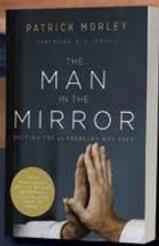
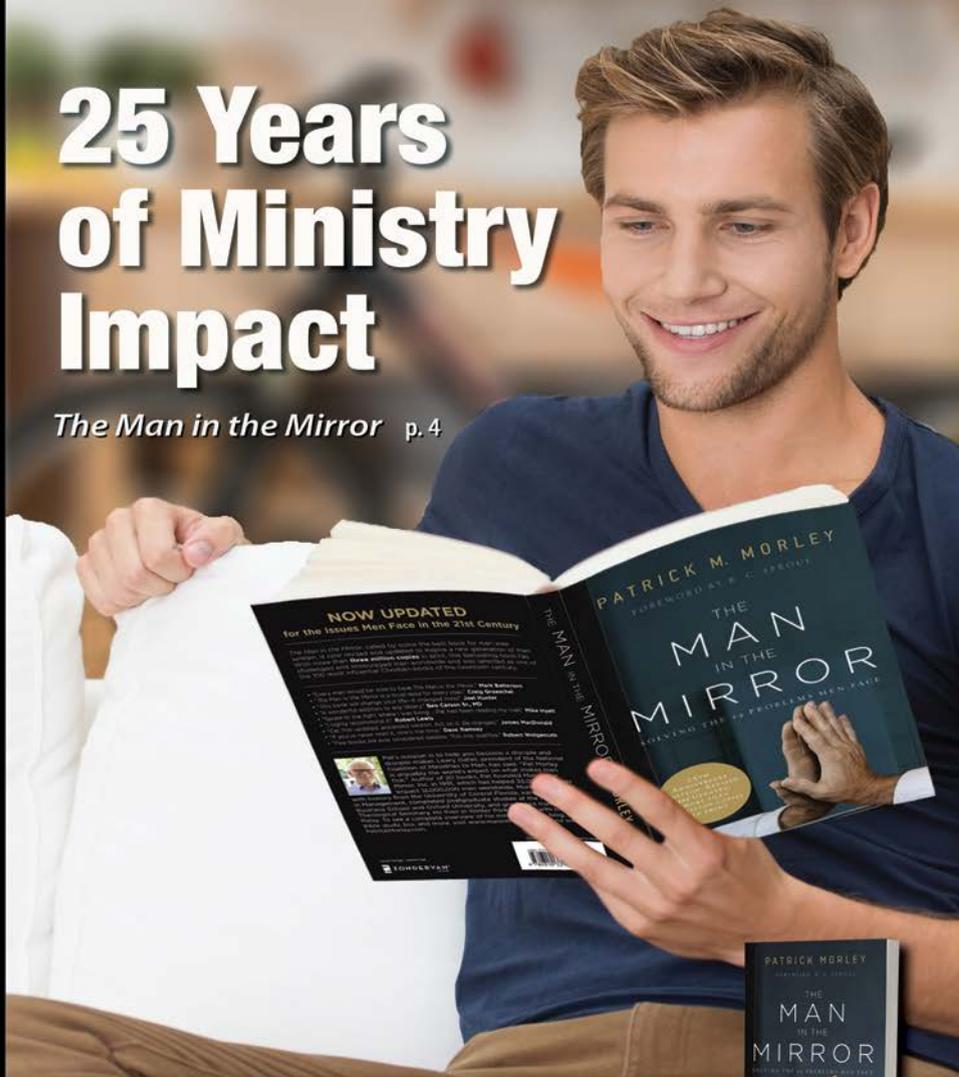


25 Years of Ministry Impact

The Man in the Mirror p.4



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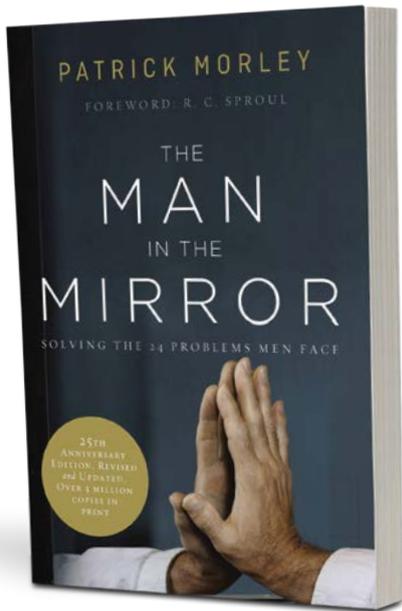
Area Directors Speak Out (p.7)

A Christmas Parable (p.8)

Reflections from *The Man in the Mirror* (p.60)

A Classic Book for Men

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The Man in the Mirror has helped hundreds of thousands of men understand the person who stares back at them from the glass each morning and know what to do about his twenty-four most difficult problems.

This powerful book invites men to take a probing look at their identities and find the means to bring about lasting change.

In this revised and updated edition, called by some the best book for men ever written, author **Pat Morley** invites men to take a probing look at their identities, relationships, finances, time,

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For more information, or to purchase a copy visit maninthemirror.org.



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Follow the *One-Year Bible* reading plan by reading the daily Scripture at the end of each devotion. To see the complete reading plan, go to oneyearbibleonline.com.

At the end of many of the devotionals you will find an abbreviation for a resource that expands on the devotional material. For more information about the Man in the Mirror Bible Study (MIMBS) go to maninthemirror.org/archives/categories.

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Hundreds of Stories

by Brett Clemmer, Vice President of Man in the Mirror

Many times we hear the comment, "Man in the Mirror is a ministry? I just thought it was just a book." That was my reaction in 2000, as my men's small group read through the book. These guys walked through the rise and fall of a company I had helped start, the recovery of my marriage from my affair with work (my "mistress"), and the beginning of a whole new career.

As we met, my life mirrored the book (pun intended): I went from "The Rat Race" (chap. 1) to realizing I was living "The Unexamined Life" (chap. 2) to an eventual transformation of my life from being a "Cultural Christian" to being a "Biblical Christian" (chap. 3).

One evening, I told the guys I had let our remaining employees know they would need to find a new job, and I would, too. "I think Man in the Mirror is looking for someone," said one of the guys in the group. "What? You mean this guy?" I said, pointing at the guy on the cover. "I thought it was just a book."

Three months later, I was working for Man in the Mirror. I knew God had used the book to grow my faith and save my marriage, but I never would have guessed it would lead to being a part of a ministry that impacts thousands of churches and hundreds of thousands of men every year.

That's just one story. We've heard hundreds of stories of how, as Pat says, "A man gets hold of a book and then God uses the book to get hold of the man."

In honor of the revised 25th Anniversary Edition of the book, here are five interesting facts about *The Man in the Mirror*:

1. The initial cover was pink. Yes, pink.
2. The book started as a series of lessons in the Friday morning Bible Study Pat still teaches today.
3. *The Man in the Mirror* was initially published in 1989. Michael Jackson released his song in 1988. As far as we know, there was no collaboration on either the book or the song.
4. After initial tepid sales, the book took off due, we believe, to one specific group of people: pastors. Read more in Pat's article on page 4.
5. *The Man in the Mirror* was named one of the 100 most influential Christian books of the 20th century.

Join us in celebrating 25 years of lives changed, priorities refocused, marriages and families saved, and most importantly, the gospel proclaimed. Pray with us that God will continue to use this book to get hold of men's hearts. 

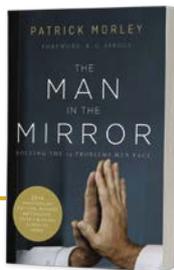
With you in the Great Adventure,

"A man gets hold
of a book and
then God uses
the book to get
hold of the man."



The Man in the Mirror for a New Generation

by Dr. Patrick Morley



*We are so excited for the re-release of the revised and updated edition of *The Man in the Mirror*. We are praying for this new version to have the same kind of impact on men as the original. We believe it will be a great tool to help you in your ministry. Pat Morley shares his thoughts on the beginnings of the book, the leaders who prompted it to become a bestseller, and the issues men are facing 25 years later.*

So far, writing and publishing *The Man in the Mirror* is easily the most impactful thing I've ever been involved with in ministry by an exponential factor. But it almost never happened! I thought you might be encouraged by the story of how God came to use this book in the lives of men.

An Inauspicious Start

After *The Man in the Mirror* was first released the publishers, Robert Wolgemuth and Mike Hyatt, had a warehouse full of books that nobody wanted. It was DOA. *What had I been thinking? Did I really think that anyone would want to read what a commercial real estate developer from Central Florida had to say to men?*

By God's grace, Robert and Mike really believed in the core message of the book, so they didn't give up. And they came up with a clever idea. They got Christian bookstores to give them their pastor lists, then wrote the pastors and offered them a complimentary copy of the book if they would come into the store to pick it up. It was good for the pastor—a free book to help them with their men. And it was good for the bookstores—it helped them acquaint pastors with their stores. Win-win. Besides, we had nothing to lose. The only other option was to donate dozens of pallets of books for a high school bonfire.

Would you believe it? Seven thousand pastors took up their offer! They started reading it, quoting from it in sermons, and taking their elder or deacon groups through it. And then, as they say in the industry, the book “got legs” and took off. (It's no secret I have a special affection for pastors. Now you know part of the reason why).

God has done something very special with that book.

A Lot Has Changed Over 25 Years

The world has changed dramatically over the last 25 years. Our once dependable consensus of Judeo-Christian values has melted away faster than a polar ice cap. Today, nearly half of our women would rather live with a man than marry him. And one-third of our children are not living with their biological dads.



Pity the man who still thinks in analog, because over the last 25 years he has officially been left behind by the digital revolution. Consider that the Internet has only been with us since the mid-1990s—just long enough for it to have made Steve Jobs rich enough to commission a \$250 million super yacht that can be operated from an iPad. He died without getting to ever see it, but I did, just two days before I wrote this—a vacant ghost ship, hauntingly moored to a berth at a marina in Florida.

How did it happen that we take body searches for granted, and welcome metal detectors into our schools? Whether it's the Great Recession, Wall Street corruption, political gridlock, social media, shifting demographics, terrorism, or the Department of Homeland Security—these are but a few of the tectonic changes that have rocked our world these last few years.

Why This Book? Why Now?

In light of these dramatic changes, it became apparent over the last few years that a whole new generation of men might benefit from taking a fresh look at “solving the 24 problems men face” (the book's subtitle). Because even though our stresses and distractions different today than in the late 1980s, when it comes to what it takes to be a man, not much has changed.



Actually, the solutions to most of the problems you and I face are surprisingly simple. But as with any skill you want to master, you have to have the right information. The book is organized into 24 chapters—each representing one of the 24 problems.

My goal in this new edition of *The Man in the Mirror* is to help you, and the men you want to disciple, address the unique challenges these 24 problems present as we find our way in the 21st century.

When I wrote the original edition of *The Man in the Mirror*, I wasn't a writer at all; I was in commercial real estate. Considering the fact that millions of copies have been distributed around the world—well, there's no question that God performed a miracle with that first book. And so I've resisted the urge to change too many of those original, direct, plainspoken sentences that put into words what so many millions of men wanted—or needed—to hear in the first place.

It is always less about writing craft anyway, and more about what God wants to do in men's lives—how He moves in the world. Some who read it became Christians. Others realized they had been more cultural Christians than biblical Christians. Many reordered their priorities and, in the process, saved their marriages and families. In short, God used that book to inspire and guide an entire generation of men. We are praying He will do it again.

THE PRESENT STATE OF MAN IN THE MIRROR AREA DIRECTORS

Area Directors Speak Out

The God We Want vs. The God Who Is



With the release of the 25th Anniversary edition of *The Man in the Mirror* we asked our Area Directors, "Which chapter from the book do you see most impacting men's lives today? How does the gospel inform the way we address this issue as men?"



Chapter 2—Leading an Unexamined Life:

Non-believer or believer, young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, we all fall into blind spots when we fail to examine our lives and the courses we have chosen to follow. For men, we often make choices without really thinking about the consequences of our decisions or why we are making them.

In Romans 12:2 the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern by testing what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Larry Niggli, San Diego County Coalition for Men's Discipleship

Chapter 3—Biblical Christian or Cultural Christian?:

Many men, even Christian men, are confused about their identity. Cultural Christianity teaches new generations a powerless religious system which looks practically indistinguishable from the surrounding culture in its materialism, self-centeredness, and lack of obedience to Christ.

Two main reasons for this dilemma are a lack of personal knowledge and submission to God's Word (where our identity in Christ is revealed), and a lack of close relationships with mature disciples of Jesus (where our identity in Christ is clarified through the examples of those living in the power of the Holy Spirit). When these are rarities on the Christian landscape, it's natural for people to "pursue the God we want instead of the God who is."

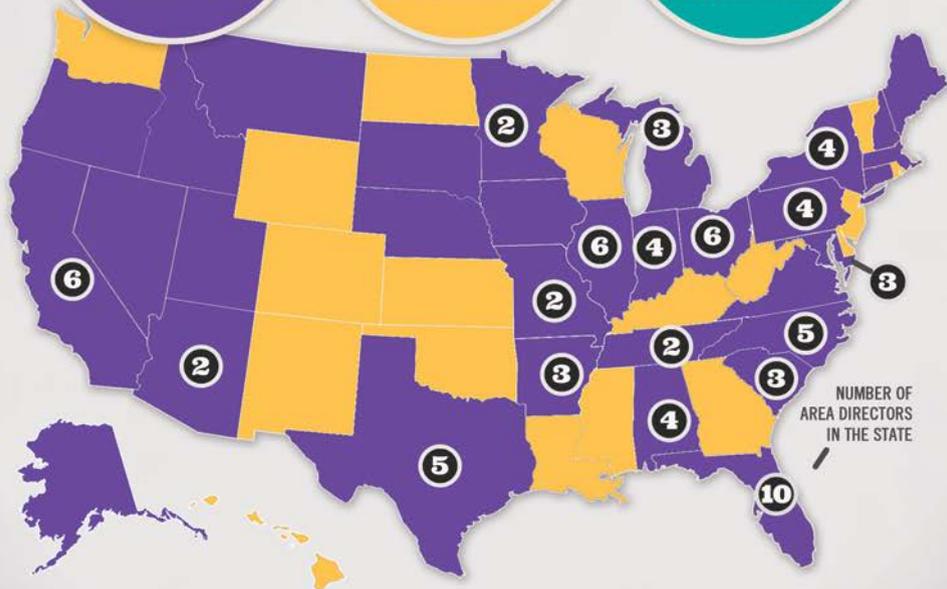
James Murdock, North Central Indiana Coalition for Men's Discipleship



Chapter 7—Broken Relationships: *Most of the time when I talk with men, they express their delusion, sadness and pain of broken relationships they have with their wives, children, parents (even after their parents are no longer alive) or other people. They feel guilty and helpless to resolve the situation.*

Jesus came and showed His love by dying on the cross to forgive all our sins, to present us pure and spotless before the Father and offer salvation by simple faith. And when we understand and appreciate that love and forgiveness, then we can also forgive and love those who we believe have hurt us and reconcile relationships that have been broken.

Oscar Urquia, Central Florida Coalición para el Discipulado de Hombres



TOP 6 STATE AREA DIRECTOR REPRESENTATIONS:



Meet all of the Man in the Mirror Area Directors at AreaDirectors.org.

A Christmas Parable

by Roger Thompson

When I was 10, all my heroes were cowboys. That Christmas the one gift I had fantasized about was a Roy Rogers gun set: two cap gun six-shooters in a genuine quick-draw holster belt. I would make it my duty to enforce justice. Women, children, and stagecoach travelers would be protected. The good guys would win. Bad guys had better be gone by sundown.

I left the Wards catalog conspicuously lying around in odd places, opened to the page where my folks could see my heart's desire. I hinted for months, bragging about my hero and generally leaving no doubt about the one thing I wanted.

Christmas Eve was agony. Anticipation raged. But the longest night of my life finally brought Christmas morning. With determined self-restraint I opened the mittens, sweaters and clothes first, and dutifully feigned my gratitude. The one heavy box I saved for the finale. Furiously ripping ribbon and paper, I pried open the lid. There it was: a Black and Decker quarter-inch electric drill! Wow. Somebody—and I had two people in mind—had completely missed the boat.



How could a boy who wanted to tame the Wild West get excited about an electric drill? But since I got it for Christmas, I figured I might as well try it out. So I went to the basement and began drilling holes. I drilled holes in the shelves, scrap wood, the workbench and even an old piece of steel. I perforated and ventilated everything in sight until the drill was too hot to hold.

While it cooled, I asked my Dad for more drill bits. I drilled bigger holes, smaller holes and angled holes. I asked my mom if she needed any holes anywhere in the house. I invented a pencil holder, a drill bit holder, and a game with pegs whose rules I hadn't thought of yet. I discovered the wonder of bolting stuff together using holes. Stuff could be joined, hinged, lengthened. All it required was well-drilled, strategic holes.

A Father's Love Sees Into Our Hearts

What I now see is that the best gifts are the ones we don't even know we want until we receive them. My dad, in his wisdom had discerned that my deepest joy came, not from play, but from doing useful things alongside of him using real tools. His gift got beneath my surface distractions to deeper longings and joys in a way I never could have imagined. That gift wasn't completed at the time of giving. It awakened new joy, fresh discovery, and kept on giving.

If that's the case with a gift from a store, then what about the real gift at Christmas? God the Father gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus. We weren't looking for Him. But God, the perfectly wise Father, knows that we need a Savior. He knows that beneath all the busyness, success, and technology there is a longing for

deeper peace, hope and love—something that lasts and satisfies. So God has delivered a package at Christmas which you may not even be looking for, until you unwrap it and experience its true potential. Then you will discover more about yourself than you knew.

Even now, a baby in a manger may seem remote and somehow irrelevant. But look closer. Understand that a loving God has shown not only His generosity but your pathway to freedom. People who really want and need personal deliverance and direction are often distracted by mere creature comforts.

This Christmas, look again at the gift which completes your deepest longing. It was given by someone who knows you best, and loves you completely. Joy to you. The Lord is come!



*"This is how God showed his love among us:
He sent his one and only Son into the world
that we might live through Him."
(1 John 4:9)*



• ROGER THOMPSON

Roger Thompson is the Man in the Mirror Area Director for the Twin Cities South Coalition for Men's Discipleship. Roger served Berean Baptist Church in Burnsville, MN as Senior Pastor for 23 years and now serves there as a Teaching Pastor/Men's Discipleship Pastor. He and his wife, Joanne, live in Apple Valley, MN.

*The Son of God became a man to
enable men to become the sons of God.*

—C.S. Lewis



*The Wise Men
came bearing gifts.*

*Why not give your guests a gift
this Christmas?*



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Equipping Your Men's Small Group



Get all your men engaged in the regular study of God's Word by using this magazine as a small group tool. At the end of each week's devotions, you'll see a box containing discussion questions and exercises. These can form the basis of your time together. These pages supplement those questions with additional steps. If you use this magazine with your men this quarter you will have:

- ✓ Prayed for another man's prayer request for two weeks.
- ✓ Expressed gratitude to or for a certain generous person in your life.
- ✓ Discovered new ways to be wise with your finances, relationships or life choices.
- ✓ Asked God to reveal whether you are pursuing success or faithfulness.
- ✓ Memorized Matthew 22:36-40 as a reminder of God's love.
- ✓ Planned a team-building event for your small group.
- ✓ Encouraged each man to celebrate how God has shaped him.
- ✓ Spent time with someone who sees the world through a Kingdom view.
- ✓ Given generously to a family in need.
- ✓ Prayed for God to use affliction to draw you or someone you know closer to Him.
- ✓ Committed to making a change towards life directed by God.
- ✓ Written a prayer consisting of praise, thanksgiving, intercession and specific personal needs
- ✓ Celebrated the birth of Christ as part of God's great plan of redemption.

Continued on page 12



□ **10/1-10/5:** In this week's devotions, you'll learn that **nothing is too big or too small to bring to God in prayer.** **SAS (Suggested Application Step):** Ask each man to share a time when God handled a big or a small matter in his life. Ask each man to share one prayer request (big or small) with the group. Ask the person to the right of that man to commit to praying for that request for the next two weeks.

□ **10/6-10/12:** These devotions teach you about **the impact that a grateful heart has on your life and those around you.** **SAS:** If you had to name one person in your life to whom you owe an abundance of gratitude, who would that person be? Over the next week, express your gratitude to that person (if they are living) or share why you are grateful for that person with others.



□ **10/13-10/19:** In this week of devotions you'll discover what **it means to be wise.** **SAS:** Open up your group time with this question: Who do you consider to be the three wisest men in history? What characteristics do those men share? Look for new ways to be wise with your finances, relationships or life choices. From two weeks ago, share any updates to the prayer requests your partners have been praying for.

□ **10/20-10/26:** Our devotional theme this week is **the incredible value that God places on a faithful heart and the true definition of success.** **SAS:** Read aloud the devotional "Faithfulness Trumps Achievement" from page 24. What does it look like when a man pursues success? What does it look like when a man pursues being faithful? In silent prayer, ask God to show you if you've been pursuing faithfulness or success.



□ **10/27-11/2:** This week your men will learn **the depth of love that God has for each and every one of us.** **SAS:** Commit to memory this passage of Scripture: "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40

□ **11/3-11/9:** These devotionals remind you of the **vitality of building and maintaining healthy relationships with others.** **SAS:** Brainstorm some ways for your group to build deeper relationships with one another (fishing trip, BBQ, community service, etc.). Decide on an activity and begin to plan it for early December.



□ **11/10-11/16:** These devotionals help you focus on the **calling God has placed on your life.** **SAS:** Give each man a piece of paper with the names of every man in the group listed on it. Spend a few minutes and write down the positive characteristics that you see in the life of each man. In pairs, spend some time in prayer asking God to open up new avenues for one another to be used for His glory.



□ **11/17-11/23:** This week you will learn **the difference between seeing the world with a cynical heart or seeing the world through a kingdom view.** **SAS:** Think of a man who sees the world through a kingdom view. Make a call or set up an appointment with that man. While talking to him, take note of ways His kingdom view impacts his life.

□ **11/24-11/30:** These devotionals remind us of the **importance of maintaining a generous heart and mind.** **SAS:** Is there a family or a couple of families in your church who are in need during this time of Thanksgiving? How can your small group help with their financial needs? (Love offering, bake sale, food drive, etc.)



□ **12/1-12/7:** This week's devotionals address **the truth that God uses times of affliction to draw people closer to Him.** **SAS:** If you or someone you know is facing affliction, pray this prayer for yourself or for them over the next seven days: *Jesus, Your gospel is good and Your kingdom is great. My sin is profound. Your forgiveness is sweet. My affliction is painful. And yet it is a grace that draws me to You. Thank You. Amen.*

□ **12/8-12/14:** This week you'll see **the difference between a self-directed life and a life directed by God.** **SAS:** On a white board, list some of the goals of a life directed by God. In groups of 2-3, discuss those goals. Talk about things each of you may need to do or change to reach the discussed goals. Commit to making a small change that may allow you to move toward the goal of a God-directed life.



□ **12/15-12/21:** These devotionals teach you about **the power and mystery of prayer.** **SAS:** Give each man a pen and sheet of paper. Open up with a few moments in silent prayer. After silent prayer, ask the members of the group to write a prayer that consists of: praise and worship, thanksgiving, surrender, intercession (praying for others), and some specific needs of your own life (spiritual, relational or physical).

□ **12/22-12/28:** In this week's devotionals, you'll see **the true meaning of Christmas of God sending His only Son to fulfill His plan of redemption.** **SAS:** Enjoy this week of Christmas by celebrating the birth of Christ with family and friends and giving praise to God for the gift of His Son.



How to Use This Devotional

To make the most of *Equipping the Man in the Mirror*, we have dissected a devotional so you don't miss any aspect of the magazine (see below).

☐ **Wednesday—October 8 • Hope Sustains**

Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.
Psalm 119:116

Completion checkbox → ☐

Correlating Scripture →

I heard a famous story that came from concentration camps. In order to destroy the will of prisoners, their captors would make them load piles of dirt into wheelbarrows, then take it to the other side of the camp and dump it. The following day they would dig the same piles of dirt and haul them back to the side where they originated. Even though this type of physical labor was no harder than other activities required of the prisoners, it affected them more deeply. Prisoners actually started giving up and dying, because they recognized the meaninglessness of their effort.

The New Testament was written primarily to Christians who were persecuted for

Source material →

their faith. They were on the losing end of their culture. In the midst of that, Peter encouraged them to focus on the living hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Hope that rests on God and His promises can sustain a person in the face of great difficulty. A person without hope generally cannot persevere.

☐ *MIMBS 2*

How have you seen hope feeding perseverance? Ask another man about his experience with hope and discouragement.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 10:1–11:23, Colossians 3:18–4:18, Psalm 78:56–72, Proverbs 24:28–29*

Discussion/journal questions →

← *One-year Bible daily reading*

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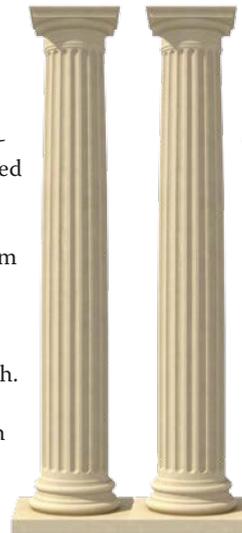


www.areadirectors.org

☐ **Monday—October 1 • He Is the Victory**

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.
Isaiah 12:2

In 2 Chronicles 13, a war breaks out between Abijah, the King of Judah and Jeroboam, the King of Israel. Abijah led 400,000 select warriors, while Jeroboam mustered 800,000 troops from Israel. At one point, the Israelites ambushed Judah and had them surrounded. Abijah was surprised to find his 400,000 troops flanked by the huge number of soldiers from Judah. Outnumbered two-to-one, it looked hopeless. But Abijah saw it differently. He realized that God had always been with them and was with them again. So they cried out to the Lord for help and relied on Him for the victory. Judah



defeated Israel on that occasion because they trusted in the Lord, the God of their ancestors. God provides for each of us every day. Sometimes, His hand is more obvious than others. A miraculous provision, a kind word from a friend, a new job, a hopeful diagnosis, a listening ear—these can become pillars in our faith journey. When we remember that we've seen God's faithfulness in the past, we'll remember that we can count on it today.

☐ *MIMBS 1*

Name one or two of these “pillars” in your life. How has the Lord provided for you? Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: *Isaiah 62:6–65:25, Philippians 2:19–3:3, Psalm 73:1–28, Proverbs 24:13–14*

☐ **Thursday—October 2 • Never Too Big or Too Small**

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”
Mark 5:36

Many men give lip service to faith, but when it comes down to it they believe they are responsible for providing for their family, navigating a successful career, keeping healthy relationships, exercising, being a good neighbor, and being a solid church member. We think we should be able to take care of the day-to-day items of life on our own. We try to be self-reliant until a situation arises that we absolutely cannot control. Then we look to God to step in and rescue us.

When your wife is in a car accident or you're facing cancer or a child has gone astray, God will be there. But God is also

with us every day during the mundane, simple actions and choices we face. Our heavenly Father is interested in every aspect of our lives. He has a loving interest in you and your family. There is no situation or problem that is too big or too small to bring to Him and ask Him for guidance and direction. That's what having a father is all about. ☐ *MIMBS 1*

Think of a hymn or praise chorus that reminds you of God's care in all situations. Sing that song or pray the words as a prayer to God.

Daily Reading: *Isaiah 66:1–24, Philippians 3:4–21, Psalm 74:1–23, Proverbs 24:15–16*

So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 11:9

Waiting on the Lord or trusting Him is not passive. Looking to God for guidance doesn't mean that we do nothing. Trusting God for a job doesn't mean that you lie in bed and expect the postman to ring the doorbell with a job offer in hand. If your child is ill, it doesn't mean that medical help shouldn't be found.

We must use the intelligence that God gave us to function in life. And in the midst of accepting responsibility for our own life, we also need to spend time with God and read His Word. We go to Him in humble prayer and ask Him to guide and direct



our steps. As we spend time in the Bible, we learn His ways. When we fellowship and seek counsel from other believers, we learn how God has worked in their lives. When we discuss our circumstances with another Christian, they can give insight about God's Word, His ways and His hand in our lives.

Whether we are making a decision about a vacation, a soul mate, a home church or new home, He is interested. At the heart of every situation, the most important thing

is to trust the Lord. He can be trusted with the big and little of life. He guides us in all things through His Word, prayer and fellow Christians. Once your decision is made, trust Him with that decision.

The process may not be easy and the path may not be straight. The Lord gives us tools to discern our best decision and then we must trust Him with our hearts and mind. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

The battle belongs to Him whether it is a small skirmish and or a massive war. What He really cares about is the focus of your heart. [MIMBS 1](#)

What little things have you tried to control in life? Has that pursuit been successful? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 1:1–6:15, Philippians 4:1–23, Colossians 1:1–2:7, Psalm 75:1–77:20, Proverbs 24:17–24:25*



For Your Small Group

☐ **October 1–5: Make a list of the some of the big things and little things going on in your life right now.**

- Reflect on the impact that prayer has had on these issues.
- Have you had people who prayed for you during your childhood, your teens or your adulthood?
- Why has that been important to you?

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4–7

When you turn your key in your car's ignition, you probably don't consider that parts of your engine will suddenly move at 2,000 revolutions per minute (RPM). Most of us just fill the tank with gas, turn the key in the ignition, put the engine in gear and press on the accelerator. Somehow all that power gets transferred to the wheels, which take us where we want to go.



In a similar way, sometimes we take for granted the realities of what God has done for us. As I talk with men, I find many are looking for answers in four areas:

- 1) Why do people suffer?
- 2) What will make me happy?
- 3) Am I really okay?
- 4) Where can I focus my worship?

God answers those questions through a love relationship with Jesus, who is described as the "kindness and love of God." He saves and renews, leading us to a place of hope that looks past the limitations of our current situations, into the reality of abundant and eternal life. [MIMBS 2](#)

List three things you can do to stay focused on the reality of God's great love for you, and what that means in your current circumstances.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 6:16–8:7, Colossians 2:8–23, Psalm 78:1–31, Proverbs 24:26*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

1 Peter 1:3–4

In our culture, when we use the word *hope*, we generally refer to something we desire or wish for, but we're not sure it's going to happen. For instance, we might say, "I hope it doesn't rain this afternoon," with absolutely no idea what the weather will be. That's not the kind of hope that God offers.

In today's passage, the word translated *hope* carries certainty. It would be like if you invested \$5,000 in a one-year certificate of deposit, and then you said, "In a year, I hope I'll be able to get my initial investment plus interest." Of course you're going to receive that.

In this passage, Peter is essentially saying,

if you're in relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you can rest assured that you have a certain future—a living hope that comes through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. His resurrection is the promise of power that God will work on your behalf. That hope does not depend on circumstances, for Peter reminds us it will "never perish, spoil or fade." [MIMBS 2](#)

Describe how today's passage encourages you in one specific situation you are currently facing.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 8:8–9:26, Colossians 3:1–17, Psalm 78:32–55, Proverbs 24:27*

Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.
Psalm 119:116

I heard a famous story that came from concentration camps. In order to destroy the will of prisoners, their captors would make them load piles of dirt into wheelbarrows, then take it to the other side of the camp and dump it. The following day they would dig the same piles of dirt and haul them back to the side where they originated. Even though this type of physical labor was no harder than other activities required of the prisoners, it affected them more deeply. Prisoners actually started giving up and dying, because they recognized the meaninglessness of their effort.

The New Testament was written primarily to Christians who were persecuted for

their faith. They were on the losing end of their culture. In the midst of that, Peter encouraged them to focus on the living hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Hope that rests on God and His promises can sustain a person in the face of great difficulty. A person without hope generally cannot persevere.

☐ MIMBS 2

How have you seen hope feeding perseverance? Ask another man about his experience with hope and discouragement.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 10:1–11:23, Colossians 3:18–4:18, Psalm 78:56–72, Proverbs 24:28–29

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:6–7

My father-in-law is 82 years old. If you ask him how he's doing, he says he's grateful, and he means it. He's grateful for everything, whether it's big or small. His attitude feeds his ability to rejoice, even in less-than-perfect circumstances. It's pretty hard to express contentment and satisfaction with a whine in your voice.

Some of us need to remember that truth in our houses and workplaces, and with our friends and family. When we're complaining, we're not attentive to the wonderful things God has done for us. Instead, we're griping about all the times we haven't received respect or appreciation, or we've missed out on what we "deserved."

C.S. Lewis indicated that you don't find

pleasure and joy by seeking them. Rather, they are the product of seeking something else that brings fulfillment. Gratitude helps in that process, because it has the potential to refocus us on God and on His eternal purposes. When that happens, the result will be "praise, honor and glory" passed on to Jesus through our lives. ☐ MIMBS 2



Try practicing gratitude for one whole day. At the end of that day, write a few brief sentences describing how gratitude affected your level of joy.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 12:1–14:10, 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:8, Psalm 79:1–13, Proverbs 24:30–34

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:8–9

True salvation leads to freedom, because it is anchored in a love relationship with God rather than a set of rules. I meet so many men who wear masks, trying to live up to expectations. They experience a sort of identity crisis, because they lose track of who they really are. True freedom comes when we put away our disguises because we're comfortable with our true identity in Christ. Then we find we can really love God and love people. That inevitably glorifies God.

When I was a college freshman, every morning I woke up and said to myself, "What do you want to do today?" I might decide to play basketball, catch a movie, or hang out with the guys. In my sophomore year, I met Ruthie, and that changed my motivations. Suddenly I was saying, "I wonder what Ruthie wants to do today." I had someone in my life that I loved more than myself.

That's what it means to love

Jesus. When I wake up in the morning, I need to say, "Jesus, how can I join You today?" It's very easy, especially in

American Christianity, to reduce our faith to a series of logical points that we read in a book or hear in a sermon.

In this passage, Peter notes, "... though you do not see him, you love *him*." He's not referring to a set of principles or beliefs, but to God Himself. Peter indicates that's where God's promises find glorious fulfillment in our lives, because true salvation is found in the freedom of knowing we are accepted by a loving God. ☐ MIMBS 2



When you wake up tomorrow morning, ask Jesus how you can join Him in His day. Focus on demonstrating love for Him throughout the day, then record what happens.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 14:11–21:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:9–35:28, Psalm 80:1–82:8, Proverbs 25:1–10



For Your Small Group

☐ **October 6–12: What are the characteristics of a grateful person?**

- Do you have any of those characteristics in your life?
- In what tangible ways could you demonstrate gratefulness to those around you?

I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the LORD your God, and follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go.

1 Kings 2:2, 3 NLT

Before King David died he anointed Solomon as the new king of Israel. He became the king as a boy, perhaps only 12 years old. Solomon was not next in line for the throne because he was not the oldest child. David had promised Bathsheba that Solomon would be king. Solomon was a special young man and he inherited a vast empire to rule.

Most of us can't even imagine leaving even a small amount of money in our will for a 12-year-old to manage. Let alone a kingdom! A middle school boy became a king, a warrior, a ruler and one of the wisest men in the Bible.

God's plans don't always make sense to us. He used the offspring from a relationship that started with an adulterous affair

between David and Bathsheba as the next king. Many must have questioned David's choice and God's plan. It is only through time and history that we see how God's plan worked out.

Are you questioning God's plan for your life? Does it feel like life just doesn't make sense? Ask God to give you more faith in His plan for you. ☐MIMBS 3

In what area of your life are you having difficulty trusting God and His plan? Talk about that area with the guys in your small group to see if they have some godly insight.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 22:1–23:20, 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12, Psalm 83:1–18, Proverbs 25:11–14*

That night the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!"

1 Kings 3:5 NLT

Solomon faced a very difficult question. The Lord asked him what he wanted. That is a loaded question. Think about it.

You go to bed tonight and, in a dream, God comes to you and says, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you." What is the first thing that comes to mind? Many of us would ask for money, fame, youth, success, love, or a new house, sports car or boat.

The young king, Solomon, asked for wisdom. God was pleased with his answer and told Solomon he would be wise and, in fact, he would have more wisdom than anyone. God would also bless him with fame, riches and a long life.

Why was God so pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom? Solomon realized he needed the wisdom of God to effectively rule over Israel. Solomon's rule lasted 40 years and he used his wisdom well. He built the first temple in Jerusalem. He brought enormous prosperity to his country. He built new cities and ports and authored parts of the Bible. All through the wisdom of God. ☐MIMBS 3

How do you define wisdom? How could the wisdom of God be helpful in your life?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 23:21–25:38, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–17, Psalm 84:1–12, Proverbs 25:15*

"Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!"

Ecclesiastes 1:2 NLT

I know a man in Pittsburgh who is selling his business. He just started his company six years ago and he has already found it wearisome. He said, "I just want to sell it and I want to do something of value with my life."

Maybe you can relate to his story.

Solomon begins the Book of Ecclesiastes with that same thought. Here was a man who explored all the things that were being done in the world and set out to write an explanation of what he found.

He revealed that, apart from God, everything is meaningless. As Solomon observed, "What's there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone?" (Ecclesiastes 1:3 The Message).

And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?

Mark 8:36 NLT

You know the drill. You set a goal, work hard and diligently meet the goal—euphoria. Two weeks later, the novelty wears off. So, you set a new goal. But the new goal is always bigger and better. Two weeks later, the novelty wears off. You have to set another goal. The sense you get at the end, "What have I gained? What is the meaning of all this?" It seems so futile.

If men could find even a trace of meaning in any worldly pursuit, what would they do? They would take it. They would pursue the worldly meaning, and they would not pursue God. So God, in His grace, has stripped the world of all its meaning. Apart from God you cannot find meaning. Do you

Although God had given Solomon great wisdom, he had great sorrow and failure in his life. He had worshipped other gods and been involved with many women and pagan countries.

Perhaps you are struggling with the meaning of your life. Be encouraged! Even the greatest and wisest of kings found out that nothing matters unless God is in it.

☐MIMBS 3

Where have you felt the futility and meaninglessness of life? How has God shown you ways to invest in things that really matter?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 26:1–27:22, 2 Thessalonians 3:1–18, Psalm 85:1–13, Proverbs 25:16*

realize that this is incredibly good news? God knew if we are to have a meaningful

relationship with Him, He had to destroy all possibility of confidence in the world.

Most of us have tried to succeed on our own and make our lives into something important. And just like Solomon, it is through our failures that we realize that what really matters is found only

through God and His grace. ☐MIMBS 3

What have you learned through your failures in life? Have those failures brought you into a deeper relationship with God?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 28:1–29:32, 1 Timothy 1:1–20, Psalm 86:1–17, Proverbs 25:17*



Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

Psalm 4:7

Ken, a member of our weekly Bible study, had major surgery. While he was hospitalized, word spread through the medical staff that there was an incredibly cheerful, elderly man recovering from surgery. One morning Ken looked up to find a doctor standing at the door. The doctor had heard of Ken's disposition and wanted to know how, in the midst of a hospitalization, a patient could have such a positive outlook on life.

The doctor shared about the ways he had tried to find meaning and contentment in his life. Ken shared his earlier struggles with those same issues. One day, Ken had cried out to God and asked him to come into his life. Ken invited the doctor to ask Christ into his life. He told him it was the only way to the true meaning of life and real happiness.

Real happiness (like Ken's) stands out in life. We have all said, "I would be happy if _____". What is your "fill-in-the-blank"? I made more money? My kids were

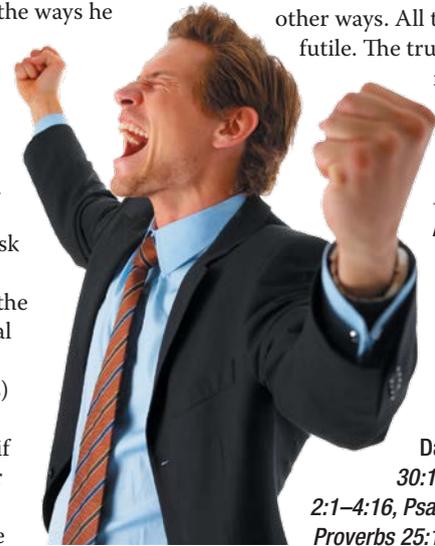
well behaved? I never had to work again? I won the lottery?

But can you find enjoyment during the difficult times? During a layoff, a divorce, a loss, or a season of illness—can you find joy and contentment? Are you able to rely on the Lord and His plan when life isn't going your way?

Ken knew the secret that Solomon shared in Ecclesiastes. Solomon, Ken and the doctor had tried to find meaning in other ways. All those pursuits are futile. The true meaning, happiness and joy of life come only from a life dedicated to Christ. **MIMBS 3**

Are you experiencing the joy that only Christ can give? Are you trying other earthly ways to find happiness? What might need to change?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 30:1–34:22, 1 Timothy 2:1–4:16, Psalm 87:1–89:13, Proverbs 25:18–24*



For Your Small Group

☐ **October 13–19: Ask the men in the group to write a definition of wisdom.**

- Share those definitions with the group.
- Did those definitions share any common words or thoughts?
- How does wisdom play out in your daily life?

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

Matthew 25:14–15

Today's passage comes from a series of parables Jesus told to explain principles of God's kingdom. You may want to read the whole chapter to gain a better understanding of context. In the meantime, let's just say that, since all three men in this story are called servants, it appears Jesus was making a reference to believing men who follow the master.

In this parable, all three servants are entrusted with property in varying amounts, based on their *ability*. That word in the original Greek language is *dunamis*, which refers to power. It's the root for our word *dynamite*, and in Scripture, it often refers specifically to a God-given ability.

In the context of this story, God's

kingdom is not developed by proud and self-dependent people who "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Rather, God's kingdom grows through the faithful investment of people who recognize and steward the abilities He gives, applying them to the opportunities He provides. The overarching goal for this type of servant is to glorify God by focusing on His priorities.

MIMBS 4

Describe the difference in focus that comes when a person recognizes his ability as a gift from God rather than a talent of his own making.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 35:1–36:32, 1 Timothy 5:1–25, Psalm 89:14–37, Proverbs 25:25–27*

The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Matthew 25:16–18

Jesus told about a wealthy man who distributed resources to his servants before leaving on a trip. Two of the servants invested the money and managed to double the amount. The third servant did nothing. Frankly, it wasn't really a huge accomplishment for these two servants to double the money allotted to them.

The story clearly indicates the master was gone for a long time, and a person earning 7.2 percent would double his investment in about 10 years. So Jesus wasn't talking about someone who got in on the start-up of a technological wonder company and made millions. He's talking about a regular guy who basically invested without major risk, but also without major gains. When the master finally returned to settle

accounts, he referred to the one who did nothing as "wicked and lazy" (Matthew 25:26). But He congratulated the two men who had made modest gains and called them "good and faithful servants" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Jesus' word choice underscores an overriding principle of His kingdom. The world judges our "success." In contrast, God calls us to faithfulness. **MIMBS 4**

How do you respond emotionally to the truth that God focuses on faithfulness rather than success? Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 37:1–38:28, 1 Timothy 6:1–21, Psalm 89:38–52, Proverbs 25:28*

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

1 Corinthians 4:2

Scripture puts a higher premium on faithfulness than on success. The results you produce don't necessarily impress God. According to the Bible, God is pleased when His followers put effort into doing whatever He lays before them. What God puts before some men leads to incredible success in the world's eyes. But some men are assigned tasks that, according to the world's definitions, lead to poverty.

For instance, God may call someone to be a substitute teacher for his career. As the world sees it, that won't lead to great success or riches. But that person may have an incredible opportunity to grow God's kingdom by influencing impressionable lives. That person's



faithfulness to God's priorities will give God pleasure. God already owns everything in the world. Even if we make millions of dollars, that level of success won't impress or earn favor with the Lord of the Universe. He's more interested in faithfulness than achievement, and more pleased by proven dependability than by a list of accomplishments. MIMBS 4

How would you define the calling God has put before you? How have you been tempted to define your progress in terms of success? Give an example that supports your answer.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 39:1–41:18, 2 Timothy 1:1–18, Psalm 90:1–91:16, Proverbs 26:1–2

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Matthew 25:21

Nineteenth century evangelist Dwight L. Moody noted that the reward of service is more service. If you faithfully pursue a small task God has given, He will reward you with more responsibility. But in today's passage, the faithful servant also was invited to share in the master's happiness. C.S. Lewis wrote that, in this world, we feel stabs of joy. It's not the real meal, but it's like hors d'oeuvres—not the full meal, but a delicious hint of what is yet to come.

In the story in Matthew 25, two servants were faithful to invest their resources, and they experienced their master's delight. But a third servant returned the original amount and nothing more. He thought if he did no harm, he was doing okay. God's perspective is different. According to this

story, if you're not making things better, in essence, you're making them worse. The master referred to this servant as "worthless" and threw him out into the darkness (Matthew 25:30).

That's quite a contrast to the reward for faithfulness—sharing in the master's joy. MIMBS 4

Describe a time when you experienced someone's joy because you fulfilled or exceeded their expectations. How does that compare to the joy of knowing you've given God pleasure by your faithfulness to the calling He has laid before you?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 42:1–44:23, 2 Timothy 2:1–21, Psalm 92:1–93:5, Proverbs 26:3–5

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

I believe the most effective way to be a faithful steward of God's grace is to commit to the process that makes disciples. My friend Jim Seibert accepted that mandate. Jim had the privilege of leading his son Timmy to Jesus, just two days before the young man died from AIDS.

We shared that story in our Bible study, and someone asked if Jim would visit a young man named Butch, who also was dying from AIDS. Butch said it was okay for Jim to visit, but he didn't want to hear any Jesus stuff. Jim agreed, but received permission to pray at the beginning and end of each visit.

Over the next eight weeks, Jim visited regularly. Finally, after investing a lot of time to build rapport, Butch asked Jim if he knew anything about AIDS. You can imagine the young man's surprise when he heard about Jim's son.

Eventually, Butch asked Jim, "What do you think about gay men?" Jim simply talked about God's love for all people. Then he compared Butch's life to a train, saying, "Your train is coming into the station pretty soon, and you're going to have to decide which way you'll turn. If you want to turn to

God, He's waiting for you with outstretched arms."

A few days later, Jim received a phone message asking him to come to the hospital. Jim was able to help that young man respond in faith to Jesus. An hour later, Butch died. Jim Seibert's faithfulness to sharing God's grace helped a young man make choices that brought him into relationship with His loving Lord, thus altering his eternal destiny. MIMBS 4



Describe someone you know who has been a "faithful steward of God's grace." How did that person reveal his commitment and dependability, in light of the calling God had placed on his life?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 44:24–50:46, 2 Timothy 2:22–4:22, Titus 1:1–16, Psalm 94:1–98:9, Proverbs 26:6–16



For Your Small Group

❑ **October 20–26: On a white board or large piece of paper, make two columns with the headings "Success—God's Way" and "Success—My Way"**

- List some ways that success is the same in both columns and ways they are different.
- What is something new you learned about success?

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:10

From beginning to end, Scripture is steeped in God's love. In fact, the Bible tells us that love isn't just something that God does, but it's who He is (see 1 John 4:7).

For the sake of love, God created you. You didn't really evolve over millions of years from some sort of amoeba. The Bible tells us that, for the sake of love, God fashioned you. He "knit me together" in my mother's womb (see Psalm 139:13). When mankind made sinful choices that marred our relationship with God, He still responded in love, sending His Son to die for our sins.



Scripture lists many attributes of God. He is holy and holds all power. He has all knowledge and wisdom. But as incredible as those characteristics are, they don't account

for His desire to enter time and space and suffer a cruel death, all for the sake of restoring relationship with us. That kind of sacrifice can only be motivated by love, which seeks relationship regardless of personal cost. [MIMBS 5](#)

Describe a time when you experienced God's great love for you in a personal way. Ask another man his thoughts about God's love.

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 51:1–53, Titus 2:1–15, Psalm 99:1–9, Proverbs 26:17*

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

Mark 12:28

Today's passage tells of a conversation between Jesus and a "teacher of the law." The Jewish Law was written in a book called the Talmud. It included Scripture and also commentary. So, by the time that Jesus was engaged in this debate, the Talmud probably included about 600 commandments.

Nobody could possibly understand and apply it all. So, in essence, this man is asking, "Is there some master key or golden gateway to pleasing God? Is there some overarching idea that pulls the essence of all these laws into one place?" Jesus said yes—the law and the prophets hang on two commandments that describe what God most wants and values. Jesus said if we truly

love God and love people, we will find we are keeping all the other laws as well (Mark 12:29-31). Later on, the apostle Paul summarized this same idea. "Let no debt remain outstanding," he cautioned, "except the continuing debt to love one another, *for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law*" (Romans 13:8 emphasis added). Clearly, God places supreme value on love. [MIMBS 5](#)

How would you answer a friend who says there's no way to keep all the commandments in the Bible?

Daily Reading: *Jeremiah 51:54–52:34, Titus 3:1–15, Psalm 100:1–5, Proverbs 26:18–19*

"Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:36–40

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He could have said anything He wanted. He could have said the most important thing is to do good works. He could have said the most important thing is to pursue justice in the world. He could have pointed to tithing, or avoiding sexual immorality, or taking a vow of poverty. Instead, He said the most important commandment is to love God, and the second is to love people. Augustine famously said, "Love God and do what you want." He meant that if we really love God, everything else we pursue will fall into line the way He wants it to.

You could say that loving God is the



"North Star" of spirituality. God reaches out to you with great love, and He wants a reciprocal relationship. When you truly love God with everything that is in you, your priorities will align with His. When you take delight in God and your core longings agree with His, the Psalmist says, "He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

[MIMBS 5](#)

In your own words, explain why loving God is the "North Star" of true spirituality. Ask another man for his thoughts.

Daily Reading: *Lamentations 1:1–2:22, Philemon 1:1–25, Psalm 101:1–8, Proverbs 26:20*

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Philippians 2:13

When Jesus was asked to define the most important commandment, He pointed to loving God with every bit of passion that is within us. God loves us extravagantly, and He wants a reciprocal relationship. The Bible also indicates that God wants us to love others unconditionally, with the same love that we have received from God. But the reality is, we cannot succeed in either of those endeavors without God's empowerment.

God would never give clear instruction regarding His desires without also offering the ability to do what He requests. We can put our faith in Jesus, and allow Him to work through us. The apostle Paul pleaded

three times for God to take away a specific issue in his life. God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

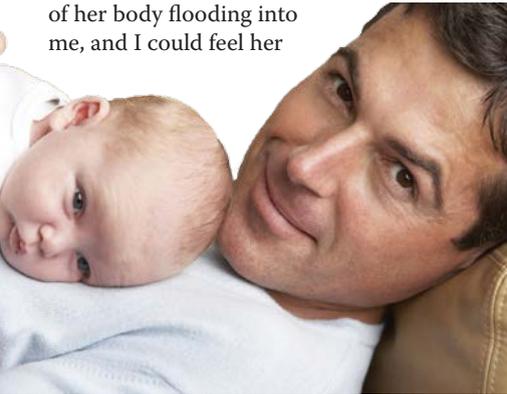
Today's passage also reminds us that God works within us to birth both the desire and the power to do His will. God will never ask you to do something without also empowering you to fulfill His purpose. [MIMBS 5](#)

How does God work within you to fulfill His purpose? How is His strength made perfect in your weakness?

Daily Reading: *Lamentations 3:1–66, Hebrews 1:1–14, Psalm 102:1–28, Proverbs 26:21–22*

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.
Deuteronomy 33:27

The best way I know to illustrate God's great love is to recall the birth of my first-born—my daughter. I remember bringing her home from the hospital. My wife was exhausted, and she lay down to rest. I was exhausted too, and I lay on my back on the bed with my newborn daughter on my chest. I could feel the warmth of her body flooding into me, and I could feel her



little heart thumping. It was the sweetest experience I've ever had. I felt an overwhelming sense of love for that child that I had created. I would sacrifice anything

necessary to nurture, protect, and provide for that child.

God loves you in a similar way, and He desires a reciprocal relationship that overflows into your relationships with those around you. He wants this so much, that if you don't love Him with everything in you, as He gives ability, then He will allow you to experience the sense of futility and meaninglessness that comes from pursuing anything other than Him and His purposes.

The biblical book of Ecclesiastes was written by a man who pursued everything he could, from work to leisure, and found it all to be meaningless. This is the brutality of grace, that God will allow us to experience the futile results of our choices and our distractions, doing whatever it takes to bring us to the place where we no longer want to resist His love. [MIMBS 5](#)

How did God bring you to a place where you did not want to resist His love? Share your story with your small group.

Daily Reading: *Lamentations 4:1–5:22, Ezekiel 1:1–6:14, Hebrews 2:1–4:16, Psalm 103:1–104:35, Proverbs 26:23–27*



For Your Small Group

☐ **October 27–November 2: Ask each man to share a time in their life when he experienced God's love.**

- Did that experience of God's love change you? In what way?
- How would you explain that experience to someone who is in need of experiencing God's love?

I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.
Leviticus 26:12

God's eternal plan is all about relationship. Let's go back all the way to the starting point, when God was thinking about hurling the stars into existence, flicking His finger against the curtain of the night and arraying the cosmos with planets and suns and galaxies. Before anything else existed, there was God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From eternity past, long before creation, the Trinity existed, enjoying a love relationship with one another.

The purpose of creation was to extend this relationship, because God wanted a people for Himself. And that brings us to today's scripture, which records God's statement: "I will walk among you and be your God,

and you will be my people." The plot of the entire Bible is God's sovereign orchestration of human events to bring us into right relationship with Him and with each other. From beginning to end, the Bible reveals God as a loving Father who relentlessly pursues relationship with His children. Scripture reveals that salvation is all about relationship. [MIMBS 6](#)

If you were asked by a non-believing friend to explain what salvation really means, what would you say?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 7:1–9:11, Hebrews 5:1–14, Psalm 105:1–15, Proverbs 26:28*

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

Mark 1:16–17

When Jesus launched His ministry, He called people first to relationship. He said, "Come, follow me..." He assembled a group of 12 men. For three-and-a-half years, these men lived, ate, prayed, worked, fasted and ministered together as a team, in relationship with Jesus and with one another. Later, after Jesus died and was resurrected and returned to heaven, His followers showed great courage in standing up to those who wanted to silence their message.

Acts 4 tells of two disciples, Peter and John, who were called to testify before authorities who questioned their right to minister in Jesus' name.



Because of the disciples' response to their threats, Acts 4:13 tell us that, when the authorities "saw the courage of Peter and John... they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." They recognized the results of simply hanging out with Jesus.

The most powerful force in the world is a relationship, because men will do for love what they will do for no other reason. [MIMBS 6](#)

Re-read the last sentence in today's devotional. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. Share your idea with another man.

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 10:1–11:25, Hebrews 6:1–20, Psalm 105:16–36, Proverbs 27:1–2*

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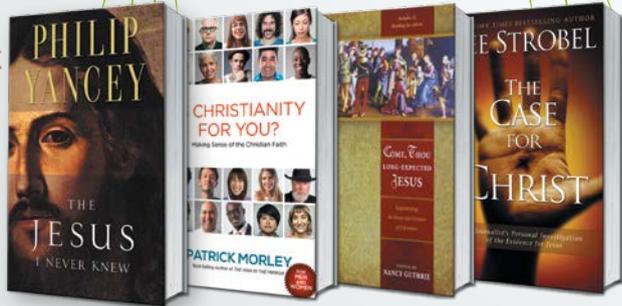
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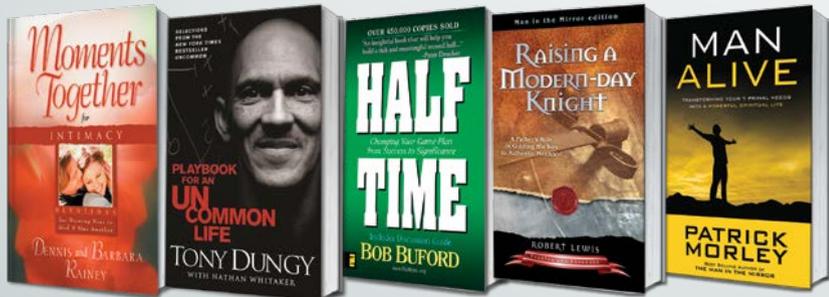
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Wednesday—November 5 • Victory Through Relationship

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9–10

When Americans face a problem, we generally ask, “What do we need to do to solve this problem?” In contrast, it’s said that the Chinese ask, “Who do we need to know to solve this problem?” When Jesus saw the world perishing in its own sins, He offered a relational solution by giving Himself. He empowered people first through relationship rather than task.

If you face an overwhelming problem, you probably won’t solve it through your own ability. God may use your efforts, but ultimately victory comes through relationship with God and with others. If you’re dealing with an addiction, ask what relationships you need to pursue, and what relationships you need to diminish or eliminate in order

to support your desire for freedom. If your family is falling apart, ask what relationships you need to bring around your family to support your desire for healing.

Jesus’ earthly ministry clearly shows the power of relationship to change people’s lives. For the sake of love, people will do things that they would not attempt for any other reason. **MIMBS 6**

Describe a problem you are currently facing. What human relationships are inhibiting your ability to gain victory in that situation? What human relationships would help empower your victory in that situation?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 12:1–14:11, Hebrews 7:1–17, Psalm 105:37–45, Proverbs 27:3*

Thursday—November 6 • Team Building

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...

Hebrews 10:24–25

Many regard John Doerr as the greatest venture capitalist who ever lived. He was a part of the startups for some of the world’s most successful technology companies like Sun Microsystems, Compaq, Intuit, Amazon.com and Google. One interviewer asked Doerr what criteria he uses to identify a successful venture. Doerr simply said that he bets on teams. He indicated that he doesn’t just look at the people, but he looks at how they relate with one another. He notes, “As you build a new business, one thing’s for sure: You will get into trouble.” So, he says, you have to ask yourself, *are these the people with whom you want to face those problems?*

Relationships are powerful. In a

spiritual context, I don’t really know anyone who has changed his life apart from regular Bible study in a small group of people who “spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” The most meaningful change takes place in the context of applying scriptural truth through life-on-life relationships, similar to what was modeled by Jesus and His 12 disciples, and by the people they influenced. **MIMBS 6**

Are you involved in a small group that allows you to apply scriptural truth in the context of life-on-life relationships? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 14:12–16:41, Hebrews 7:18–28, Psalm 106:1–12, Proverbs 27:4–6*



“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
John 13:34–35

Today’s scripture includes some of Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples before He was crucified. He reminded them that He was calling them to a life of love. This required that relationships would be their priority. Doctrinal truth is absolutely important, but Jesus did not refer to it as the defining characteristic of His followers. He said people would recognize the priority of our relationship with Him as we learn to love each other.

Within that context, there is a process for relationships. Patsy and I have been married for 41 years. When I first saw her, I didn’t introduce myself and say, “I love you. Would you like to get married?” That would have violated the process of relationship. All relationships have a similar development that requires time to build trust and transparency. And frankly, relationships also have limits. It’s virtually impossible to have close friendships with more than a small handful of people. Even Jesus limited Himself to 12. And there are priorities in relationships.

Your relationship with God must be number one, with your spouse and family

number two. Within that context, though, Jesus clearly indicated that the mission He laid before His followers was in building relationships. “By this,” He said, “everyone will know that you are my disciple.”
☐ MIMBS 6

Based on today’s Scripture passage, do you think the people you work with know that you follow Jesus? Why or why not?



Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 16:42–20:49, Hebrews 8:1–9:28, Psalm 106:13–107:43, Proverbs 27:7–11*



For Your Small Group

☐ **November 3–9: Go to biblegateway.com and read aloud Hebrews 10:24–25 in at least 4 different versions or translations.**

- What do these verses mean?
- Who has been an encourager to you? What difference did it make?
- Have you been an encouragement to someone in your life?

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10

When Ernest Shackleton was organizing his third polar expedition, he reportedly ran this advertisement in the newspaper: “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, nor and recognition in case of success. Only 27 positions available for this expedition.” It’s said that 5,000 men applied for those 27 positions. Why would they do that? I believe all men desire three things:
A vision that calls them to give their lives.
Someone with whom to share that vision.
A reasonable explanation of why those two desires are so hard to fulfill.

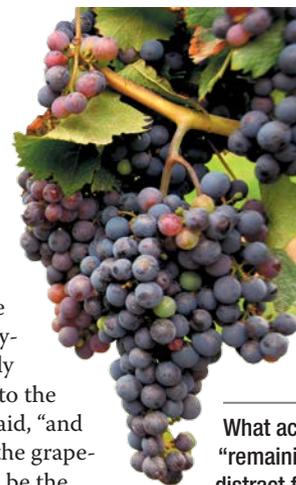
God created men with an almost insatiable desire to invest their lives in something that will outlive them—something bigger than themselves that will make a contribution to the world. And because He created us with that desire, He also has a plan for its fulfillment. He already has established the works He wants us to perform for His glory.
☐ MIMBS 7

Why do you think men responded to Ernest Shackleton’s advertisement? Can you relate to that? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 21:1–22:31, Hebrews 10:1–17, Psalm 108:1–13, Proverbs 27:12*

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. . . . This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
John 15:5, 8

God created men with a desire to make a contribution to the world. But He also showed us how to fulfill that desire by producing eternal fruit that will give glory to God. Jesus compared our relationship with Him to the relationship that branches have with a grape vine. The branches don’t produce anything on their own, but only when they stay connected to the vine. “Remain in me,” He said, “and I will remain in you.” Like the grapevine, the natural result will be the development of a lot of fruit.



you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last” (John 15:16). So we aren’t just promised that we will bear much fruit; we’re also promised that it won’t fade because of the passing of time. But we don’t bear fruit by straining to “make a difference.” It comes through remaining in Christ. Come into His presence on a regular basis. Abide in Him, and lasting fruit will be the result. ☐ MIMBS 7

What activities in your life contribute to your “remaining in Christ,” and what activities distract from that goal? How can you remain in Christ today?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 23:1–49, Hebrews 10:18–39, Psalm 109:1–31, Proverbs 27:13*

Later on, Jesus added, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

John 14:12 NLT

Today's verse gives an astonishing promise that, if we remain in Jesus through faith, He will enable us even to exceed the good works He accomplished while He was on earth. You might say, "Come on! There must be a loophole here somewhere. Greater works than Jesus???"

Think about it. How many lepers did Jesus heal? Well, one time He healed 10 of them. Leprosy was the raging disease of Jesus' day. Yet today we don't have many lepers.

Why? Because God put in someone's mind a strategy for treating leprosy, and millions of people were delivered from the disease over the course of time. Or, how many blind people



received their sight through Jesus' ministry? Obviously, He did restore sight to some people. Think of the lives that an ophthalmologist can change today!

Any skill that God has given you has potential to impact the lives of many people. When you submit that skill to Him, it has potential not just to touch people in a temporal way, but to touch them for eternity. [MIMBS 7](#)

What skill or ability has God given you? How are you using it to reach people for eternity? Share your thoughts and pray with other men about these.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 24:1–26:21, Hebrews 11:1–16, Psalm 110:1–7, Proverbs 27:14

Thursday—November 13 • Persecution

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

John 15:18–19

Jesus gives great kingdom promises in John 14 and 15, but He also informs us of the price for choosing His way. Then, at the beginning of John 16, Jesus explains why He wants us to count the cost of following Him. He says, "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away" (John 16:1).

Jesus doesn't want us to be surprised when life isn't easy. He says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace" (John 16:33). Peace in the midst of great difficulty? How is that possible? By staying in Him, because He also says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (vs 33).

Bruce Barton, a Christian writer from the

early 20th century, noted, "Jesus brought forth man's greatest effort by the promise of obstacles, not rewards." We understand that persecution is part of the equation when we desire to make a contribution. And yet, the incredible joy that comes with producing eternal fruit more than compensates for the temporal price we pay in the process.

[MIMBS 7](#)

In your life, what has been the cost for following Jesus? How have you found joy in the midst of that difficulty?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 27:1–28:26, Hebrews 11:17–31, Psalm 111:1–10, Proverbs 27:15–16

Friday, Saturday, Sunday—November 14, 15, 16
Ambition and Calling

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

Philippians 3:7–8

God made us with a desire to do something that will outlive us. But most of us settle for a cheap imitation of the overarching plan God has for our lives. I believe most men in today's culture—even Christian men—don't know their calling before God. So they are pursuing their own best definition of "the good life."

The apostle Paul was an ambitious man with impeccable credentials before he came into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He was zealous for what he understood to be true. In the realm of "legalistic righteousness," he says he was "faultless" (Philippians 3:6). Then, when he met Jesus, he found that his calling took him in a very different direction. In hindsight, Paul told the Philippians, "Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Wow—the "surpassing worth" of knowing Jesus made his former ambitions look like dust.

I challenge Christian men to distinguish between ambition and calling. Take some time to kneel before God and say, *Lord, I'm a sinful man. I've been making my own plans for my life. But now I want to follow Your plan. I want to produce fruit that will*

last, and I know that will only happen as I stay in You and submit to Your will. Please reveal my calling to me.

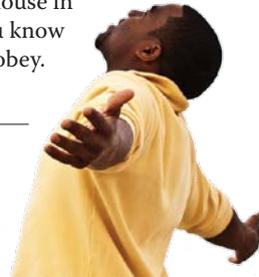
Now something really radical: while you're waiting for His answer, start looking at your finances. The biggest problem I see with the men who come to me exploring God's calling is that they are living with so much debt and overhead they don't see how they can pursue that calling! Many turn away.

So pray for God to reveal His call on your life. And in the meantime, invest some time getting your financial house in order, so that when you know God's calling, you can obey.

[MIMBS 7](#)

Are you willing to pray the prayer from this devotional? What might it cost you? Is your financial house in order in such a way that you could obey God's calling?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 29:1–34:31, Hebrews 11:32–13:25, Psalm 112:1–115:18, Proverbs 27:17–22



For Your Small Group

November 10–16: Read aloud the devotional, "Created for Good Works" found on page 35.

- What does Shackleford's advertisement tell us about what men desire in life?
- Would you have been interested in joining Shackleford's expedition?
- What are the deepest desires you have in life?

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

There is a concept in social psychology called pluralistic ignorance. When people privately disagree or reject something but think (incorrectly) that everyone else agrees or accepts it, this is pluralistic ignorance. It leads us to the wrong conclusions, which have consequences.

For instance, society continually tells us that Christianity is losing ground. When you look around, do you seem to focus on the presence of evil so much that you no longer notice the presence of good? We see leaders fall and society's attitudes toward religion change, and cynicism begins to build a hard shell around the soul.

You may need to adjust your lenses. Scripture teaches us that we serve an

in-control God who never forsakes or abandons us. He is always advancing His kingdom. Chances are more people than you think feel as you do and desire the things you do—to do good, to love, to be a light. Wrong conclusions about God's kingdom here on earth will always contribute to a hard shell on the soul. [MIMBS 8](#)

Do the trivialities and cynicisms of life ever leave you feeling jaded? What are some ways you've experienced the light of Christ from others recently? Share your thoughts with a group.

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 35:1–36:38, James 1:1–18, Psalm 116:1–19, Proverbs 27:23–27*

“An enemy did this,” he replied. The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?” “No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.”

Matthew 13:28–30

We become jaded when we lose the kingdom perspective, the manifestation of God's reign here on earth. Jesus teaches us about how this kingdom works through a series of parables in Matthew 13.

He says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared” (vv. 24–26). Although Jesus sowed the good seed of the Word of God, the enemy came and sowed evil in the world.

In another parable, He describes a similar condition: “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down

into the lake and caught all kinds of fish” (vv. 47–48). All kinds of fish were caught together, and wheat and weeds were allowed to grow side by side in the same field.

When you see injustice and evil, take comfort in the sovereignty of God; the kingdom looks exactly as it's supposed to here on earth. The world is operating exactly as we were told it would. God is in control. [MIMBS 8](#)

How have you been impacted by this mixture of good and evil here on earth? How does this perspective help explain the way the world works?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 37:1–38:23, James 1:19–2:17, Psalm 117:1–2, Proverbs 28:1*

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14

Ever feel like the dark is overcoming the light? You watch the news, listen to the guys at work, read the paper, and it's easy to ask: Is the kingdom of heaven retreating? Jesus gives us a glimpse into this in two more parables found in Matthew 13.

In the first, He compares the kingdom to a man who plants a mustard seed in a field: “Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches” (v. 32). Next, He says it's like “yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough” (v. 33).



Make no mistake: Christianity is still advancing consistently and forcefully, from China to Africa to South America. Yes, there are many who resist it, but the light is overcoming darkness all over the world. Jesus will not be denied. [MIMBS 8](#)

Have you ever made a “mustard seed”-sized spiritual investment only to see God use it in His kingdom in a big way? How can you be an intentional part of His kingdom work today?

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 39:1–40:27, James 2:18–3:18, Psalm 118:1–18, Proverbs 28:2*

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17

Three men combined their savings to purchase a Porsche in a rare color. But what looked perfect to them turned out to have been repainted, greatly reducing its value. They had gathered all their possessions to buy what they thought was a real treasure and were left bitterly disappointed.

Have you ever poured your time, money or effort into something you thought was valuable, only to be left unsatisfied?

Jesus tells us about two men who found the real thing: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away

and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44–46). The first man wasn't looking for it, while the second man was searching diligently, but both recognized true treasure and were willing to do whatever it took to take possession.

The kingdom of this world has plenty to offer in the form of false treasure. Are you desperate enough for God to exchange it all for the kingdom of heaven? [MIMBS 8](#)

What investments or pursuits have you later regretted? What are some of the obstacles that keep you from pursuing or selling out to the will of God? Share your ideas with some other men.

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 40:28–41:26, James 4:1–17, Psalm 118:19–29, Proverbs 28:3–5*

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.
Matthew 13:16

When you have experienced a deep sense of splendor and awe before God, your emotions are overwhelmed. You suddenly understand—not by intellect, but by the Spirit—what the kingdom of heaven is all about. In that moment, you identify with the men who sold everything to get the treasure, the wheat that bears fruit, the good fish in the net, the leavened bread, and the towering tree.

But what happens outside of those experiences? The cares and stresses of life creep in. You grow discouraged, cynical, and distracted. Your boss yells at you first thing Monday, your wife is frustrated that you worked late again, your son is sick, and the car breaks down on the way home. Suddenly, that perspective you had the day before on your knees is all but gone.

Living with a kingdom perspective is the difference between flying along at treetop

level and going up to 30,000 feet. The view changes completely. The small, inconsequential things drop out of sight and only the things that truly matter remain.

Feeling overcome by the troubles of the world? Noticing more weeds than wheat? Chasing after the wrong things? Gain some altitude. Return to the truth that Jesus gives in the parables. God is not surprised or nervous by the state of the world or your circumstances. Everything is just as He said it would be. Let this keep your soul soft and heart malleable. Commit to view every day, every person and every situation through a kingdom perspective. [MIMBS 8](#)



What helps you keep a kingdom perspective in the midst of the stress of life? Ask some other men for their ideas as well.

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 42:1–46:24, James 5:1–20, 1 Peter 1:1–2:10, Psalm 119:1–48, Proverbs 28:6–11*



For Your Small Group

November 17–23: What areas of your life leave you feeling cynical? What areas of your life bring you hope or give you life?

- Have you known older men who have developed a hard shell of cynicism?
- Do you know older men whose hearts have remained open and hopeful?
- What kind of older man do you want to be?

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”
Mark 12:41–44

In today’s scripture, we see Jesus distinguishing between dollars (amount) and donors (attitude of the giver). He pointed out that some people give from their surplus, but this poor widow gave all she had. That required a huge level of trust in God. Spiritually, she had given more than those who put in large monetary amounts.

It’s important to note that Jesus did not vilify the wealthy contributors. Some people have resources to give large amounts—let’s say, \$100,000. Those people don’t deserve to be indicted simply because they are rich. In fact, a stingy person wouldn’t give \$100,000, so these people can be classified

as generous. Frankly, a large donation may go further and accomplish more than a small one, according to human standards, but it is not necessarily more valuable or pleasing to God. Jesus pointed out that you don’t have to give a large amount to give a lot. [MIMBS 9](#)



Write one sentence explaining how Jesus’ view of generosity differs from what our culture would expect. Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: *Ezekiel 47:1–48:35, 1 Peter 2:11–3:7, Psalm 119:49–64, Proverbs 28:12–13*

Tuesday—November 25 Balancing Generosity and Personal Responsibility

The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down.
Proverbs 21:20

Yesterday we saw Jesus commending a widow who gave two small coins at the temple. While some gave greater amounts from their surplus, she gave all she had (see Mark 12:41–44). We could easily assume that Jesus wants all Christians to give away everything they have. But the Bible also indicates that a person should prepare for the future.

Today we might not suggest storing up food and olive oil, but we might advise investing in an IRA. Mark 12 doesn’t support the view that all Christians should give away everything they have.

I believe wise stewards make financial choices that enhance their ability to provide long term for themselves and their families. In fact, some women are in this widow’s

position simply because their husbands did *not* adequately prepare for the future. However, I also believe Jesus’ commendation of the widow’s coins indicates that God is very pleased when desperate people are able to express trust in Him by giving, even in the face of their own need. [MIMBS 9](#)

An overall view of Scripture indicates that Godly stewardship requires wise preparation for the future, and it also requires generosity to others. How would you explain that balance to someone who has great resources? And how would you explain that balance to someone who is in great need?

Daily Reading: *Daniel 1:1–2:23, 1 Peter 3:8–4:6, Psalm 119:65–80, Proverbs 28:14*

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

1 Timothy 5:5

The first time I read today's text, I was in the throes of materialism and worldly ambition. I remember thinking, "I want this kind of faith." Since then I have prayed semi-regularly, "God, please be gracious enough to keep some major unmet need in my life so I will remain dependent on You." God has honored my request. If you are in need, you can trust God to help you make wise financial choices. If you want to make an offering to Him to express your love, then do it. But don't give with the expectation of receiving. Just obey and trust God to care for you. One of my friends led a major Canadian ministry. Last year his family endured tremendous setbacks, but he emailed me after

the year was over to say that "2013... taught us to walk depending on the Lord more closely," trusting in His provision. If you're in need, take heed. Desperation often awakens a faith that exceeds anything we've experienced in more prosperous times.

☐ MIMBS 9

Describe someone you know who has experienced great need and has grown stronger in faith and closer to Jesus as a result. Ask a few other men about their experience.

Daily Reading: Daniel 2:24–3:30, 1 Peter 4:7–5:14, Psalm 119:81–96, Proverbs 28:15–16

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:6–8

No one else can determine God's will for your resources, unless referring to something specifically commanded or prohibited by Scripture. The Bible does not include a passage outlining exactly how much money to keep. But it does warn that the things you treasure should be eternal rather than temporal (see Matthew 6:19–21).

Luxury does not necessarily deliver a person from fear. I met a man with a net worth of about \$5 million who said he could not make a ministry donation, because he was afraid of running out of money. If you have a surplus of resources, you still have to decide if you will make financial decisions based on faith or on fear.

Today's scripture encourages generosity. Earlier this week we noted that you

don't have to give a large amount to give a lot. But it's also true that a person who has a lot and doesn't give accordingly may fall into the category of sowing sparingly. In the process, that person may limit the return God provides in and through his life.

☐ MIMBS 9

In your own words, explain how the decisions made by a person with abundant resources can still reflect fear rather than faith.

Daily Reading: Daniel 4:1–37, 2 Peter 1:1–21, Psalm 119:97–112, Proverbs 28:17–18



Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:1–4

Some of our wealthy elite have made media splashes with large charitable donations. Yet, in Jesus' eyes, the young single mom who quietly put \$10 in the offering plate on Sunday may have given much more than the mogul who gave millions amid media flashbulbs. In a similar situation, Jesus said, "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything" (Mark 12:44).

Statistics indicate that the 20 percent of our population representing the richest of our culture give only about 1.3 percent of their income to charity.

The bottom 20 percent, representing the most financially needy of our culture, give about 3.2 percent of theirs. That means that in some ways, the bottom 20 percent, representing those with the greatest personal need, is more than twice as

generous as the top 20 percent.

My friend Dan sent me an email in January relating a holiday experience he may never forget. He went with a group to a downtown area, handing out lunch bags and various clothing items to people living on the streets. He reported, "God had special plans that day, not for the homeless, but for me. I saw homeless people who wouldn't take more than they need, but realized we who have lots are greedy." May God enable each of us to understand His views on generosity in a world that often places more value on show than on substance, and more value on keeping than on giving.

☐ MIMBS 9



How does a clear understanding of God's view of generosity affect the tendency to show favoritism to the rich and wealthy members of our culture? Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: Daniel 5:1–7:28, 2 Peter 2:1–3:18, 1 John 1:1–10, Psalm 119:113–176, Proverbs 28:19–24



For Your Small Group

☐ **November 24–30: During this week of thankfulness, reflect on those people who have been generous with you regarding their time or finances.**

- How has that generosity impacted your life?
- Have you passed on that generosity to someone else?

The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”

Luke 4:42–43

The Bible has many layers. One layer shows that God is interested in our personal needs. Jesus met many individual’s needs for healing, forgiveness and purpose. But the gospel He preached wasn’t focused on the desires of people. Jesus’ message was based on a simple declaration: “I am the Messiah.” He was the anointed one, destined to rule God’s kingdom.

Jesus said that, as part of the process of instituting His kingdom, He “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus made Himself accessible to everyone, even going to places where He wasn’t

entirely welcome, like in His hometown. John 4 shows Jesus in conversation with a Samaritan woman—a social outcast. It also shows Him healing the son of a royal official.

Jesus is actively seeking, not just waiting for people to come to Him. We worship a God who became a man so that He could come after us. That is a Savior worth following! **MIMBS 10**

Have you felt God pursuing you? Share your story with some brothers.

Daily Reading: *Daniel 8:1–27, 1 John 2:1–17, Psalm 120:1–7, Proverbs 28:25–26*

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:44

I heard about a man in the locker room at his gym. When a cell phone rang, he put it on speaker and answered. A woman said, “Hi, Honey. I’m at the mall. There’s a gorgeous leather coat here for a \$1,000.” He said, “Buy it!” She described a \$65,000-vehicle and a million-dollar house. He told her to go ahead with both transactions. “Great,” she said. “I love you!” He replied, “I love you, too.” Then he hung up and asked, “Whose phone is this?”

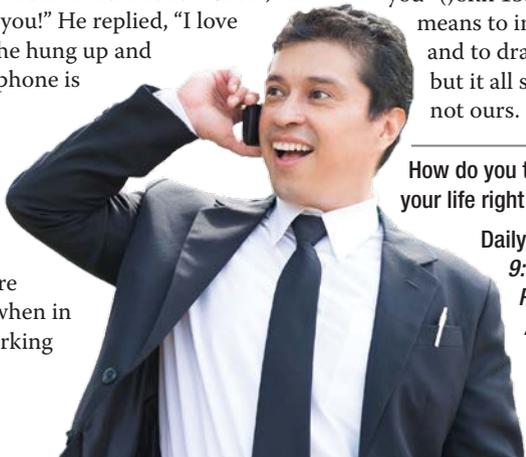
That story shows that our assumptions aren’t always correct. We might think we’re pursuing God, when in reality, He is working

in our circumstances to draw us to Himself. Dr. Sproul notes that today’s verse actually could be translated, “No one comes to me unless the Father drags him.” It carries a sense of expended energy.

Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16). God uses various means to introduce Himself to us and to draw us into His embrace, but it all starts with His effort—not ours. **MIMBS 10**

How do you think God is working in your life right now to draw you to Him?

Daily Reading: *Daniel 9:1–11:1, 1 John 2:18–3:6, Psalm 121:1–8, Proverbs 28:27–28*



Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23:6

Even if we don’t have a thorough grasp of the Bible, most of us are somewhat familiar with the 23rd Psalm. I thought I knew it pretty well. Then, about five years ago, I was reading a translation I hadn’t used much before—the New Living Translation. It presents today’s verse like this: “Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.”

I did a little Hebrew study, because of the difference in the wording between *follow* and *pursue*. I found the Hebrew word “pursue” really does have a more active sense than what is communicated by “follow.” It really gives a sense that God’s goodness and love will chase me. I mentioned this to a pastor friend, and he said, “Yeah, it’s more like you look in

the rearview mirror and see the red lights flashing. You’re being pursued by God’s kindness.”

That’s a beautiful picture. We may think we’re chasing after God, when in reality, He is pursuing us.

MIMBS 10

How does it affect your understanding of God’s intention toward you, to know He isn’t just following you, but He’s lovingly chasing after you?

Daily Reading: *Daniel 11:2–35, 1 John 3:7–24, Psalm 122:1–9, Proverbs 29:1*



And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived... he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

John 4:46–47

John 4 tells about a man who had prestige, power and wealth, and still could do nothing to help his sick son. He brought the need to Jesus’ attention, and our Lord healed the boy. We’ll never know if this man would have sought Jesus if he were not desperate. But we do know that, because of his son’s illness, he did come to Jesus, and his whole family believed as well. An entire household, including the servants, believed in Jesus, all because of a child who almost died.

I can honestly say that, in 40 years of walking with Christ and listening to testimonies, I don’t remember a single instance

of a person who came to faith because they were happy and content with their circumstances. Some men do come to Jesus in times of success, but only when that success has, in fact, become an affliction. Generally speaking, prosperity and joy and pleasure don’t draw us to Jesus. God uses our suffering as a grace by which He entices us to seek out Jesus and follow Him. **MIMBS 10**

Describe a time when some sort of affliction drew you closer to God.

Daily Reading: *Daniel 11:36–12:13, 1 John 4:1–21, Psalm 123:1–4, Proverbs 29:2–4*

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good... It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees... I know, LORD, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Psalm 119:67–68, 71, 75

No one should go looking for affliction, but when it comes, we should actively wonder what God is trying to say in the midst of difficulty.

If you have not embraced Christ yet, and you're wondering why you are in such difficult circumstances, please know that God will work in that affliction with a desire to draw you to Himself. God always makes Himself accessible to you—the question is, are you accessible to Him?

If you are a Christian and you are experiencing affliction, remember that even the apostle Paul had a “thorn in the flesh.” This was something that frustrated him so that he asked God to take it away. Three times God told Paul He would not take it away. Eventually Paul wrote that his “thorn” had the effect of keeping him humble. Affliction can teach us to depend on and obey God.

Finally, 2 Corinthians 1:4 says that when we are afflicted, God comforts us, so that we can also comfort others. The passage continues, “If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer” (2 Corinthians

1:6). In other words, other people watch to see how we will handle difficult times. God's grace reaches more and more people, drawing them into His kingdom, which is the ultimate priority that sent Jesus to our world. Because He loves us, God sometimes will allow things to be so hard, we cannot make it without Him. Our responses impact our own lives, but also those around us.

Pray this prayer today: *Jesus, Your gospel is good and Your kingdom is great. My sin is profound. Your forgiveness is sweet. Your affliction is painful. And yet it is a grace that draws me to You. Thank You. Amen.* ☐MIMBS 10



Respond to this statement: “Because He loves us, God sometimes will allow things to be so hard, we cannot make it without Him. Our responses impact our own lives, but also those around us.” Share your thoughts with a group of men.

Daily Reading: *Hosea 1:1–9:17, 1 John 5:1–3 John 1:14, Psalm 124:1–126:6, Proverbs 29:5–14*



For Your Small Group

☐ **December 1–7: Think of 2–3 people who are going through a time of affliction (health issues, divorce, bankruptcy, etc.).**

- What special needs might those people have right now?
- What ways could you minister to them?
- Spend a few minutes in prayer asking God to show them comfort, support and love during these times of affliction.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Pascal once said that all people seek happiness. This is without exception. We are looking for happiness in all the decisions we make—in our marriage, in our finances, in our career. The Bible seems to promise that this is in fact God's plan for us. Jesus said that we would have peace, that we would find happiness and that we would have an abundant, full life: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,” John 10:10.

The frustration we often have is that happiness is elusive. Even the man who is able to get exactly what he wants often finds out that it doesn't really make him happy after all.

“Success sickness” is the disease of always

wanting more and then never being happy when you get it. A lot of guys have an intangible pain that sits there in the gut, not because they didn't get what they wanted but because they did. They thought getting what they wanted would make them happy, but they ended up miserable. They got off track and pursued their own desires rather than what God wants for them.

☐MIMBS 11

In what parts of your life have you been chasing success? Are you content with your whole life, or is there an area in which you are struggling with contentment?

Daily Reading: *Hosea 10:1–14:9, Jude 1:1–25, Psalm 127:1–5, Proverbs 29:15–17*

Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.”

James 4:15

How do men get off track? James 4:13–15 contrasts two types of people: the people who worry about this life and its anxieties, and those concerned with the will of God. James reminds us that our life is a mere mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

How much anxiety and worry is directed at things that are already past? None. All of our worry is directed at an unknown future. And yet the Bible says no man can know anything about his future.

I've lived with both contentment and worry. I used to have a plan for my life. Even when I became a Christian it never

occurred to me that I should change my ways. My credo was “Plan, comma, then pray.” I was reading my Bible for comfort, but my *Forbes* for direction.

One day, I was shaken and realized I was living according to James 4:13 instead of James 4:15. I decided to make a significant redirection of my life to the Lord. ☐MIMBS 11



What is your view on the direction your life is heading? Are you asking God to lead you in the steps He wants you to go, or are

you racing for what you want and then praying about it?

Daily Reading: *Joel 1:1–3:21, Revelation 1:1–20, Psalm 128:1–6, Proverbs 29:18*

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:9

The man who tries to be in charge of his own life lives the life of the cultural Christian. He lives by his own ideas. He seeks the god or gods he wants. Strong-willed and ambitious, his motto is: “I do what I want to do, I make my own plans.”

The Bible tells about the Pharisee who beats his chest and tells God, “I am a righteous man. I’m not like that sinner over there.” And the humble sinner can’t even look up at God; he says, “Lord, have mercy on me.” This man is the biblical Christian.

While the cultural Christian lives by his own ideas, the biblical Christian seeks constantly to live a more surrendered life. So one seeks the God he wants, the other

seeks the God who is. How does a man experience true peace, happiness, and contentment? The answer is that he will be most peaceful, most happy, and most content when he lives in surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.  MIMBS 11

Are you living a self-directed life, or one that is humble, seeking what God wants for you? Is there any area of life you have not yet surrendered to the Lord? Share your thoughts with members of your group.

Daily Reading: Amos 1:1–3:15, Revelation 2:1–17, Psalm 129:1–8, Proverbs 29:19–20

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matthew 7:26–27

One day I wrote in the front of my Bible, *I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God.* I really made Jesus the center of my life. At the time I made this commitment I thought, *Imagine what God can do, now that I’m on His side.*

Some years later, I was in the midst of a major remodel of a building. Out of nowhere, the state passed some new laws that affected our project. One morning bulldozers showed up and leveled everything to the foundation.

It was a picture of my relationship with Christ.

I had the right foundation but I

had just not built on it the right way. God leveled me right down to the foundation. It was one of the most gracious things He has done for me. I never could have gotten on the right track without His intervention. I am so grateful. I was mired in my own system and trying to write my own script in life.  MIMBS 11

Take a few minutes to review your life to reflect on how and where God has intervened or redirected your plan or life. Share with your group one or two of the times you recalled when God got you back on track.

Daily Reading: Amos 4:1–6:14, Revelation 2:18–3:6, Psalm 130:1–8, Proverbs 29:21–22



God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”

Exodus 3:14a

Not long after my recommitment to Christ came a huge business crisis. I was sitting around in the rubble of my business when a thought went through my mind: *There is a God we want, and there is a God who is. They are not the same God.* This is the greatest lesson I have ever learned.

I asked myself, “Morley, what are you doing? Do you really think that you can reshape God in your image? Do you think your efforts can have one iota of impact on changing His nature and character?” He is the all-knowing, all-powerful God. He existed before anything or anyone and His plan began thousands of years ago. He does not need to change His mind or plan to suit me. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god we want and start seeking the God who is. Does that make sense?

I had spent 12½ years trying to change God; meanwhile, God’s desire was to change me. I thought I knew what was best for me and that surely He would bless my plans. I realized that my duty is to come humbly to the foot of the cross and completely surrender my life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. I had to trust Him and let go of the control I *thought* I had.

I’ve since learned the irony of surrender is that it leads not to defeat but victory. So if I want peace, happiness and contentment, the way I get this is by living according to James 4:15, according to God’s will.  MIMBS 11



Do you ever try to change who you think God is to fit your life? What does it mean to you to live a surrendered life?

Daily Reading: Amos 7:1–9:15, Obadiah 1:1–21, Jonah 1:1–4–11, Revelation 3:7–5:14, Psalm 131:1–133:3, Proverbs 29:23–27



For Your Small Group

☐ **December 8–14: Ask your men to share the difference between a life directed by God and life directed by self.**

- If you look back over the past 10 years of your life, would you say it is self-directed or God-directed?
- How do you want to spend the next 10 years?
- Does anything need to change for the outcome of the next 10 years to show your desire?

For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
Luke 11:10



If one of our children were to become deathly ill, what should we be praying for? We would want health for our child. We would want our child to live. Is that the will of God? Of course, we want healing, but we also want the will of God. It can be very confusing. Many people

have been in this situation and prayed for healing, but some people still die even after lengthy and gut-wrenching prayer. Others have seen their prayers answered and experienced complete healing.

Do our prayers have any influence over God's master plan? Today's verse indicates that God listens to us and wants us to ask Him for our needs. There is another passage in Luke 18 about a widow who is persistent in asking a judge for justice. Because of her persistence, the judge grants her request. These scriptures (and others) tell us that God does listen and acts on our prayers.

Are you asking for specific things in your prayer life? Are you being direct with God? Or are you afraid to tell God what you really want? ☐MIMBS 12

In your prayer time this week, be direct with God. Tell the Lord the desires of your heart and ask for what you need. He is listening!

Daily Reading: Micah 1:1–4:13, Revelation 6:1–17, Psalm 134:1–3, Proverbs 30:1–4

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!
Romans 11:33 NLT

There are some things that God will not do, whether we pray or not. God will never sin or lie. God's character will never change. There are some other things that God does not do when we pray. I don't believe we have seen too many people with amputated limbs and the limb has actually grown back. He doesn't turn back time so that you can redo something from your past. He does not suspend the laws of nature. You can count on gravity if you jump off a building. All things are possible through God, but we can pray and pray for the power to fly or any other super power and we can assume those things will not happen.

God's character doesn't change. We know He is good and we know He is all-knowing. If there are things in life we cannot change, we must accept those things. The Serenity prayer opens with, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change." There are things in life that we just have trust God with even when prayer doesn't change them. ☐MIMBS 12

Are you having trouble trusting God with a difficult issue? Ask God to help you trust Him even while you persist in prayer.

Daily Reading: Micah 5:1–7:20, Revelation 7:1–17, Psalm 135:1–21, Proverbs 30:5–6

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me. The LORD will vindicate me; your love, LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.
Psalm 138:7, 8

I was talking to a friend a while ago, soon after the housing market fell out. On that dramatic day my friend was in New York City, to complete the sale of his company to a venture capital firm for a huge fortune. But the announcement was made before closing and the venture capitalist backed out.

He went home in tears, devastated, all the work and prayers he had put in. And the whole thing fell apart on him. He went back home and a couple of weeks later he got a phone call from a company who wanted to be acquired.

He was able to multiply the size of his company many times over and his personal fortune many times over by acquiring this company. In other words, what looked like complete disaster in his case, a few months later turned into an enormous blessing way beyond anything he could imagine.

Sometimes we mistake protection as suffering. Oftentimes God is protecting us, but we think it's



suffering. It feels like suffering at the time, but some time down the road we are able to look back and see God had His hand in the situation. He is always protecting us, even when we cannot see it. ☐MIMBS 12

Is there a recent situation that has devastated you or someone you love? How would your view of that situation change if you knew it was simply God lovingly, protecting you?

Daily Reading: Nahum 1:1–3:19, Revelation 8:1–13, Psalm 136:1–26, Proverbs 30:7–9

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.
Matthew 5:18 NLT

One year, I had the brilliant idea to take 15 percent of my time and start the Morley Leadership Center. I prayed and was convinced this was God's will for me. It soon became obvious that it would take a lot more of my time to really make it work. I wasn't prepared to work it that hard. I put a year and a half into it and then decided to stop doing it all together.

I could say, "Lord what was that about?" But I didn't. I'm convinced it was His will for me to start it and then to stop it. I don't need to know the in between. Even though it put me upside down financially, in no way do I view it as a failure. I know the goodness

of His will.

Stop and think about it—who knows better how your prayer should be answered for your benefit? You or God? It is kind of a no brainer when you think of it like that. We can have great confidence when we trust the will of God, and pray Thy will be done. ☐MIMBS 12

Have you been praying that God would give you what you want or what He wants? In what ways might you need to change your prayers?

Daily Readings: Habakkuk 1:1–3:19, Revelation 9:1–21, Psalm 137:1–9, Proverbs 30:10

Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”

Mark 10:27 NLT

There is nothing I cannot ask for and nothing God cannot do. That statement is 100 percent true. But there is a lot of mystery between those two statements.

God’s Word tells us that we should ask God for anything. We should be able to ask our loving, heavenly Father to give us the desire of our hearts. We can come to Him and share our deepest needs. As His children, we can bring Him our sorrow, our joy, and share both the little and big things of life.

From reading the Bible, we know God to be all-powerful and all-knowing. He can turn water into wine, make the blind see, part the seas and even raise people from the dead. He is a God of miracles.

But (and this is the mystery), God doesn’t always give us what we want. He doesn’t heal everyone in an earthly way. There were Christ followers in the Bible who were martyred. People lose their jobs and homes. Sometimes we don’t get the miracle we request.



So our real prayer should be a believing prayer like this, “Lord this is what I want, but what I really want is what You want.” Lay your desires at His feet and ask Him to give you what He wants. Jesus, while in the garden, gave us a wonderful example of a believing prayer when He prayed to His Father, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42).

We may know what we want and we can ask God for that, but we also need to know that His answer may be different than ours. And that answer gives us the opportunity to desire what God wants to do in our life. **MIMBS 12**

As you pray with your small group, how can you help each other pray with the right attitude? How can we show each other our faith through our prayers together?

Daily Readings: Zephaniah 1:1–3:20, Haggai 1:1–2:23, Zechariah 1:1–21, Revelation 10:1–11, Psalm 138:1–140:13, Proverbs 30:11–17



For Your Small Group

December 15–21: How would you describe your prayer life (praising God, praying for missionaries, asking for help, reciting memorized prayers, or other descriptions)?

- Do you ask God for general things like good health, financial provision, and love for people?
- Do you ask God for specific items like healing from chronic pain, help loving a difficult person in life or ways to pay off a lingering hospital bill? Why or why not?
- Do you need to change the way you pray and interact with God?

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

The biblical story of the birth of Jesus is an incredible narrative describing a historical event, but sometimes I think we get a little jaded and even confused about the details, maybe because of the little kids’ pageants. I saw one presentation where two children, dressed as Mary and Joseph, knocked on the door of the inn. The innkeeper, also a child, came to the door and reported the *No Vacancy* status of his establishment. Then, seeing Mary’s sad expression, the innkeeper said, “Never mind. You can have my room!”

In some ways, it makes a great spiritual application, and yet it’s just not what really happened. When we gloss over the true

story of the very human birth of a baby who was both God and man, we do an injustice to our faith.

The details of Jesus’ birth don’t just matter at Christmas. They matter all year, because of what they imply about His identity. He was the Word (God) made flesh. Every day of the year, our faith rests on the Person of Jesus Christ. **MIMBS 13**

List three details you recall from the biblical Christmas story. What do they reveal about Jesus’ identity?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 2:1–3:10, Revelation 13:1–18, Psalm 141:1–10, Proverbs 30:18–20

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

Luke 1:30–31, 34

Matthew and Luke both recorded in their Gospel accounts that Jesus’ mother, Mary, was a virgin. They didn’t gloss over it at all, but rather stressed this information in a variety of ways. The angel that brought Mary the news of the impending birth explained how this would happen. He said, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Joseph was Jesus’ earthly father, but the Scripture tells us Mary was a virgin whose pregnancy was the result of God’s intervention.



As humans, we could not pay the penalty for our sins. Only God could save us and restore our relationship with Him. And so, as Scripture tells us, “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Galatians 4:4–5).

MIMBS 13

Why do you believe the doctrine of the virgin birth is so important for us to understand and accept?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 4:1–5:11, Revelation 14:1–20, Psalm 142:1–7, Proverbs 30:21–23

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Matthew 1:18, 22–23

Because we hear the biblical Christmas story repeatedly, perhaps we lose sight of the mind-blowing nature of a virgin birth. Hundreds of years before the event happened, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah: “The virgin will conceive . . .” (Isaiah 7:14).

The reality that Jesus was born to a virgin is crucial for our faith, because it underscores Jesus’ true identity and His power and ability to save us. If Jesus had come as a man directly from heaven, we would have said, “He’s not really one of us.” Instead, God chose a human mother who was a virgin. She was supernaturally “overshadowed” by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) so the baby growing inside of her was fully God

and fully human.

When sin entered the world through Adam, the whole world reeled. All of humanity was affected, so that C.S. Lewis refers to us as “sons of Adam.” But Jesus was not a “son of Adam”—He was the Son of God, uniquely qualified to break the power of sin and restore each of us to fellowship with God. [MIMBS 13](#)

What does it mean to you personally to recognize that Jesus is uniquely qualified to break the power of sin in your life and to restore you to fellowship with God? Share your thoughts with your group.

Daily Reading: Zechariah 6:1–7:14, Revelation 15:1–8, Psalm 143:1–12, Proverbs 30:24–28

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Luke 2:39–40

Jesus was born as a baby, then grew naturally and matured to manhood. He dealt with difficult people and environments, and sometimes grew weary. Once when He fell asleep in a boat, a “furious storm” arose on the lake, “so that the waves swept over the boat” (Matthew 8:24–25). In spite of those conditions, Jesus slept so soundly, the disciples had to wake Him.

The Gospels also record a time of fasting in the desert, when He endured 40 days of temptation. At the end of that time, “he was hungry” (Luke 4:2). That’s evidence of His humanity. Scripture shows that He experienced all kinds of emotions from compassion to anger, and even grief. The

Bible says He can empathize with our desperate situation, because He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus is uniquely qualified to save us. Because He did not sin, He could give His own life on our behalf, breaking the power of death, and offering life instead. [MIMBS 13](#)

How does Jesus’ human experience make God more approachable? How does it encourage you to seek God’s mercy and grace?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 8:1–23, Revelation 16:1–21, Psalm 144:1–15, Proverbs 30:29–31

“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

John 8:58–59

John’s Gospel records a time when some people asked Jesus, “Who do you think you are?” (John 8:53). Today’s passage records part of His answer: “before Abraham was born, I am!” From our perspective, there seems to be a grammar issue with His answer. Normally we would expect Him to say, “Before Abraham was born, I *was*.” When Jesus said “*I am*,” He used the name by which Hebrew people knew God. They understood He was equating Himself with God. The people reacted violently, because they couldn’t accept this reality.

Jesus was Sovereign Lord of the universe, even as He was born as a baby, grew up through childhood and adolescence, and lived as a man. The apostle Paul wrote that “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell” in Jesus (Colossians 1:19). We will never fully comprehend how that is possible, but the reality is that God will always far exceed our ability to understand. The prophet Isaiah recorded God’s declaration: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). This is evident in Jesus’ identity as fully God and fully human.

The essence of Christianity isn’t rooted in a creed or a system, but in the Person of

Jesus Christ. The challenge of Christmas is to realize that the baby in the manger, fully human and fully divine, is the core of everything we are as Christian men. Let’s devote ourselves to loving Him better and demonstrating that relationship through our daily choices. [MIMBS 13](#)

List three choices you’ve made recently that reflect the depth of your relationship with Jesus. Do your choices show your love for Him? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Zechariah 9:1–13:9, Revelation 17:1–19:21, Psalm 145:1–147:20, Proverbs 30:32–31:7



For Your Small Group

☐ **December 22–28: What aspects of the Christmas story reveal God’s love to you?**

- Why is it easy to show and see the love of God at Christmas?
- How can you show God’s love in tangible ways during this Christmas week?

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.
Proverbs 17:3



A few years ago, Man in the Mirror President David Delk planned an awesome celebration for his oldest son's 16th birthday. Among other things, David gave his son a one-ounce gold coin to symbolize his incredible value and to commemorate God's investment in the young man.

Similarly, gold can symbolize the worth of true biblical manhood. This week we'll explore that theme.

There are two ways a person learns that something is truly precious: by having it, and by not having it. With gold, some learn its value by owning it and discovering all

the ways it changes their situation. Others learn its value by not having it, and having to live without.

The same is true with the influence of a godly man in your life. You may have had a godly example in your life—a father or grandfather, a coach, a teacher, a neighbor. Or you may understand the value because of what was missing in your life. Either way, you know that a man who biblically defines his purpose and his value is priceless. **MIMBS 13**

Who has had the greatest influence on your life? Was it a godly influence? What kind of role model are you prepared to be for the men around you?

Daily Reading: *Zechariah 14:1–21, Revelation 20:1–15, Psalm 148:1–14, Proverbs 31:8–9*

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:13–14

Like other precious metals, gold is valuable, at least in part, because it is rare. Similarly, men who truly know Scripture and define themselves by biblical standards are vastly outnumbered by those who seek a broader road with fewer restrictions. But that makes them all the more valuable.

In our culture, celebrity stories and political headlines usually reflect the antithesis of biblical standards. Yet, in that environment, a man who uses Scripture as a map for his life has tremendous opportunity to stand out in the crowd. I remember reading about an NFL linebacker who made headlines because he didn't sleep around before he was married, he courted his wife and

married her, and then he made his family a top priority in his life. That was so extraordinary that it was covered more widely than his athletic exploits. A lifestyle that should be expected of any man was deemed worthy of a huge newspaper story. That kind of manhood is deemed valuable, partly because it is so rare. **MIMBS 13**

With some brothers, make a list of men who are public examples of godliness. How do these men set the example for you?

Daily Reading: *Malachi 1:1–2:1, Revelation 21:1–27, Psalm 149:1–9, Proverbs 31:10–24*

Yet, you LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter.
Isaiah 64:8

Scripture repeatedly calls us to be malleable in God's hands; for instance, clay in the hands of a potter. Other images also support that idea. For instance, gold is extremely malleable—some say it is the most malleable of all known metals. In fact, a single ounce of gold can be hammered to create a sheet that is about 400 times thinner than a human hair, covering about 300 square feet!

The Bible indicates that real men—men who seek to define themselves and their purpose biblically—will allow God to shape them. A true man is willing to adjust his



agenda when it doesn't correspond with God's.

Anyone who is seeking God's plan for his life must be willing to be hammered out and shaped by God. Scripture challenges us not to let the world hammer us into its mold. Instead, we are to be transformed by letting God renew our minds and change us from the inside out (see Romans 12:2). **MIMBS 13**

How has God been trying to shape you? How have you been cooperating or resisting His efforts?

Daily Reading: *Malachi 3:1–4:6, Revelation 22:1–21, Psalm 150:1–6, Proverbs 31:25–31*

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Now What?

Our nation and world face a devastating "men problem." Legions of men have grown up without a clear understanding of how to execute their manhood. The collateral damage in marriages and families has been staggering. Of course, no man fails on purpose. Yet if the next 25 years are like the last 25, life as we have known it will be no more.

However we got into the current situation, the only solution is to disciple our way out. Making disciples is God's designated way to release the power of His gospel on every problem we face.

Notice that Jesus did *not* say, "Go and become disciples." He said, "Go and *make* disciples" (Matthew 28:19). Of course, you can't give what you don't have, so becoming a disciple is important. But for at least one generation, we have emphasized "becoming" at the expense of "making." The result? Most Christians today are not contagious. We sneeze and nobody catches what we have. We have created a generation of spiritual overeaters who don't "pass it on."

So where should we go from here? I've updated and revised *The Man in the Mirror* to help you grow as a disciple and disciple-maker. I hope you will read or re-read it. And use it to disciple a few men. Of course disciple your family first; that's your most important priority. After your family, the place on the battlefield where you are most needed today is to disciple men. Be sure to teach them to "pass it on," since you're not making disciples until your disciples are making disciples.



According to Jesus, making disciples is the one thing that's guaranteed to make a difference 25 years from now. *The Man in the Mirror* is a tool that can help you help men. We can do this. Are you with me? 

Until every church discipled every man...

Patrick Morley, PhD
Founder and Chairman, Man in the Mirror

The Man in the Mirror has helped hundreds of thousands of men over the last twenty-five years. It invites men to take a probing look at their identity and find the means to bring about lasting change. For more information, or to purchase a copy, visit maninthemirror.org.



• PATRICK MORLEY

The author of 21 books, Patrick Morley, PhD, is best known for writing *The Man in the Mirror*, with more than 3 million copies in print. He is Founder and Chairman of Man in the Mirror and has been teaching a weekly Bible Study to thousands of men for over 25 years. Pat and his wife, Patsy, live in Winter Park, Florida. www.maninthemirror.org.

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Reflections from...

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR



Every day men fail morally, spiritually, relationally, and financially—not because they don't want to succeed, but because they have blind spots and weak spots, which they believe they can handle on their own. —Chapter 23

Five overarching areas of importance to God form the foundation on which we are to prioritize our lives: 1) To love God, 2) To love others, 3) To rest, 4) To work, 5) To do good works. —Chapter 14

Every opportunity to fear is also an opportunity to trust God and move from the Cliff of Fear across the Bridge of Faith to the Cliff of Courage. —Chapter 17

No single undertaking will ever come close to that of assisting in the salvation of our children. —Chapter 8

The universal part of our earthly purpose is to be a certain type of man in character (being) and conduct (doing). —Chapter 5

Harmony about family goals and problems comes from spending time fleshing out our differences about them. There can't be a meeting of the minds if the minds don't meet! —Chapter 9

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