

EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

TOOLS TO HELP MEN GROW TODAY



OPEN THE BOTTLENECK OF MEN'S DISCIPLESHIP

**ALSO
INSIDE**

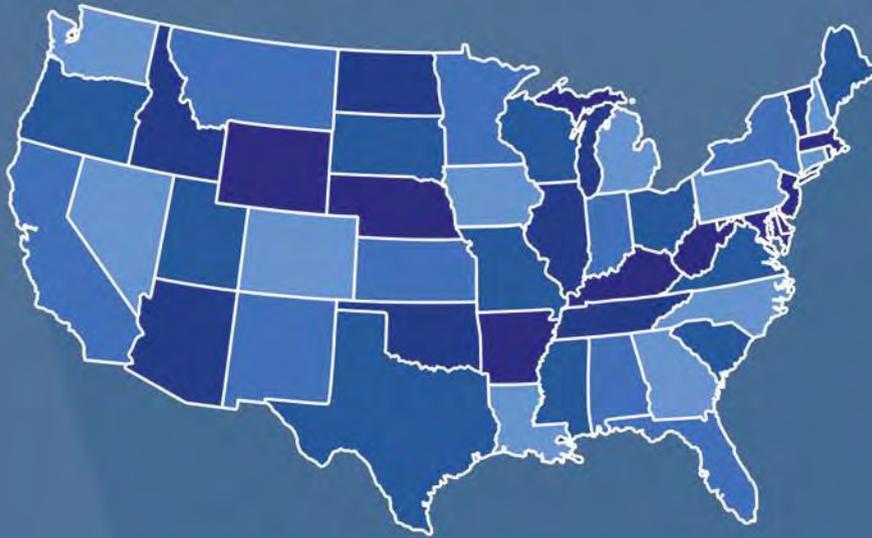
Set Annual Goals page 8
God's Plan Is Working page 30
The Church Is the Plan page 60
Daily Devotions page 14



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EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURED ARTICLES

- 3 **First Things First** by Brett Clemmer
- 4 **What Is the Bottleneck Holding Us Back Today?** by Patrick Morley
- 8 **How to Set Annual Goals** by Patrick Morley
- 30 **God's Plan Is Working**
- 60 **Church, Let's Keep It Strange** by Patrick Morley

DEVOTIONS

- 15 **January 2017 Devotions**
- 29 **February 2017 Devotions**
- 44 **March 2017 Devotions**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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.

RESOURCE TOOLS

- 11 **Equipping Your Men's Small Group**
- 14 **How to Use This Devotional**

Check out Man in the Mirror's new donation website—mimdonate.org.



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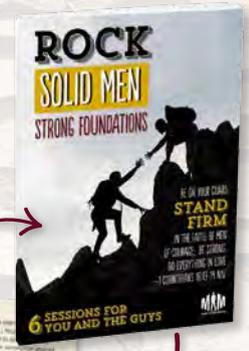
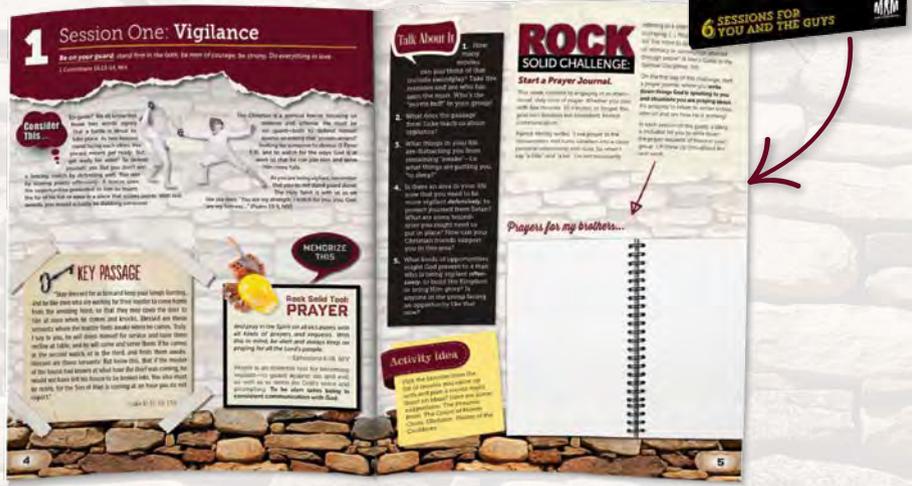
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This event is the recommended kick-off event for Challenge 5 of the Journey to Biblical Manhood, centered around the spiritual disciplines. Visit www.journeytobiblicalmanhood.org for details.

FIRST THINGS FIRST CHOOSING YOUR FIFTH PRIORITY

by Brett Clemmer

For years now I have worn a blue rubber bracelet on my wrist. It says: “No Man Left Behind.”

We give these away at our leadership training events, and it's the name of our model for men's discipleship. (You can read about it at a website called, of course, nomanleftbehind.org.)

When I give them out, I tell a story about a consultant that came to the office several years ago. During our discussion, she told us that sociologists say the average person can only have about five major priorities in their life. It may be apocryphal, but it rings true.

For most men, the first four priorities are: (1) your relationship with God; (2) your spouse; (3) your kids or grandkids; and (4) your job. That leaves one.

When I ask guys what their priorities are in life, most stammer through the first three or four like it's a pop quiz they wish they could have studied for. Many don't think that intentionally. Instead of centering our lives on what is most important, we let our circumstances determine our focus.

I've seen many different “Fifth priorities.” For some, one priority takes on double importance. Youth sports can be all-consuming—I've coached my share of youth teams and seen it become overwhelming. For others, it's a hobby: softball, hunting or fishing, for instance.

I decided to make my fifth priority to reach men and draw them closer to a life of biblical manhood. To help them find and follow Christ. To leave no man behind. The blue bracelet is a reminder to make that decision every day.

Don't get me wrong, coach that team if you get the chance, go hunting or fishing or join a softball team. I love to rock climb, personally. But even our hobbies can be an opportunity to share the gospel.

In his article *What is the Bottleneck Holding Us Back Today?*, Pat identifies the primary restraint on the spread of the gospel. I don't want to ruin it for you, but it's basically this: men are not intentionally deciding to build into each other's lives.

My son recently reminded me, “Not making a decision is deciding to do nothing.”

Decide what your life will be focused on. I invite you to join us as we seek to make sure that there's No Man Left Behind. **MAM**

P.S. I'm excited to announce we've added a new team member. Steve Hutton has a background as a PGA Tour Professional and Tournament Director, PromiseKeepers Field Director and entrepreneur. Read a letter from Steve and me on page 30 and check out his complete bio on our website.

WHAT IS THE BOTTLENECK HOLDING US BACK TODAY?

By Patrick Morley

Twenty years ago there wasn't enough good curriculum to disciple men.

Leaders who attended the annual meetings of NCMM (the National Coalition of Ministries to Men) recognized that a lack of acceptable curriculum as the bottleneck mostholding us back, and began encouraging curriculum developers. Today I'm happy to say there is a plethora of good curriculum to disciple men. It has led to an acceleration in men's discipleship. So what's the bottleneck today that, if removed, would most lead to an acceleration in men's discipleship over the next 20 years?

A Little Background: The Bottleneck Theory

In the "the bottleneck theory" (officially, the Theory of Constraints) you may have 10 obstacles slowing you down, but at any given moment there is only one obstacle that is *most* slowing you down. So even if you solve all nine of the other issues, you still won't see any acceleration until you

remove that "one thing" most holding you back.

Let me give an example. Once I was going through a breakfast buffet at an old-fashioned Holiday Inn. Everything was great until I got about halfway through, and then the line came to an abrupt halt. Why? Someone had put the toaster in the middle of the buffet line! And it had become the bottleneck that brought everything to a standstill. A good manager would

spot the problem and move the toaster to the end of line. Then people could step aside to wait once they popped in their bread. And the line would speed up. But you know what happens next, right?

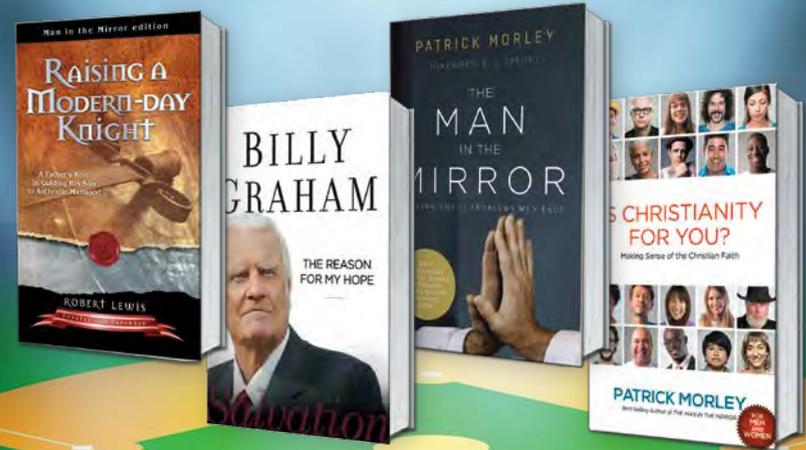
Yep. The "next biggest" bottleneck will appear (the new obstacle most slowing you down) —let's say waffles. And once that bottleneck is removed, the next one will show up— maybe eggs. But if you fix the waffles

What's the bottleneck today that, if removed, would most lead to an acceleration in men's discipleship?

What Is the Bottleneck Holding Us Back Today? continues on page 6 ▶

THESE SMALL GROUP **RESOURCES** ARE A HOME RUN!

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before the toaster problem—no acceleration. Why? Because people are still backing up at the toaster. That’s why the only way to accelerate is to first solve that one bottleneck most holding you back. So how does this apply to men’s discipleship?

The Bottleneck Today

In my opinion the current bottleneck—the one thing most holding the church back from mission success—is “disciples not making disciples—starting at home.” Of course, “disciples not making disciples” is an oxymoron—an internally inconsistent statement. What’s the underlying problem? We’re doing a much better job of inspiring men to grow, but at the same time we’re not giving them a compelling vision to reinvest in other men. Men who have been disciplined are not discipling other men.

What’s really going on? Paralleling culture, in our day there’s a lot of “spiritual obesity.” There are so many spiritual overeaters who have been gorging on good teaching for years, but haven’t been following the Jesus-way of discipling others as they have

been disciplined. Why does it matter? Most of us don’t need more food, we need more exercise. Personally, I think “disciples not making disciples” is ignorance, not malice, which is why we urgently need to train men how to make disciples.

How Does God Provide to Solve This Problem?

God, of course, can do anything He wants. He can send a wholesale spiritual awakening even if NONE OF US makes a single disciple. God can reform our governments, churches, and families even if NONE OF US makes a single disciple. But apart from begging God for such a miracle, “making disciples who make disciples—starting at home” is what He commissioned as His designated way to turn things around.

So what’s the solution? How can we help people really believe that they can make a difference? That their personal involvement is not only desirable but necessary, even crucial? And what is the structure that will help them make that difference? The really

great news is that while implementation takes a few years, the solution is quite simple. There is a method for disciples to make disciples with proven results. It’s the method Jesus inaugurated as the cornerstone of His strategy to bring the gospel of His kingdom to the whole world: He started a small group.

The bottleneck—the one thing most holding the church back from mission success—is “disciples not making disciples—starting at home.”

If Jesus was incarnate today, He would take a few men under His wing, show them the ropes, help them become robust disciples, then send them out to disciple others with instructions to, in turn, disciple others—starting at home. That’s His plan, then and now: “Disciples making disciples.” Why? Because He wants to save the world. Jesus wagered the success of His entire mission on the success of a single small group to spiritually reproduce themselves.

What makes a small group so special? A small group is where people can get so personally invested in others that they come to believe that what they say and do really can make a difference, and that their personal involvement really does matter.

What makes a small group work? There are several factors, of course, such as a leader who cares, two more people who really want to grow, and a respect for the process of relationships. But like a shade tree over all of these is love. Love makes me care. I may love the masses in a general way, but when I really love the most is when I go small.

Why Does It Matter?

Disciples making disciples. It’s something anyone can do. And it’s something you can know for sure will actually make a difference in the history of the world. Why?

- Because “disciples making disciples” is God’s designated way to release the power of His gospel on every problem we face.
- Because however we got ourselves into the current situation, the only solution is to disciple our way out.
- Because evangelism without the rest of discipleship is cruel.
- Because discipleship changes marriages, families, the workplace, and our communities.
- Because discipleship is the one idea that, once fully understood and truly believed, changes EVERYTHING.

Are you making disciples who make disciples? If yes, praise God for you! But if you’re not sure how, and tired of sitting by while Rome burns, send me an email to patrickmorley@maninthemirror.org and we’ll get you what you need. Remember, you’re not really making disciples until your disciples are making disciples. 



■ PATRICK MORLEY

The author of 20 books, Patrick Morley, PhD, is best known for writing *The Man in the Mirror*, with more than three 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 30 years. Pat and his wife, Patsy, live in Winter Park, Florida. www.maninthemirror.org

HOW TO SET ANNUAL GOALS

by Patrick Morley



The new year gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect on the past, be thankful for the present and look forward to the year ahead.

Setting goals is a tool we are given to dream and strive for things we would like to accomplish. More importantly, it allows us time to listen to God and what He would like to do through us for His glory.

As the new year begins, why not set aside a few hours for a personal retreat? Begin with prayer. Ask God to intervene in your heart, take you to new places, show you new things, and guide you into the new year. Slowly proceed through these 12 areas. Set goals where appropriate.

Think about and meditate on these aspects of your life:

1. Self Examination

Richard Foster said, “Superficiality is the curse of our age. . . . The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.” Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” We live in a wonderful age, but it has a dark side. Many of us today are in a “structural hurry”—a fast pace is part of our DNA. The price of pace is peace. Let’s begin the new year by

resolving to call “time out” to peer into our souls. Read Psalm 17:3, 26:1-12, 32:8, 139:1-24; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, 13:5.

Sample Goal: I will take one morning each month to slow down, examine my heart, think deeply about my life, and make changes based upon God’s purpose.

My Goal: _____

2. God

Spurgeon said, “In 40 years I have not spent 15 minutes without thinking of Jesus.” There is a God we want, and there is a God who is. They are not the same God. One day it hit me: Wishing for “the God I want” won’t have one iota of impact on God’s unchanging nature. Our job is not to change God—but rather to let Him change the core affections of our hearts. We must come humbly and negotiate a full surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is. Read Psalm 96:1-9; Ezekiel 1:25-28; Revelation 4, 5, 21, 22.

Sample Goal: I will search for the God of the Bible, inviting Him to change the affections of my heart. I will begin each day with faith and repentance.

My Goal: _____

3. Wife



After God, but before all others, I will make my wife my top priority. If we took all of the problems of men, put the marriage problem in one stack and the other problems in another stack, the marriage problem alone is still higher than all the other problems combined. Easily the No. 1 problem most men face today is that their marriages are not working the way God intended. When the party is over, the lights have been dimmed, and the kids are grown and gone, there will only be two rocking chairs sitting side by side. You really are the only ones in this thing together.

Sample Goal: I will prove by the way I spend my time that my wife is truly the most important person in my life after God, but before all others.

My Goal: _____

4. Children

No amount of success at work can adequately compensate for failure at home. If your children are walking with God, all of your other problems will fit into a thimble. So be your children’s spiritual leader, greatest fan, encourager, cheerleader, mentor, and example. Pray for them. Spend time with them in ways they want to receive it—board games, outings, watching their sporting events. Tell each child every day, “I love you!” and “I’m proud of you!”—like God did in Matthew 3:17! Also read Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:23.

Sample Goal: I will rotate taking one child each week on a “fun date,” tell each child I love them and I’m proud of them, and pray for them each day.

My Goal: _____

5. Work

I don’t have to work 70 hours a week to be successful. In fact, if I work that much, I can be pretty sure I’m failing everywhere else. Most people will spend more time at work than any other place. Work is not merely a platform to do ministry—it is ministry. Our work is a holy vocation. Do your work with uncompromising excellence as if doing it for the Lord Jesus—because you are! Read Genesis 1:27-28, 2:4-15, 3:17-19; Colossians 3:22-24.

Sample Goal: I will stop thinking of work as merely a “means” to other ends and begin to look for intrinsic value in the work I do.

My Goal: _____

How to Set Annual Goals *continues on page 58* ►

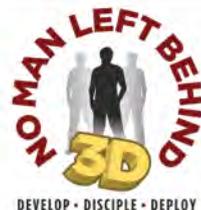
Is there a piece missing in your church's ministry to men?



Man in the Mirror has helped thousands of leaders complete a custom, long-term strategy to disciple all their men. **Now it's your turn!**

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To register for a training or to bring training to your community visit nomanleftbehind.org and click on Live Training.



EQUIPPING YOUR MEN'S SMALL GROUP

What Your Men Can Accomplish

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:

- { } Implemented a spiritual discipline into your daily life.
- { } Discussed the impact of the small group experience on spiritual growth.
- { } Committed to reflecting on the "five gauge" questions for a month.
- { } Written a note of affirmation to someone who has reflected Jesus in their life.
- { } Honored a faithful servant in your own congregation.
- { } Memorized one of your favorite versions or translations of Matthew 28:19.
- { } Written a prayer asking God to bring humility to your heart so He can greatly use you.
- { } Taken an action step to show that child or grandchild your unconditional love.
- { } Prayed for one another as you seek to fulfill God's calling in your lives.
- { } Recognized what it means to serve others and be served by others.
- { } Called and thanked that person with whom you have an authentic, honest relationship.
- { } Agreed on a way to minister to the young Christians in your church or community.



EQUIPPING YOUR MEN'S SMALL GROUP

Suggested Applications Steps

January 1-8

Throughout this week, you'll meditate on **the process of growing in your relationship to God.** **SAS (Suggested Action Steps):** Take a few minutes to discuss how a spiritual discipline (such as prayer, reading or memorizing God's word, going to church, etc.) can impact your relationship with God. Are you willing to implement a spiritual discipline into your daily life? Which disciplines would you commit to implementing into this next week?

January 9-15

From these devotionals you will see **the importance sharing your life with others for the purpose of mentoring, encouragement and discipleship.** **SAS:** Ask each man in your group to answer these three questions. Why did you come to this group in the first place? What keeps you coming back to this group? How would you explain how the small group experience has impacted your spiritual growth?

January 16-22

This week's devotionals help you **examine your spiritual life by looking at five gauges (spiritual life, home life, work life, ministry life and critical concerns).** **SAS:** Read aloud the devotional on page 24. Over the next month, have each man commit to asking himself the questions on page 24 on a weekly basis and come back with some insight from that experience.

January 23-29

This week **your men will look at what it means to imitate Jesus and align yourself with His word.** **SAS:** On a large piece of paper or white board, list some attributes of Jesus. Now list some people you think imitate Jesus in those ways. Write a note of affirmation to one of those people for showing you Jesus through their life.

January 30-February 5

This week, **you'll see that God honors those who faithfully serve Him.** **SAS:** Does God honor people in the same way that the world honors people? Is there someone in your church who has faithfully served the Lord? This could be a pastor, a nursery worker or a parking lot attendant. Is there a way for our group to honor that person?

February 6-12

These devotions show you **the importance of your pursuit of reproducing disciples.** **SAS:** Discuss what it means to be involved in reproducing disciples. Read aloud Matthew 28:19 from a variety of versions or translations. Ask the members of your group to memorize that verse of Scripture.

February 13-19

This week you'll consider **the difference between attitude of pride and a humble spirit.** **SAS:** Ask the men to identify Biblical characters who either struggled with pride or served with humility. How did God use those people for His service? Where do you find yourself in the struggle between pride and humility? Write a prayer asking God help you with your desire to have a humble heart.

February 20-26

In the devotionals this week, you'll read about **the impact of God's unconditional love.** **SAS:** Share with the group either an experience of conditional or unconditional love. How did experience impact you? Think of a way you can show and communicate unconditional love to your child or grandchild. Take an action step to show that child or grandchild your unconditional love for them.

February 27-March 5

The theme for this week is **the calling that God has given to each and every one of us.** **SAS:** In pairs, take a few minutes to share the following: What area do you believe God has called you to? Are you pursuing that area? Have you experience success or fulfillment in that area? Spend a few minutes in prayer for one another and the calling God has placed on your lives.

March 6-12

From these devotionals, **we learn what it means to serve others and be served by others.** **SAS:** Is it easier for you to give or receive? Why is one of those easier than the other? Read aloud the devotional on page 48 about Todd Beamer and 9/11. How did that group of people serve others? How did they serve our country?

March 13-19

This week, you will be reminded about the importance of having accountability partners in life. **SAS:** Who is that person who is honest with you and about you? With whom can you share your struggles, fears, dreams and hopes. Call that person this week. Thank them for the relationship you have with them and the authenticity you share with them.

March 20-26

From these devotionals, you will see that, generally, **there are four kinds of Christians: 1. Those who are young or weak, 2. Those with special needs, 3. Those who have fallen into sin, 4. Those who are strong.** **SAS:** How can a church or congregation minister to all kinds of Christians? How could your group get involved with helping the young Christians in your church or community?



DAILY DEVOTIONS

October • November • December 2016

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).

Correlating Scripture

Source material

Monday—January 16 • Growing Up in Our Faith

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)

The Bible says "folly is bound up in the heart of a child" (see Proverbs 22:15). Folly is another word for foolishness, usually linked with immaturity. I love my grandchildren, even in their immaturity, but I don't want them to stay that way.

My natural long-term desire is that they grow up in a healthy way and become adults. And, of course, we expect different behaviors from adults than from children. In a family, we help kids mature by imparting skills and teaching them to think clearly, so they can make strong and healthy moral decisions. Similarly, our heavenly Father wants to help us mature in our faith.

The apostle Paul wrote, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11). God's goal for His followers is to help us grow up in our faith, so we become "fully mature in Christ." MIMBS 2

Name one of your friends or acquaintances that you believe is mature in his faith. Suppose you had to use that friend as an example to explain maturity to a new believer. List three characteristics that you see in that person that you would use in your explanation.

Daily Reading: Genesis 32:13-34:31, Matthew 11:7-30, Psalm 14:1-7, Proverbs 3:19-20

One-year Bible daily reading

Discussion/journal questions

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.

- MIMBS 1—Growth
- MIMBS 2—Spiritual Maturity
- MIMBS 3—Parable of Talents
- MIMBS 4—The Easiest to Commit But Hardest to Detect Sin
- MIMBS 5—I Don't Feel Like God Cares About Me Personally
- MIMBS 6—Job
- MIMBS 7—Washing Feet
- MIMBS 8—Why Doing What You Want Will Make You Miserable
- MIMBS 9—A Clean Heart
- MIMBS 10—WWJD Is the Wrong Question (David Delk)

The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Matthew 23:11-12)

Jesus clearly turned the worldly ideal of leadership upside down when He told His disciples, "The greatest among you will be your servant." We think of leadership in terms of vision and motivation and power. But Jesus said a good leader becomes a servant. I don't think that means leadership skills are totally unimportant.

By all means, pursue training that will provide practical skills to undergird your leadership ability. But remember, if you aren't following Jesus, those skills will not make you a better leader in God's eyes. Being a good leader does not primarily depend on your ability to lead, but on your ability to follow Jesus. You have to stay connected to Him.

On March 9, 1976, a group of 44 people entered a gondola at a ski resort in Italy. They thought this would be an ordinary trip, but something went terribly wrong. The gondola broke free, falling 660 feet down the mountainside. The three-ton carriage assembly fell on top of it, completely crushing the cabin.

The investigation revealed that one wire was severed, and that caused the worst disaster in the history of gondola ski lifts. A vital connection became disconnected and 43 people died.

In today's passage, Jesus talked about leaders who become disconnected from their power source because they exalt themselves. He said those leaders will be humbled. The goal of godly leadership is to lovingly influence people to pursue God's vision. We can only accomplish that as we stay connected to Jesus, so He can love others through us.

What habits are you developing to help you stay connected to Jesus?

Daily Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:25, Matthew 1:1-2:12, Psalm 1:1-6, Proverbs 1:1-6

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.
—Corrie Ten Boom

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
—Proverbs 3:5-6



We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again.

You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. (Hebrews 5:11-13)

After I speak in men’s meetings, participants often want to chat. Usually one guy waits at the end of the line. His Christian life is stagnant, and usually his life is disintegrating. In Nashville, Tom was that guy. I noticed his sagging posture. His eyes revealed the vacancy of someone in crisis. He unfolded an incredible story, outlining the results of living a life divided between his desire to be a Christian, and his desire to have the best the world can offer. Tom had gotten himself into deep financial trouble, until it looked like he would lose his career and possibly his marriage.

I asked him, “Do you regularly read God’s Word?” His chin dropped almost to his chest. “No.” “Are you part of a small group, or do you have a best friend who can help you do life?” He replied, “No. I’ve withdrawn from people.” Over years of ministry to men, I’ve learned that men who invest time in spiritual disciplines grow in their relationship with Jesus, while those who don’t, seem to stagnate.  MIMBS 1

Today’s Scripture passage concludes, “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.” Explain how disciplines like regular Bible study and prayer, coupled with relationships with people who will hold you accountable, can help you learn about righteousness. How does that help a man to mature in his relationship with Jesus?

Daily Reading: Genesis 3:1–4:26, Matthew 2:13–3:6, Psalm 2:1–12, Proverbs 1:7–9

Tuesday—January 3 • How God Grows Men

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. (1 Timothy 1:18-19)

A 19th century Anglican theologian named J.C. Ryle produced a book titled *Holiness*, which sits on my shelf of my 50 top resources. I am always challenged by Ryle’s summary statements related to our sanctification (the process by which we learn about Jesus and become more like Him).

Ryle reminds us that true faith requires effort, as we strive to make daily choices in keeping with God’s principles and desires. He notes that all Christians should expect their spirituality to be contested. He explains that, while faith begins by yielding to God, a growing Christian must fight for his faith. A quick study of Scripture certainly will support Ryle’s assertions. The apostle Paul explained, “He (Jesus) is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29). In this battle, God provides the resources, but we must learn to use them as we contend for our faith.  MIMBS 1

Throughout his book, Ryle paints the process of maturing in faith against the backdrop of a huge battle. How does that reflect the truth of 1 Timothy 1:18-19, quoted above? What does that mean for your life?

Reading: Genesis 5:1–7:24, Matthew 3:7–4:11, Psalm 3:1–8, Proverbs 1:10–19

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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 1:4-6)

The apostle Paul doesn’t offer any “ifs, ands or buts” regarding the part God plays in growing and deepening our relationship with Him. Paul wrote that God “began a good work in you.” He noted that God also “will carry it on to completion” (see above). Millions of younger Christians have walked away from God and the Church.

They think they’ve left that all behind. In reality, even though they wander as prodigals, I don’t believe God will abandon them. Rather, He will work in their circumstances and their lives to woo them back to Himself. Later in Philippians, Paul also noted that God works in Christians, enabling us “to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). In other words, God gives us the desire and the power to do His good will. Finally, Paul also indicated that God gave His Word as the primary resource that develops and deepens our relationship with Him, so that we are “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).  MIMBS 1

Psalm 119 reminds us, “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (see verses 9-11). How does this Old Testament passage reflect the same truth that is revealed in the New Testament passages cited in today’s devotional?

Daily Reading: Genesis 8:1–10:32, Matthew 4:12–25, Psalm 4:1–8, Proverbs 1:20–23

Thursday—January 5 • Our Part in Our Growth Process

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling... (Philippians 2:12)

Scripture tells us that God initiates relationship with us. He also works within us, igniting both our desire and power to live out that relationship through our daily choices. The Bible even explains that God breathed truth into His Scriptures, offering a resource for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (see 2 Timothy 3:16). However, it also is true that we play a part in the process that deepens that relationship as we grow closer to Him and our understanding of His plan.

We have to value that relationship enough to fight for it. We must put forth the effort to avail ourselves of the resources God offers. Let’s admit it, the Christian lifestyle conflicts with the world around us, so it requires us to be intentional in pursuing our relationship with God. I’ve been involved in men’s ministry for a few decades now, and I’ve observed a simple truth. Men who engage in spiritual disciplines like Bible study and meditation grow in their relationship with God. Men who avoid that commitment tend to stagnate.  MIMBS 1

The Bible calls us to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Based on what you read above, describe some daily disciplines that might help you assume a healthy control over your thoughts rather than allowing them to control you. Are you already engaged in those activities? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: Genesis 11:1–13:4, Matthew 5:1–26, Psalm 5:1–12, Proverbs 1:24–28

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:7-8)

I heard about some executives from a well-known department store who visited executives representing a business that had an incredible reputation as a premier retailer. After an appropriate time of small talk, one of the men representing the department store said, “We’d like to know the secret of your success.” The agents representing the prestigious retailer looked at one another nervously. Without a word, one of them rose and went to the adjoining room. He came back with a big book, which he laid on the table between the two groups. “This book is a hundred years old,” he said. “It’s the original operating manual created by our founder. The secret to our success is that we do everything in this book.”

That’s a template for spiritual success as well. We have an operating manual—the Bible. The secret to our spiritual success is in knowing and doing what God’s operating manual says. I encourage men to develop a habit of reading and studying Scripture each day. Do your private devotions! Read your Bible, and ask God to reveal the ways He wants you to apply it to your relationships and your circumstances. Spiritual understanding and wholeness come as the natural result of honoring God and His Word.  MIMBS 1

Review your schedule from the previous week. How often did you read your Bible? What does your answer reveal about how intentional you are in pursuing the secrets to success from the “operating manual” God has provided for you?

Daily Reading: Genesis 13:5-19:38, Matthew 5:27-7:14, Psalm 6:1-8:9, Proverbs 1:29-2:15

To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Timothy 1:2)

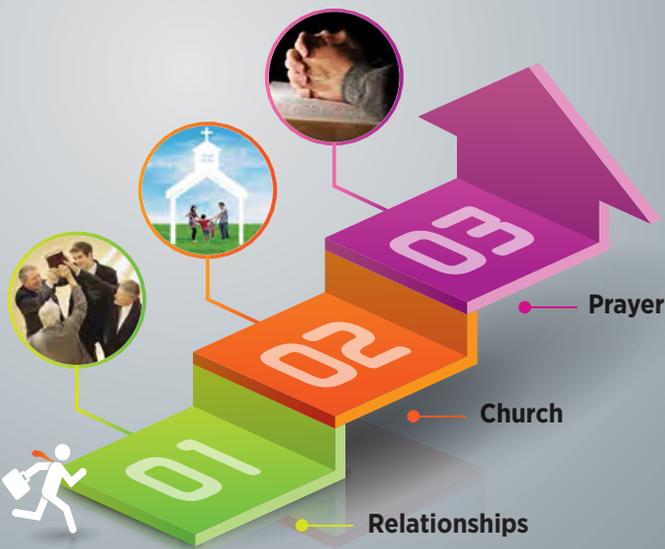
We know from Scripture that Timothy had a special relationship with the apostle Paul. Though not physically related, these men related to one another like a son and father. That’s a great example for men who want to grow deeper in their relationship with God. Find one or more mentor(s) who know more about the spiritual life than you do, and then ask questions and seek their advice.

Watch how they do life and imitate their example. I once had a mentor named Jim Gillian who saw something in me that I never saw in myself. He spoke words into my life that I had never heard before. He helped me envision being a godly man, a godly husband and a godly father. He believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself, and that released something inside me. I believe this is one of the most powerful factors for helping men grow their faith. It’s one of the greatest disciplines differentiating men whose spiritual life is deepening from those who are plateauing.  MIMBS 1

If you have a mentor, describe your relationship. If you don’t, write a prayer asking God to give you one.

Daily Reading: Genesis 20:1-22:24, Matthew 7:15-29, Psalm 9:1-12, Proverbs 2:16-22

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



January 2-8

Name three things/activities that help you stay connected to God.

- How do relationships help you stay connected to Him?
- How does church help you stay connected to Him?
- How does prayer help you stay connected to Him?

Tuesday—January 10 • Life-on-Life Small Group

For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers. (Proverbs 11:14)

My mentor Jim Gillian had a tremendous impact on my life. One way he did that was by inviting me to join his small group. Through Jim’s community of friends and faith partners, I experienced the power inherent in receiving good advice from godly friends who would hold me accountable for my attitudes and my actions.

Beneficial small groups require an investment of time, energy, and a certain level of transparency. Anyone who sits in a small group without making a personal investment, and then just gets up and leaves, won’t receive much benefit. The key is in spending enough time together to build community and to develop caring relationships and mutual respect.

When we care about what’s going on each other’s lives, we can encourage one another in living out our faith through our daily lifestyle choices. And we can experience the reality of today’s Scripture. Victory really can be the prize for those who realize the need to surround themselves with godly advisers.  MIMBS 1

If you are or have been part of a small “life-on-life” small group, describe one situation where the advice you received moved you deeper in your relationship with God. If you are not or have not been part of that kind of community, briefly describe how you might engage with that kind of group, so you could give and gain encouragement in your walk with God.

Daily Reading: Genesis 23:1-24:51, Matthew 8:1-17, Psalm 9:13-20, Proverbs 3:1-6

Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. (Psalm 34:3)

After years of working in men’s ministry, I believe the biggest problem men face has to do with their marriages. Imagine that you can stack up the marriage problems men face. I believe if you stacked all the other problems and then slid the two piles together, the marriage stack would be higher than the pile of all other issues combined.

I’ve been married 41 years, and frankly, I love my wife more now than I did when we married. That’s because we’ve learned to develop intimacy with one another. Prayer has been a key factor in that growth. Certainly, it’s a building block for intimacy. But it also provides evidence of what’s going on in your relationship. My wife doesn’t like to pray aloud, so I usually do that. In the morning, we pray over the coming day. And in the evening we pray a blessing at dinnertime for our families, and for the things that are meaningful to us. Our marriage has benefitted from our commitment to prayer.  MIMBS 1

Ephesians 5:25-27 exhorts, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” How does praying with and for your wife help accomplish the mandate described in this passage?

Daily Reading: Genesis 24:52-26:16, Matthew 8:18-34, Psalm 10:1-15, Proverbs 3:7-8

Thursday—January 12 • The Discipline of Tithing

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” (Malachi 3:10)

The concept of tithing appears in various places throughout Scripture. The literal definition of tithe is a tenth. When someone chooses to put a tithe in the offering plate, it means he is giving 10 percent of some larger amount. Usually in contemporary language, a tithe would be 10 percent of a person’s income. The verses that precede the one quoted above indicate that a person who says he belongs to God, but fails to give his tithe to support His kingdom, is actually robbing God.

I’ve known countless men who failed to act on this scriptural principle. They didn’t tithe. Many thought they simply couldn’t afford it. I cannot remember any of those men who were happy. By contrast, I’ve never known a tithing man who was spiritually unhappy. You might think you can’t afford to tithe, but I’d like to ask you a simple question. When you look at all the benefits God lists for tithing, can you afford not to?  MIMBS 1

What would you assume are the benefits of tithing?

Daily Reading: Genesis 26:17-27:46, Matthew 9:1-17, Psalm 10:16-18, Proverbs 3:9-10

I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” (Psalm 122:1)

A pastor visited a church member who hadn’t attended for several weeks. When the parishioner answered the door, he welcomed the pastor and invited him in. “Come sit by the fire!”

The pastor sat silently in a comfortable chair, warming his hands by the roaring blaze. After what seemed like a very long time, the pastor took the tongs and grabbed one end of a log. Pulling it from the fireplace, he laid it on the hearth. The log burned brightly for a bit, and then slowly the flames ceased to flicker and the orange color faded to black. Soon both men were staring at a lonely, cold log.

After a few more moments, the pastor picked up the log and threw it back on the fire. Instantly the flames reignited the log. The pastor still didn’t say a word. He walked to the door and turned to say goodbye. The parishioner smiled and waved. “I appreciate this fiery sermon you have preached to me tonight, and I assure you I will be in church on Sunday.”

God intends His followers to live out their faith in community. When we “go it alone,” we’re like the log whose flame ceased when separated from the rest of the wood in the fireplace. But when we demonstrate our relationship with Jesus in context of relationship with other Christians, our spiritual flame grows.  MIMBS 1

Scripture reminds us to “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). In your own words, explain how meeting with other Christians on a regular basis yields love, good deeds, and encouragement.

Daily Reading: Genesis 28:1-32:12, Matthew 9:18-11:6, Psalm 11:1-13:6, Proverbs 3:11-18

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

January 9-15

Discuss why your small group is important to each man.

- What were some of their answers?
- How could this small group be an encouragement to others?



He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)

The Bible says “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” (see Proverbs 22:15). Folly is another word for foolishness, usually linked with immaturity. I love my grandchildren, even in their immaturity, but I don’t want them to stay that way.

My natural long-term desire is that they grow up in a healthy way and become adults. And, of course, we expect different behaviors from adults than from children. In a family, we help kids mature by imparting skills and teaching them to think clearly, so they can make strong and healthy moral decisions. Similarly, our heavenly Father wants to help us mature in our faith.

The apostle Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11). God’s goal for His followers is to help us grow up in our faith, so we become “fully mature in Christ.”  MIMBS 2

Name one of your friends or acquaintances that you believe is mature in his faith. Suppose you had to use that friend as an example to explain maturity to a new believer. List three characteristics that you see in that person that you would use in your explanation.

Daily Reading: Genesis 32:13–34:31, Matthew 11:7–30, Psalm 14:1–7, Proverbs 3:19–20

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (Luke 8:15)

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who sowed seed on different kinds of soil with different results. Some seed fell on hard, impacted soil, and birds ate the exposed seeds before they sprouted. Some fell on rocky ground, and it sprouted, but the roots never grew deep enough to sustain growth during dry spells. Some fell on thorny ground, and the weeds crowded out the seedlings before they could mature. But the seed that fell on fresh soil sprouted and produced a harvest.

In this story, the seed represented God’s Word, and the soils represented the various types of people who hear the gospel. The condition of their hearts impacts the efficacy of the gospel in their lives. Jesus said His final example of good soil represented those “who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” This type of person really listens to God’s message. Because his heart is poised toward God, he retains it. And then he bears fruit by reflecting God’s character. That type of response to the gospel is evidence of maturity.  MIMBS 2

Read Luke 8:1-15. Record the four different kinds of soil mentioned, and the description of the people represented by the soils. Prayerfully consider which of those illustrations best describes your spiritual experience. Give specific examples to support your evaluation.

Daily Reading: Genesis 37:1–38:30, Matthew 12:22–45, Psalm 16:1–11, Proverbs 3:27–32

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-15)

The world around us threatens to overwhelm us with its deceitful scheming and deceptive philosophies. Today’s passage implies that spiritual infants will be susceptible to those lies—even “tossed back and forth” and “blown here and there.” In direct contrast to the “cunning and craftiness” of the world, when we pursue spiritual maturity, we choose to live in truth and integrity.

Our goal is to become more and more like Jesus, allowing the changes He’s making inside of us to become evident to the world through our attitudes and actions. When I prepare to speak to men, I try to discern whether the audience is filled with men who need a hug or a kick in the pants. But when I give a kick in the pants, it isn’t motivated by a belief that God is angry. Regardless of the tone of voice, I’m simply “speaking the truth in love.” That’s the method by which we achieve our God-given goal—helping men grow up in their faith, so they look more and more like Jesus.  MIMBS 2

In your own words, explain how “speaking the truth in love” stands in stark contrast to the world. Then describe how having that kind of relationship with Christian men could help you grow in your faith so you reflect Jesus more and more clearly.

Daily Reading: Genesis 35:1–36:43, Matthew 12:1–21, Psalm 15:1–5, Proverbs 3:21–26

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

The apostle Paul felt confident enough of the maturity of his faith to call others to follow his example. I believe his words offer a kind of litmus test for us as well.

A man who is nearing true spiritual maturity can legitimately say to another man, “Follow my example, as I follow Christ.” Are you following Jesus in such a way that people could follow you and find Jesus? No one can do it fully. Even Paul wrote, “I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (see Romans 7:19). He also didn’t claim he had arrived at a perfect state of full maturity. “But,” he explained, “one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

By exhibiting that same spirit of humble perseverance, a flawed human being can exhibit a spiritual maturity that invites others to follow his example.  MIMBS 2

On a scale of 0-5, with 0 meaning you have absolutely no confidence, and 5 meaning you are completely confident, rate your comfort level in telling another man he can follow your example, as you follow Christ. Explain the factors you used to make that evaluation.

Daily Reading: Genesis 39:1–41:16, Matthew 12:46–13:23, Psalm 17:1–15, Proverbs 3:33–35

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

I'm sure your car features various gauges on the dashboard, designed to alert you to issues that could harm your vehicle. The goal is to take care of those issues before they sideline your progress. I'd like to offer five gauges for your spiritual life that may alert you to potential issues before they inhibit your progress toward becoming more and more like Jesus.

Spiritual life—Are you learning about Jesus through reading and meditating on His Word? Are you communicating with Him through prayer? Are you consistently attending church? How have you been tempted recently, and how did you respond?

Home life / relationships—Are you experiencing meaningful encounters with your wife and/or children? Are your finances in order?

Work life—How are things going at your job? What temptations are you facing there?

Ministry life—How are you sharing your faith with others? How are you helping to equip others to mature in their faith? What have you done for someone recently without expectation of repayment?

Other critical concerns—Are your priorities in the right order? Is the “visible you” the same as the “real you”? Have you been faithful in the key areas of your life? If not, what is your plan?

Regularly answering questions like these may help you steer a straight course toward spiritual maturity.  MIMBS 2

Which of the above questions was hardest for you to answer? Why? Man in the Mirror Ministries offers One Hour Weekly Accountability Checkup cards featuring questions like the ones listed above. If you're interested in more information about the types of gauges that can help you continue your course toward spiritual maturity, you may want to contact our ministry and order some of these for personal use.

Daily Reading: Genesis 41:17, Matthew 13:24–14:36, Psalm 18: 1–50, Proverbs 4:1–4:13

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Isaiah 61:1–2a)

In Jesus' day, Israel was an occupied nation, kind of like the United States under British rule in the 1700's. The Israelites felt like they were oppressed by the rule of unjust, outside power. And they had a collection of books, which we call the Old Testament, which promised that God would send a man who would give them freedom.

In Luke 4, Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, returns to His hometown. Because it was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. When He was asked to read the Scriptures, He unrolled the scroll to find this passage from the book of Isaiah. This passage outlined Jesus' role: not to deliver an oppressed people politically, but deliver people who are spiritually captive.

Jesus understood that His calling did not fit their expectations. Even in an environment of false assumptions, Jesus fulfilled His destiny, because He aligned His life with Scripture. You can become a man of destiny, as well, when you align your life with Scripture.  MIMBS 3

Discuss this with some brothers: How intentional are you about aligning your life with Scripture? What is one area where you could improve?

Daily Reading: Genesis 46:1–47:31, Matthew 15:1–28, Psalm 19:1–14, Proverbs 4:14–19

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:14–16)

Suppose you play guitar. You can listen to someone else's guitar and tune yours to make the two smatch, and you can play together. But if your partner's guitar is off pitch, then yours will be also. You'd be much better off tuning to something that has true pitch—like a tuning fork or some other device. Then you would both know you were truly on pitch.

These days we have more and more access to the examples of talented people. Sometimes we know right away which ones are worthy of imitation, and sometimes it's not as obvious. The reality is, if you want to be a man of destiny, the primary person you should emulate is Jesus. Keep yourself aligned with His example, as revealed in Scripture. Go where you know He would go, and do what you know He would do. Tune your life to the life of Christ, as revealed in Scripture.  MIMBS 3

Can you think of someone who does a good job of imitating Jesus? What makes you say that? What is an attribute of Jesus you would like to be tuned in to?

Daily Reading: Genesis 48:1–49:33, Matthew 15:29–16:12, Psalm 20:1–9, Proverbs 4:20–27

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



January 16–22

Read Luke 8:1-15 aloud to the group.

- What were the four kinds of soils?
- What did they represent?
- Have you had those kinds of spiritual experiences?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Let's say you are a pilot, and you're planning to fly across the United States. You figure out your flight plan, but you are one degree off from the correct course. Did you know that, for every 60 miles you fly without correcting that simple one-degree mistake, you will be one mile off your course? If you were trying to fly from Orlando to Los Angeles, you'd miss your mark by about 38 miles.

We need other men in our lives—godly men—who will hold us accountable for our daily decisions and help us stay “on course.” But ultimately, those men should help us align our lives with Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 calls us to “[fix] our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” That's the only way to make your paths straight. It's the only way to avoid the little errors in judgment that could take you very far away from your intended destination.  MIMBS 3

What little choices are you making today that may have big consequences in the future? Who do you have in your life that helps you stay aligned with Jesus?

Daily Reading: Genesis 50:1—Exodus 2:10, Matthew 16:13-17:9, Psalm 21:1-13, Proverbs 5:1-6

Thursday—January 26 • Jesus' Motivation

“Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”... All the people in the synagogue were furious... They got up, drove him out of the town... (Luke 4:24, 28-29)

I can hardly fathom the rejection Jesus experienced in His hometown. Luke 4 reveals that Jesus' acquaintances were furious because He spoke positively about Gentiles—the very people from whom they expected their Messiah to deliver them.

The people in Jesus' hometown intended to throw Him off a cliff! But Jesus simply walked away. He endured their opposition without any sense of retaliation. And He didn't back away from His calling. Scripture says in John 3:16 that God was motivated by love when He sent Jesus. That same love motivated Jesus.

I have an unruly dog. He doesn't do anything I tell him to do, but I love him. That's a tiny picture of God's indescribable love for us. That's what motivated Jesus not to retaliate. It's also what motivated Him to keep ministering. The apostle Paul wrote, “For Christ's love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). A man of destiny will imitate Jesus' motivation of love.  MIMBS 3

On a scale of 1-10, how strongly are you motivated by the same indescribable love that Jesus showed? How can you be motivated to love even more?

Daily Reading: Exodus 2:11-3:22, Matthew 17:10-27, Psalm 22:1-18, Proverbs 5:7-14

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.” At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:16-18)

Simon and Andrew seemingly made a snap decision—but then, we can assume from other Gospel accounts that these men were familiar with Jesus even before this event. At any rate, the actual invitation didn't say, “Come and fulfill your destiny.” Jesus simply invited some guys to hang out with Him. If they chose to do that, over the long haul they eventually would “buy in” to His motive and purpose, because they would become like Him. They would become “fishers of men.”

Most of us don't make important decisions quickly. Suppose someone called you on the phone to say they have an incredible investment opportunity. A condominium is available in a desirable location at half the market price. Even if you are eager to make an investment, you wouldn't just jump on it. You would collect a lot of information before making the final decision.

You'll notice as you read the Bible, Jesus invited, but He rarely pushed. In fact, sometimes He made provocative statements that seemed designed to discourage people from following. Jesus thoroughly understood and was committed to the purpose for which He came. Though He was motivated by love, He was not swayed by acceptance or rejection.

Similarly, the apostle Paul said, “For Christ's love compels us... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:14, 20). If you want to ensure that you are fulfilling your God-given destiny, you need to make sure you are hanging out with Jesus and becoming like Him. Absorb His motivation and His purpose. You'll find that He's in the process of making you a “fisher of men.”  MIMBS 3

How would you define your God-given destiny? What is motivating you to pursue it?

Daily Reading: Exodus 4:1-9:35, Matthew 18:1-19:30, Psalm 22:19-24:10, Proverbs 5:15-6:5

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

January 23-29

What does it mean to align your life with Scripture and with Jesus?

- How would your family life demonstrate that alignment?
- How would your work life demonstrate that alignment?
- How would your community life demonstrate that alignment?



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)

Matthew 25 records a series of Jesus' stories describing God's kingdom. Today's passage begins the second story, featuring a man who decided to go on a trip. He entrusted three servants with specific amounts of his money. These servants represent believers—people who have entered into relationship with the master.

This traveler meted out his money in varying amounts, according to the *ability* of each servant. The word translated *ability* happens to be the Greek word *dunamis*. It literally means *power*. At Man in the Mirror Ministries, we've mentioned often that this Greek word gives us the English word *dynamite*. In this text, I believe the original wording implies that even our abilities are God-given. We don't deliver ourselves as babies, cut the umbilical cord, and then spend the rest of our lives pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. God is active at every juncture, forming our character and giving us the abilities to fulfill His purposes. As we enter into deeper and deeper relationship with Him, He develops us to the point that He can entrust us with those things that hold eternal value.  MIMBS 4

Describe one way God has taught you how things that hold eternal value may differ from things that hold temporal value.

Daily Reading: Exodus 10:1-12:13, Matthew 20:1-28, Psalm 25:1-15, Proverbs 6:6-11

Tuesday—January 31 • It's the Least I Could Do...

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)

When someone thanks us, we sometimes minimize our contribution with this reply: "It's the least I could do." Jesus described some servants who *really* did the least they could. Their master, preparing to be away for an extended period, entrusted them with varying amounts of money. Two servants invested their master's money and doubled the amounts.

That sounds like a big deal, but it's really not. In investing, we talk about the rule of 72. You divide the interest rate you're earning into 72 to find how soon your investment will double. So if someone gave you 5 grand, and you found an investment that could earn 7.2 percent, your investment would double in 10 years. These two men didn't do the first-century equivalent of creating Google, but they did the least they could to allow the investment to grow. The third man did even less. He maintained the original amount without adding to it. You could say he did less than the least he could do. He represents those who hang on to God's gifts, and they never invest them to grow God's kingdom.  MIMBS 4

This story challenges us to ask important questions: What gifts has God entrusted to you? How are you handling His investment?

Daily Reading: Exodus 12:14-13:16, Matthew 20:29-21:22, Psalm 25:16-22, Proverbs 6:12-15

After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more." 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 25:19-21)

Jesus told a story about a man who prepared for a long journey by entrusting three servants with varying amounts of money. Today's passage describes that man's response when he finally returned. He blessed the two servants who doubled their investments, saying He would honor their faithfulness by entrusting them with more things to manage. Then he invited them to share his happiness. That mirrors God's response to His followers who faithfully pursue His interests, investing the resources He gives so they grow His kingdom.

The great British writer C.S. Lewis indicated that, in this life, we don't know God's joy like we will someday. He described what we feel now as stabs of joy. He said that's like sampling God's hors d'oeuvres. A waiter gives you this one tiny bite, and then he's gone. Someday, God will invite us to enter into a new level of happiness. Instead of getting stabbed by joy, you could say we'll be slayed by joy, all around us, all the time, for all eternity.  MIMBS 4

What level of motivation do you receive from knowing someday God will honor your faithfulness by inviting you to share His joy?

Daily Reading: Exodus 13:17-15:18, Matthew 21:23-46, Psalm 26:1-12, Proverbs 6:16-19

Thursday—February 2 • Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant!

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more. 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 25:22-23)

Jesus told a parable about a man who authorized three servants to handle three different amounts of money in his absence. Today's passage gives a window into what happened when he finally returned. If you read this passage in context, you'll find that two servants made simple investments that doubled their amounts over a long period of time.

Jesus told each of them, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Notice, He didn't call these servants successful. The point of this parable is that God focuses on faithfulness rather than results. What God puts before some men leads to incredible worldly success. For other men, God puts tasks before them that seem to lead to poverty in the world's eyes. Consider, for instance, a man who serves as a substitute teacher for his career. The world may not consider him successful, but he might receive a "well done" from Jesus, because he invested his talents wisely in the next generation. God doesn't need us to be successful, but He does honor our faithful efforts to invest our lives in pursuing His purposes.  MIMBS 4

Describe someone you know who has been faithful in pursuing God's purposes rather than chasing after worldly wealth or prestige. What do you think motivates that person to persevere on that course?

Daily Reading: Exodus 15:19-17:7, Matthew 22:1-33, Psalm 27:1-6, Proverbs 6:20-26



GOD'S PLAN IS WORKING THANKS TO YOU!

It's working. Who would have ever believed that God would take a Bible study birthed in an Orlando bar and over the next 30 years impact over 35,000 churches and over 12,000,000 men.

Yes, you read that correctly...let us explain. For 30 years Man in the Mirror (MIM) has quietly and consistently impacted churches and men. Over 35,000 churches and over 12,000,000 men in fact. In 1986 Pat Morley literally started a Bible study in bar. Over the next few years, God placed on him a burden to put pen to paper and unpack what it means for a man to be a Disciple of Christ. In 1989, the book *Man In The Mirror* was released, and then in 1991 the ministry was founded.

Man In The Mirror started off primarily as a resource ministry, providing quality discipleship tools and seminars for men and churches at a time when few existed. In fact, in 2000 over 1,000,000 books were distributed through our Books By The Box Program. As helpful as these tools were, it became apparent that training churches and church leaders on how to effectively use these discipleship tools could yield an exponentially larger number of men moving from Cultural Christianity to Biblical Christianity.

In 2006, the *No Man Left Behind* book and model were developed and released. Suddenly Man In The Mirror was both a resource-providing ministry and a church-training ministry. In 2012, MIM added consulting ministry to our title as well, but developing a Field Team of trained experts to help churches develop a quality Ministry to Men. Today, almost 100 men in 33 states serve on our Field Team in either a full-time, part-time, or volunteer capacity.

So as exciting as the statistics are of now working with over 35,000 churches and over 12,000,000 men, the sad news is that it took MIM 30 years to accomplish this. With 350,000 churches in America, simple math tells us it would take 300 years to reach every church and every man.

But God has given us a bigger plan.

The statistics being reported by our Field Team are astounding. These men, who raise their own ministry budget, are now working with over 1,000 new churches. We know if a church adapts the No Man Left Behind Model they will see an increase of 84 percent more men in

discipleship and 48 percent more men in their church in just 2 1/2 short years. Churches that are engaging with our Field Team are seeing on average 15 new men in discipleship within their first year.

It's working.

We know if we can find more Field Team members, we can work with and train an exponentially higher number of churches, and ultimately see hundreds of thousands more men disciplined over the next few years.

Would you help us disciple the next 50,000 men?

In order to increase our Field team from 100 men to 500 men over the next 4 years, we need generous Christians like you to help fund the effort. Specifically, we need additional support for the back office at our headquarters in Orlando. It takes a staff of 15+/- people to keep the Field Team resourced and supported. The headquarters staff trains and resources the Field Team so that they may train and resource churches and church leaders.

There are three things you may do starting today.

First, pray. No kidding. We really need the prayer warriors reading this article to pray specifically for qualified men across America to rise to the challenge of joining our Field Team. Pray that God would lead us to the right men, and that He would lead them to us.

Second, give for the first time. Become a recurring partner with Man In The Mirror and help us see the next 50,000 men disciplined. We know, based on our Field Team budget needs, that through a process a man can be moved into discipleship for about \$100 per new disciple. Would you consider giving \$100 per month and see 12 new men disciplined per year? Jesus accomplished quite a bit with His 12! Or \$50 per month would help us disciple 6 new men, or \$25 per month would help us disciple 3. Would you become a recurring partner with us?

Third, if you are currently a recurring partner, would you prayerfully consider giving above and beyond to our 50,000 New Disciples Campaign? Your faithful giving to our annual budget has allowed our staff the privilege to work with churches and leaders for close to 30 years now. But this new campaign is beyond our annual budget. Would you consider giving a new annual gift to this campaign?

Please take just a moment and go to www.mimdonate.org. There, you may easily set up a recurring gift option or make a one-time annual gift.

Again, it's working. And it's working because of generous Believers like you.

Discipleship Changes Everything



Please accept our sincere gratitude for those who have supported Man in the Mirror year after year. For those considering a donation or recurring gift, thank you!

*Brett Clemmer Steve Hutton
President Director of Development*

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

When I was in business, I accepted the job description and the value system the world gave me. I thought my identity depended upon being successful, as the world defined it. That meant money, prestige and position. I thought my worth as a human being depended on achieving those three things. I assumed people would respond to my success more than my character. I responded to the cues I got from the world's wisdom as opposed to God's wisdom, thinking that if I wanted to be *somebody*, I really needed to be *successful*.

So, I became successful. I had integrity in my business dealings, and I guess [[that (?)]] amounted to entries in the positive column. But I invested a lot of time and effort defining myself by the world's values rather than God's. I did things to earn applause from others, so I could feel confident in my identity and self-worth. God's Word turns that type of value system upside down. Throughout Scripture we find that God doesn't call men to be successful. He entrusts the resources and mysteries of His kingdom to those who prove themselves faithful in pursuing Him and honoring His kingdom. God calls us to be faithful to Him and to His purposes, and to trust Him for the results.  MIMBS 4

Describe some lifestyle factors you can use to determine if you are accepting the world's value system and pursuing success, or if you are pursuing God's value system and pursuing faithfulness.

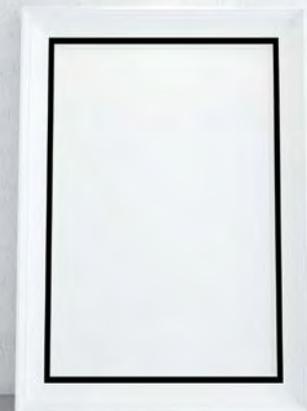
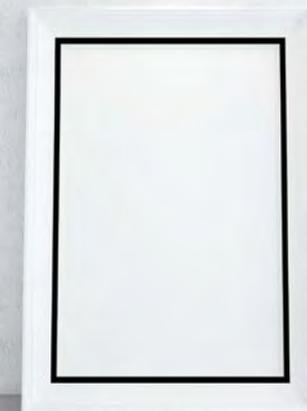
Daily Reading: Exodus 17:8-23:13, Matthew 22:34-24:28, Psalm 27:7-29:11, Proverbs 6:27-7:23

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

January 30-
February 5

On a white board or large piece of paper, list some people who have been faithful in pursuing God's purposes. Make a list of some people who have pursued worldly wealth or prestige.

- What gives you indication of their pursuits?
- How have some of those pursuits ended for historical figures?



**IF YOU COULD
HELP CHURCHES CREATE AN
ENVIRONMENT WHERE
THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRES
MEN TO ENGAGE IN
LIFE-ON-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP...
WOULD YOU?**

WE'LL SHOW YOU HOW.

MIMFIELDTEAM.ORG



Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. (Luke 16:10)

Have you ever earned an award for productivity in your work? Or did you receive a nice watch or a plaque or some other reward based on the number of years you worked for a specific company? Scripture indicates God offers different kinds of rewards. Matthew 25 describes three men who were given the responsibility to manage a small portion of their employer's estate while he took an extended trip. Two men managed to double the amount entrusted to them. The master responded, "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21, see also vv. 19-23).

Dwight L. Moody underscored the scriptural principle revealed in that response. He said the reward for service is more service. In God's plan, service is its own reward. If you successfully help a few people, God opens the doors for you to help more people. On the surface, it might not seem like much of a reward. But I can tell you from experience, in reality, service is not just a duty. It's also a reward.  MIMBS 4

God gives people opportunities to prove their faithfulness in small matters. When they demonstrate they can be trusted, He increases the responsibility. Have you found this to be true in your own life? In someone else's life? Describe the situation that best demonstrates the truth of this principle.

Daily Reading: Exodus 23:14-25:40, Matthew 24:29-51, Psalm 30:1-12, Proverbs 7:24-27

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

Every role that we fulfill is an open door to demonstrate how God is working within us, providing resources so we can be good and faithful. We can live out His purposes as husbands, fathers, friends, employees, etc.

I even found ways to do that at the gym. Suppose you wait to work out on a specific machine. As you sit down, some guy reams you out, thinking he was ahead of you in line. That happened to me, and I knew my response would invite scrutiny, because I had identified myself as a Believer. I did my best to respond kindly. I watched for that guy the following week, but he avoided me until we exited the building at the same time. I smiled and nodded, trying to cue him that I'm not holding a grudge.

I could respond differently than he expected, because I chose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He helps me live out principles I've gleaned from Scripture. As I study God's Word and do what it says, I invite God's grace into my relationships and my circumstances.  MIMBS 4

Think about what has happened in the last week. Describe one time when you allowed God's divine power to work through, helping you to be "good and faithful" in that circumstance. Describe another time when the opposite happened. What factors contributed to your reactions in those two?

Daily Reading: Exodus 28:1-43, Matthew 25:31-26:13, Psalm 31:9-18, Proverbs 8:12-13

Tuesday—February 7 • A Wicked and Lazy Servant

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest." (Matthew 25:27)

Matthew 25 includes a parable about a man who left town for a long time. In preparation, he entrusted three different sums of money to three different servants. The first two invested and doubled their amounts. This last one hid what he was given. Though he protected the initial amount, he added nothing. This third servant represents believers who have received resources from God. This could be time, talent or treasure. And instead of investing that resource for gain in God's kingdom, this believer hides the gift.

This story implies that God expects His followers to demonstrate their faithfulness by deploying the gifts He gives, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, according to the ability He already invested in us. This servant didn't do that. He responded in fear, choosing to do no harm, and believing that to be the same as doing good. The master turned the servant's assumptions upside down, calling him a "wicked, lazy servant." Clearly, God calls believers to faithful investment of His gifts, accepting the reality that not doing good actually equates to doing harm.  MIMBS 4

Today's passage implies that the third servant in this parable didn't invest the resources he was given. He was motivated by fear. List any fears that hinder you from investing your time, talent and treasures in expanding God's kingdom. Write a brief prayer, asking God to release you from those fears and motivate you to use the resources He gives to fulfill His purposes.

Daily Reading: Exodus 26:1-27:21, Matthew 25:1-30, Psalm 31:1-8, Proverbs 8:1-11

Thursday—February 9 • Where the Battle Rages

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

The great Christian reformer Martin Luther is often credited with this quote: "If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity.

Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point." Jesus gave us His top priority, just before He returned to heaven. He said, "Go and make disciples" (see Matthew 28:19).

If that's Jesus' priority, then you can bet that's where the resistance will come. Our nation is experiencing a collapse of biblical manhood, a collapse of our once dependable Judeo-Christian value system. I believe our current battle is in the area of discipleship. We can't be satisfied with *being* disciples. We must learn to *reproduce* ourselves so we are making disciples. Jesus didn't say, "Go and become disciples." He said, "Go and make disciples."  MIMBS 4

Are you becoming a disciple? What does your answer imply about your responsibility to reproduce yourself by making disciples?

Daily Reading: Exodus 29:1-30:10, Matthew 26:14-46, Psalm 31:19-24, Proverbs 8:14-26

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect... (1 Peter 3:15)

Jim Seibert, who administered our Bible study for 17 years, led his son Timmy to Jesus, two days before the boy died from AIDS. A man in our Bible Study had a son named Butch who also suffered from AIDS. So Butch's father asked Jim to visit his son. Jim walked into the hospital room and introduced himself. "I'd like to visit you on regular basis." Butch said okay, but "I don't want any Jesus stuff."

Jim visited each week, and Butch kept talking about how his train was coming into the station, referring to his own death. Finally, after eight weeks of building rapport, Butch asked, "Do you know anything about AIDS?" Jim explained that his son died from AIDS. The next week Butch asked Jim, "What do you think about gay men?" Jim assured him that God loves all people, "and He may love you best of all." Butch liked that answer, so Jim continued, "Your train is coming into the station pretty soon." He explained that Butch could choose eternal life by asking Jesus to forgive him and live inside him.

A few days later, the hospital notified Jim that Butch was dying. Jim went to visit, and Butch said, "Please tell me now about that Jesus stuff." Jim led him in a prayer of faith and repentance. An hour later, Butch died. When Jim started visiting Butch, he had no idea where his visits would lead. He simply represented God in a loving and truthful way, and as a result, he had the joy of bringing this young man into God's kingdom.  MIMBS 4

Today's verse says we should "always be prepared" to explain the reason for our hope. How are you preparing for opportunities like the one Jim Seibert had?

Daily Reading: Exodus 30:11-35:9, Matthew 26:47-27:31, Psalm 32:1-33:22, Proverbs 8:27-9:6

Follow my advice and save yourself, for you have placed yourself at your friend's mercy. Now swallow your pride; go and beg to have your name erased. (Proverbs 6:3 NLT)

C. S. Lewis is an author whose work has spanned generations. He had a great way with words and he proved to be an authority on the nature of man and our relationship with God. Lewis hit the nail on the head on the subject of pride when he said, "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man."

We have all had those moments when we have thought, *At least I'm better than that guy or I'm glad to have a better car than that or thankfully my marriage isn't that bad.* It is human nature to want to be better than the next guy. But that aspect of human nature keeps us caught up in our own accomplishments. When we believe we have succeeded on our own or our lives are better off than others or we have attained some spiritual level that others have not, the sin of pride separates us from God.

Pride can be an overt, outward sin or a subtle, quiet sin. But no matter its volume, sin always keeps us from God.  MIMBS 5

Have you faced the issue of pride in your life? In what areas? What has God taught you in those areas?

Daily Reading: Exodus 35:10-36:38, Matthew 27:32-66, Psalm 34:1-10, Proverbs 9:7-8

Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2 NLT)

One day I was kidding around with one of my colleagues who happens to be about 20 years my junior. I suggested that we have an arm wrestling match. He said, "Okay. You are left-handed; do you want to go left or right?" I thought I was better or stronger than him and chose to wrestle right-handed. In a quick, but titanic struggle, he won. We switched to left hands and I claimed the quick victory. The truth is I really wanted to win that contest. I wanted to win so badly that I actually injured my shoulder.

Why would someone choose to injure themselves over an arm wrestling championship? What makes a 55-year-old man take on a 35-year-old man in a silly act of power or strength?

It was simply an act of pride. Pride makes us act out to prove that we are not aging, we are not weak, or we are not less than something or someone. God reminds us that He came for the poor, the weak and those that truly need Him. Pride stands in the way of letting God truly be God in our lives.  MIMBS 5

Have you ever acted out and later realized that the true motivation was pride? How does pride limit God's work in our lives?

Daily Reading: Exodus 37:1-38:31, Matthew 28:1-20, Psalm 34:11-22, Proverbs 9:9-10

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



February 6-12

Ask each man to give a definition of the word "faithful."

- What does it mean to be a faithful husband or dad?
- What does it mean to be a faithful friend?
- What does it mean to be a faithful servant of God?

First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.
(Proverbs 16:18 THE MESSAGE)

The president of a company usually gets to that position for good reason. He's made good decisions, he is a leader, he has vision and he gets things done. Those are great characteristics. Countries, organizations and companies need those kinds of leaders.

How easily those characteristics can turn or shift into traps of pride. We've all seen how great athletes, good pastors or high-powered executives start believing their own hype. They don't want to be told they're wrong, that there may be a better way or they are difficult to live with. We regularly read in the news that many have lost marriages, scammed their company or lived a secret life. Their belief that they knew best or were better than others led to destruction.

God wants to use all of our characteristics for His glory. That's what we were all created for. Don't let your puffed up thoughts of yourself stand in the way of being used in great and mighty ways by Him.  MIMBS 5

When you heard of the fall of a famous leader, athlete, or pastor, what was your reaction? How can you pray for those who have had a public fall?

Daily Reading: Exodus 39:1–40:38, Mark 1:1–28, Psalm 35:1–16, Proverbs 9:11–12

Thursday—February 16 • Reluctant Leaders

Moses answered God, "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11 THE MESSAGE)

When Moses was called to lead the people of Israel, he wasn't keen on the idea. He offered up some legitimate reasons why it would be hard for him to be their leader. He was reluctant to see himself as the leader of God's chosen people. Moses was a Hebrew slave, he stuttered, and he had murdered a man. God must have made a mistake. There must have been someone better for the job. Surely he was not good enough.

Some might say that Moses had a lack of pride or self-esteem. He offered some good excuses. He did not have a great leadership resume. He could have let his belief in his own incompetence keep him from the challenge. He could have paralyzed himself by thinking he was inadequate. Instead, he chose to trust that God would enable him to lead. Out of obedience, Moses took on the momentous occupation of leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land.

Pride, or the lack of it, was the root of his hesitancy. Whether we think we're too good or not good enough, God can't use us until we're willing to see how He can work through us.  MIMBS 5

Has God called you to do something that you've been reluctant to do? How does Moses' story help you in that endeavor?

Daily Reading: Leviticus 1:1–3:17, Mark 1:29–2:12, Psalm 35:17–28, Proverbs 9:13–18

For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. (1 John 2:16 NLT)

Recently a television news channel in Denver merged with another company and the newscasters had to "re-interview" for their jobs. Most described the process as humiliating. The lead anchor, Ernie Bjorkman, had been a respected member of the community for over 25 years. He had a fulfilling television career, made a six-figure income, attended all the best social events and enjoyed a wonderful lifestyle.

As he aged, Bjorkman knew that an end to his journalism career was inevitable. So, instead of waiting for the boom to be lowered he had begun to reinvent himself three years earlier. He started thinking of other jobs he'd like to pursue. As an animal lover, Bjorkman started veterinarian technician classes. He looked forward to a new job and new challenges. He would trade his suit and tie for a lab coat and six figures for a \$35,000 annual income.

Bjorkman could have "re-interviewed" or gone to a smaller town with a smaller TV market or he could have become angry and bitter. He did none of those things. He saw what was coming, became proactive and made the best choices for himself. So, why all the attention?

He displayed a genuine enthusiasm for the next step and an authentic appreciation for his journalism career. His pride wasn't a hurdle and he gave us all a great lesson. We all have choices to make and sometimes those choices require us to humble ourselves, step outside our comfort zone and embrace something new.  MIMBS 5

Discuss "pride" with some guys this week. How has pride influenced your lives? How do you need to pray for each other and the issue of pride?

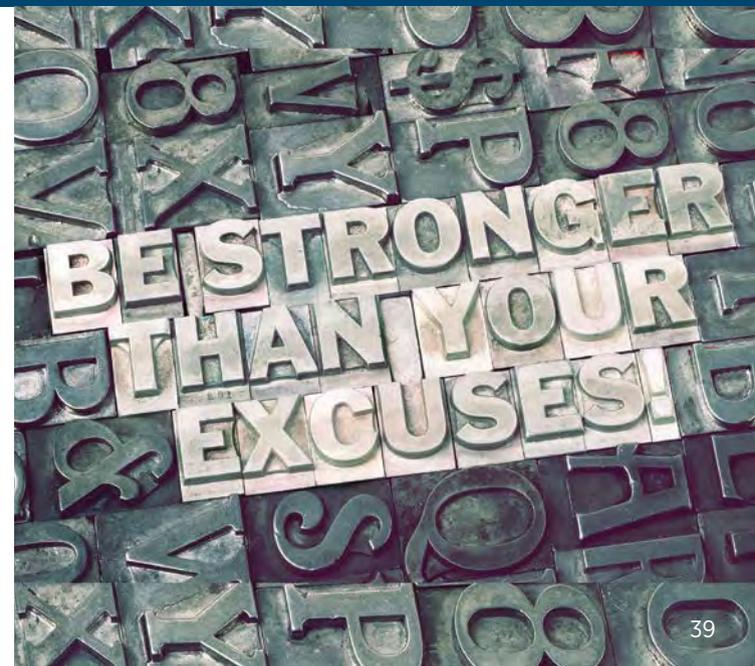
Daily Reading: Leviticus 4:1–9:6, Mark 2:13–4:25, Psalm 36:1–37:29, Proverbs 10:1–5

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

February 13–19

Why was Moses reluctant to lead the people of Israel?

- What excuses did Moses try to use?
- What excuses have you used to resist leadership?
- How did it work out for Moses?



When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.” So he got up and went to his father. (Luke 15:17-20a)

When I was growing up, I had trouble believing my father really cared about me. Soon after finishing 10th grade, I ran away and found a place in an old boarding house in downtown Orlando. I got a grueling job scraping dried cement off metal scaffolding. I ate grilled cheese sandwiches every night at the bowling alley across the street. After about two weeks, a friend arrived with two 6-packs of beer, and we drank our way through them before he threw up all over my rug. The next morning my head throbbed. My bleary eyes scanned the cans strewn across my floor. I ached to return home, but I didn’t think I could.

Later that morning, a knock rattled my door. I opened it and saw my dad standing there. He said, “Your mother and I love you very much, and we were wondering if you’d be willing to come back home.” The words were barely out of his mouth before I threw all my worldly possessions into a paper bag, and we were out of there! Like the prodigal son, I “came to my senses.”  MIMBS 6

Describe a situation in your own life when you “came to your senses.” (If you’re not familiar with the story of the prodigal son, you can read the whole thing starting at Luke 15:11.)

Daily Reading: Leviticus 9:7-10:20, Mark 4:26-5:20, Psalm 37:30-40, Proverbs 10:6-7

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Luke 15 records three stories Jesus told about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Each story reflects God’s willingness to go to extensive lengths to bring people into relationship with Him. The story of the lost son describes a young man who demanded his inheritance and then left home.

After experiencing much hardship, that young man returned home with a different spirit. He came back hoping simply to serve in his father’s house. The boy repented, which means he changed his mind and altered the direction of his life. But the father didn’t even wait for this young man to make the journey all the way home. When the father saw his estranged son coming, he ran to meet the boy, embracing the son even before he confessed his wrongdoings.

The father’s love didn’t grow or shrink based on the son’s repentance. But the son’s repentance unlocked his ability to receive and accept the father’s love. Faith and repentance are the foundation of a powerfully transformed life, because they “[lead] to salvation and [leave] no regret.”  MIMBS 6

If repentance won’t make God love you more than He already does, then why is it important to repent? What is one area where you need to change your mind and alter the direction of your life? Share your thoughts with your group.

Daily Reading: Leviticus 13:1-59, Mark 6:1-29, Psalm 39:1-13, Proverbs 10:10

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20-24)

After decades of working with men, I believe that most of us struggle to really believe that our Father God cares about us. In Luke 15, Jesus tells a story about a young man who had a squabble with his father, and then left home. He ended up in a miserable situation before he finally “came to his senses” and headed home with the intention of begging to be included among his father’s servants. But as you’ll see in today’s chosen passage, the father was filled with compassion for his son, and he ran and welcomed him home. This happened before the son ever said a single word that he had planned.

Jesus told this story to describe how God loves us. Before you and I say a thing, God is filled with love and compassion for us, simply because we are His sons. He created us. He knows everything about us. And still He loves us unconditionally, and His heart is filled with welcome when we come to Him.  MIMBS 6

How does it make you feel to know that God’s love is unconditional? Do you really believe it? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: Leviticus 11:1-12:8, Mark 5:21-43, Psalm 38:1-22, Proverbs 10:8-9

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:1-3)

I read about a young man on the Florida coast who graduated from high school, and within eight weeks he got addicted to cocaine. He stole a rifle and got arrested. Because of a quirk in Florida law, the young man received a mandatory 10-year sentence, because he sold the rifle and it could not be recovered. That boy’s father spent the next year, and \$50,000, trying to rescue his son.

Finally he made a desperate decision. Entering the drug world, he bought information. Somehow he found the drug dealer to whom his son had sold the rifle, and he bought it back. Then he got a mitigation hearing for the boy. He explained how much he loved his son. He described how he retrieved the rifle and pleaded for mercy. Because of the father’s impassioned plea, the judge released the boy for time served.

That true story reflects the love that God has for each of His children. Because you are His son, God will go to great lengths to show you how much He loves you.  MIMBS 6

What is one way God has gone to great lengths to show you that He loves you?

Daily Reading: Leviticus 14:1-57, Mark 6:30-56, Psalm 40:1-10, Proverbs 10:11-12

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Even if we know intellectually that God loves us, most of us struggle from time to time to really accept that truth in our hearts. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the consistency of God's unconditional love for us.

How can we know for sure that God really cares for us as individuals? Think about it this way: take a bill out of your wallet and wad it up into a tight ball. Then spread it out again. It will look a little "worse for the wear," but it's just as valuable as it was before you mangled it. Obviously, you don't want to throw it away. You'll put it right back in your wallet, because the condition of the bill does not alter its value.

That illustration reflects the truth of the gospel. You can't do anything bad enough to make God stop loving you. He's willing to forgive you. No matter how tattered you look to outsiders, your value to God remains unchanged. You have the same value to God as the day you were conceived in your mother's womb. This is the gospel of Jesus.

If you want to receive the assurance that God loves and values you, I invite you to pray with me:

God, I want to believe this, but I can't believe without your help. I can't repent or turn from my wrong ways without Your help. I'm asking You to help me repent. I'm sorry that I have not believed all of these signs You've given that You really do care about me. I receive it by faith. I trust that, because I am Your son, You really do love me. You care about me personally. I take it into my heart. Amen. MIMBS 6

In today's scripture, Paul wrote that he was "convinced" of God's love. Are you convinced? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Leviticus 15:1–20:21, Mark 7:1–8:38, Psalm 40:11–42:11, Proverbs 10:13–17

But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 1:7–8)

God continuously seeks to engage His children in accomplishing the larger purposes of His Kingdom. You don't have to wonder if God has a calling for your life. God spoke specifically to Jeremiah, but He can and does reveal His plan in lots of creative ways.

I remember one young single man who was associated with our ministry. His sister's family lived in New England, and his brother-in-law's health was failing. My young associate was questioning whether he should move northward to help his sister. I was teaching from New Testament passages about the broad way and the narrow way. I kept saying, "Leave the broad way!" About the fifth time I said it, this young man connected that statement to his address—he lived on a street called Broadway. So he moved to New England. God has various ways of revealing His plan, if we are willing to pay attention to His communication. MIMBS 7

Has God revealed to you a general or specific calling for your life? If He has, what is it? If He hasn't, what measures are you taking to ensure that you are paying attention to His communication?

Daily Reading: Leviticus 20:22–22:16, Mark 9:1–29, Psalm 43:1–5, Proverbs 10:18

Tuesday —February 28 • The Emotions of Serving God

Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. (Jeremiah 20:8)

Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet." He loved his country and his people, and he was grieved by their disrespect for God and for God's prophet. He also was very honest with God when he became angry because he was mistreated. He explained that God's Word was shut up like a fire in his bones, and he simply could not suppress God's message, regardless of how people responded (see Jeremiah 20:9-10).

Whatever God has called you to accomplish, please know the process can be an emotional roller coaster, particularly if you follow the world's pattern of gauging your progress by whether or not you achieve certain goals. Obviously, a prophet would be tempted to gauge his success in terms of the number of people who applied his message. Jeremiah didn't have that luxury, because his target audience ridiculed him. In order to continue pursuing God's calling, Jeremiah had to trust that God requires faithfulness rather than results. MIMBS 7

In the area where you believe God is calling you to serve His Kingdom, how do you measure your success—in terms of obedience, or in terms of results? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Leviticus 22:17–23:44, Mark 9:30–10:12, Psalm 44:1–8, Proverbs 10:19

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

Unconditional Love.



February 20–26

What is the difference between conditional and unconditional love?

- How have you experienced conditional love? What did that experience teach you about that relationship?
- How have you experienced unconditional love? What did that experience teach you about that relationship?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1–2a)

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, and many others whom Scripture describes as great, were called to ministries that made them look disappointing in human terms. God may call any one of us to a ministry that, for years and even decades, appears to be a failure.

Henry Nouwen, a Dutch-born Catholic priest who struggled with homosexual feelings, was celibate. He was a brilliant writer, producing 40 books on the topic of spirituality. When he was 56, at the height of his career, he felt God was calling him to move to a Canadian retreat center called Daybreak. This brilliant man basically spent the rest of his life caring for one severely handicapped man, because that was what he felt God desired. Nouwen’s books are very well respected. But interestingly enough, he probably is equally well known for his willingness to assume the role of a servant to one man with profound developmental disabilities. Clearly, Nouwen ran with perseverance the race that God marked out for him, even when it defied worldly definitions of status and achievement.  MIMBS 7

Describe someone you know who has responded to a call from God that did not seem to make sense, according to human wisdom. What prompted that person to choose God’s plan, and what energized him or her to persevere?

Daily Reading: Leviticus 24:1–25:46, Mark 10:13–31, Psalm 44:9–26, Proverbs 10:20–21

But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. (1 Samuel 12:24)

I heard a story about a farmer who captured a wild stallion and brought it back to his farm, enclosing it in a corral. A neighbor leaned over the fence and said, “That’s good news, about how you found that wild stallion!” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news—who knows?”

The farmer’s son began trying to train that wild stallion, and the horse threw the rider in such a way that the boy broke his leg. The neighbor leaned over the fence and said, “That sure is bad news, about your son breaking his leg!” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news—who knows?”

War broke out, and all the young men in that area except the farmer’s son were drafted to go off to a foreign war. Obviously, he could not go, because of his broken leg. The neighbor leaned across the fence and said, “That sure is good news about how your son didn’t have to go to war and risk his life!” The farmer replied, “Good news, bad news—who knows?”

That’s a pretty clear picture of how real life goes. Sometimes we endure unexpected situations, and we don’t necessarily have the wisdom to discern whether they are good news or bad news. We have to entrust those things to God’s wisdom, pushing forward in our calling with the firm assurance that His requirement is not about results. It’s about trusting Him and serving Him faithfully, with all our hearts.  MIMBS 7

Describe a situation in your life that you thought was bad news, but it ended up being good news.

Daily Reading: Leviticus 27:14–Numbers 5:31, Mark 11:1–12:37, Psalm 46:1–48:14, Proverbs 10:23–10:26

Thursday—March 2 • “A Responsible Round”

“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. (Jeremiah 1:17)

My father received a purple heart for his service as a scout in an artillery battalion. He and his buddies had a saying: “A responsible round does not go too short or too far.” An artillery round that falls short of its target has potential to kill or wound your buddies through “friendly fire.” A round that travels beyond its target has potential to kill or wound civilians rather than being effective against enemy troops.

Taking that saying into the realm of God’s calling, I think we can agree that fear can make us fall short of full obedience, and other emotions can push us to do more than God requires. A man who commits his heart to fully obey God’s plan has a built-in protection against falling short of the target, and also from pushing too far. When we wholeheartedly commit to God’s calling, we can trust His plan and His protection.  MIMBS 7

Given what you know of your specific calling, how could fear and intimidation cause you to fall short of God’s intended target? How could other emotions cause you to push beyond God’s intention? Share your thoughts with another man.

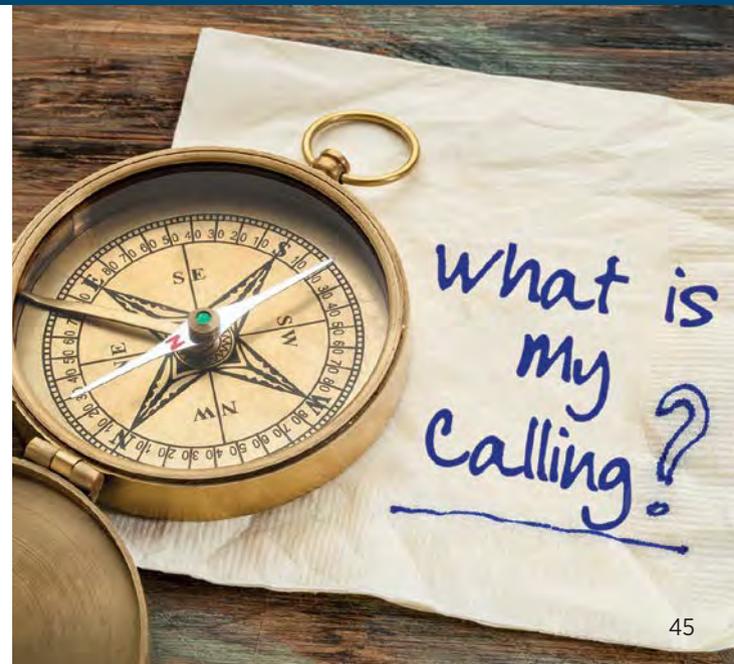
Daily Reading: Leviticus 25:47–27:13, Mark 10:32–52, Psalm 45:1–17, Proverbs 10:22

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

February 27–March 5

Discuss with the group if the men believe they have specific callings from God.

- If so, how are you pursuing that calling?
- If not, have you asked God to reveal that to you?



Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3-5)

Chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel summarize Jesus' final instructions to His disciples, in the last hours before His arrest. He described the plan by which they could actually make a difference in the world. Imagine how the disciples felt. Their world was closing in on them. Their culture hated their leader to the point that He was "wanted" by the authorities. The cultural elite wanted to kill Him. So Jesus gathered His disciples in an upper room in a safe house. In that setting, He began laying out his plan for His disciples to take back the world. You could say His goal was total "global conquest," and His plan required humble service.

Jesus modeled that initially by washing His disciples' feet. People wore sandals, so it was a normal cultural custom to offer your guests foot washing. It was a type of hospitality, usually performed by a servant. Jesus did menial work, modeling a new formula for "global conquest." The starting point would be sacrificial loving service, done in humility to one another.  MIMBS 8

How does humble loving service fly in the face of our culture's view of power and conquest?

Daily Reading: Numbers 6:1-7:89, Mark 12:38-13:13, Psalm 49:1-20, Proverbs 10:27-28

Tuesday—March 7 • Zeal without Knowledge

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean." (John 13:6-10)

In the final hours before His arrest, Jesus gathered His disciples and gave them final instructions regarding His plan to grow His kingdom throughout the world. This total global conquest would not happen in the way that worldly kings use power and authority to force others to obey. Rather, it would come through love and service.

Jesus performed the task of a servant, washing His disciples' feet, and thus modeling the attitude of humility that would accompany the spread of the gospel. When he reached Peter, this disciple overreacted and swung to extremes. "Don't wash my feet... Wash all of me!" What was the problem? The disciple's enthusiasm grew as he had seen Jesus perform miracles of raising the dead and healing the sick. Now Peter's zeal exceeded his knowledge. Jesus said, "Later you will understand." Then He carefully laid out His expectations.

Anyone who truly wants to follow Jesus will accept the call to humble and sacrificial service. This is the backbone of His plan to spread God's kingdom to every part of the world.  MIMBS 8

Why is it important to have knowledge that matches your zeal, and to have zeal that matches your knowledge?

Daily Reading: Numbers 8:1-9:23, Mark 13:14-37, Psalm 50:1-23, Proverbs 10:29-30

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:12-17)

Jesus took on the task traditionally given to a servant, and He washed His disciples' feet. Then He challenged them to follow His example. So what does that look like today? Many religious groups do ceremonial foot washing, and that's all right. But I believe Jesus was getting at something much more profound.

I believe He called His followers to an attitude that should be part of the fabric of their lives. He intended His actions to be a metaphor for sacrifice, love, service, and humility. That can take various forms in our contemporary culture.

For instance, we live on a lake, and sometimes a fibrous algae blankets the shore. Then I go down with a rake and clean the area in front of my house. One day I noticed my neighbor's lake area hadn't been cleaned yet. My back hurt, and I could think of plenty of reasons not to continue. But I also saw an opportunity to serve my neighbors, so I scraped the algae from their property as well. In the process, I believe I followed Jesus' example.  MIMBS 8

Describe one way that someone has served you in the last week.

Describe one way you've served someone else.

Daily Reading: Numbers 10:1-11:23, Mark 14:1-21, Psalm 51:1-19, Proverbs 10:31-32

Thursday—March 9 • Pecking Order

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

The world has a "pecking order." I saw this in action when I was in high school. I raised chickens in an effort to make money. I had Rhode Island Reds, and I was going to sell the brown eggs, because they were unique back then. So I built a chicken coup, and I raised all these chickens. Sure enough, inside the coup there was a pecking order.

The head rooster was number one, and he could peck on anyone. The number two chicken could peck on any chicken except the number one chicken. It went on like that until the last chicken. Everybody could peck on him! That's not just the way of chickens. It's also the way of the world. Scripture indicates the way of the gospel is devoid of pecking orders. Jesus didn't just invert social relationships, but instead, He leveled them. Our commitment to humble service should become part of our Christian DNA, affecting every decision and every relationship.  MIMBS 8

What do relationships look like when there is no pecking order?

Daily Reading: Numbers 11:24-13:33, Mark 14:22-52, Psalm 52:1-9, Proverbs 11:1-3

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Todd Beamer was in a small group studying *The Seven Seasons for the Man in the Mirror*. On September 11, 2001, Todd boarded a routine flight from Newark to San Francisco. Passengers soon learned that three hijackers had taken control of the plane. Cell phone calls confirmed the World Trade Center had been attacked. Todd sprang into action, leading a small band who decided to resist the terrorists. He contacted an operator, and with the FBI listening in, he unveiled their plan. They would storm the cockpit and fly the plane into the ground rather than allow it to strike a target in Washington D.C. Todd led about a dozen passengers who wrestled for control of the plane. In a rural Pennsylvania field, 20 minutes from Washington D.C., they forced this plane into the ground at 580 miles per hour.

Recent polls indicate that about two-thirds of Americans believe our nation is headed in the wrong direction. You might agree with them, believing our culture has been hijacked. Maybe you'd like to be a Todd Beamer for our culture, but you feel impotent. What could one person do? Jesus said our daily life choices reveal God's light to the world around us. By our actions, we can impact a hijacked culture.  MIMBS 8

Name one lifestyle choice you've made in the past week that has potential to make an impact on those around you. Name one decision you're still considering. Will it alter your decision if you recognize an opportunity to be a "Todd Beamer for our culture"? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Numbers 14:1-18:32, Mark 14:53-16:20, Psalm 53:1-55:23, Proverbs 11:4-7

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4)

Several years ago, a neighborhood teenager adopted our family. Coming from a broken home, he often ate dinner with us. Now in his mid-twenties, he has hit this existential moment of angst. After living with a woman for several years, he sees no future in that relationship. He has no money to get his own place or buy a car. He didn't pursue education.

Now when he visits me, he's anxiously trying to figure out how to change his life. He subscribed to a cultural norm telling him he could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. "I don't like studying, so why should I finish school?" Or, "It's too much trouble to work hard and convince my bosses that I'm trustworthy and can handle more responsibility." The beginning of James 4 presents this same mentality, describing how our unredeemed desires create a battle within us. Now in his young adulthood, this man has discovered the same thing James spelled out: living according to fleshly desires doesn't bring happiness, but leads instead to misery.  MIMBS 9

Carefully read today's scripture and list the results James indicates will come from pursuing your own unredeemed desires. Where have you seen those kinds of outcomes in your own life?

Daily Reading: Numbers 19:1-20:29, Luke 1:1-25, Psalm 56:1-13, Proverbs 11:8

Tuesday—March 14 • What Are You Submitting To?

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. . . . Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-8, 10)

Many men mistake freedom as the opportunity to do whatever they want. In contrast, James says we should submit to God. So the big question is, what are you submitting to? That question can seem nebulous, so let's ask some specifics that may narrow your answer:

- What causes you to rearrange your schedule?
- What do you sacrifice for?
- What are you planning ahead for?
- If you have plenty of time and money, do you still pray about your activities? Or do you just do things because you want to?

Honest answers will tend to show what you submit to. Classic cars, work, hunting, college football, your family, the Internet, making money . . . men submit to these types of desires. The activities may not be "sinful," but apart from personal scrutiny, they can dominate our lives. When we find we're in the default mode of mindlessly pursuing our own desires, we may also find we are in rebellion against Jesus Christ. The entirety of Scripture shows the road to true satisfaction rests on moment-by-moment submission to Jesus' authority.  MIMBS 9

Take some time to ask yourself the four questions listed in this devotional. What do your answers reveal about who or what you submit to?

Daily Reading: Numbers 21:1-22:20, Luke 1:26-56, Psalm 57:1-11, Proverbs 11:9-11

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



March 6-12

What does it mean to be a humble servant?

- Have you been served with that attitude in the last week?
- Have you served someone with that attitude in the last week?

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals the incredible value God places on His church. God grants us the privilege of fellowshiping with other believers in His household. Sadly, statistics indicate that many of us marginalize our local churches so that a person who attends two or three Sundays per month is considered a committed member.

Today’s Scripture passage identifies the church as “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” That’s pretty important to the development of our faith. Frankly, I believe our commitment to the church says a lot about whether we subscribe primarily to God’s purposes or our own. Imagine if people gave that same level of commitment to their jobs. What if they decided to work only on the days that it was convenient? The company would go out of business pretty quickly. Yet that’s how many men, even Christian men, relate to their local churches. “If I get a better offer, or something else is going on, I’ll do that instead.” That’s a clear indication of people living under their own authority, rather than submitting to Jesus.  MIMBS 9

How consistent is your church attendance? How involved are you in helping your church fulfill its purpose? What factors contribute to your decisions regarding your commitment to your church?

Daily Reading: Numbers 22:21–23:30, Luke 1:57–80, Psalm 58:1–11, Proverbs 11:12–13

Thursday—March 16 • Accountability

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Many men are intensely private, ignoring the fact that isolation brings danger. I saw that clearly with a young man who texted me, because he had no one to talk to. When we met, he opened up about a relationship situation. Frankly, the necessary course of action was obvious. But he couldn’t see it, because he had nobody asking, “What in the world are you doing?”

He had insulated himself, not giving anyone access to really tell him the truth. It’s pretty simple to determine if you have anyone in your life who can speak the truth to you, to protect you from your own blind spots.

Leaf back through your mental calendar for the last year. If no one has challenged you on something significant in your life, my guess is that you aren’t really close to anyone who would hold you accountable to make godly life choices. We all need to find some men that we allow to speak into the most important areas, to help us continue in a lifestyle that demonstrates submission to Jesus Christ.  MIMBS 9

In the last year, has anyone challenged you on something significant in your life? What does your answer reveal about the level of accountability you’ve allowed in your life?

Daily Reading: Numbers 24:1–25:18, Luke 2:1–35, Psalm 59:1–17, Proverbs 11:14

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

One of my college friends had a little suction cup that he would lick and stick on different things. He stuck it on his chest, and after about twenty seconds, he had this round mark. We were all laughing at him when this football player came in. We said, “We’re having a contest. We’re sticking this to our foreheads to see who can keep it there the longest.” This gregarious newcomer accepted the challenge. He slapped that suction cup on his forehead, and we started timing. Two minutes ticked by. Finally, he said, “I don’t think this thing is coming off.” Everyone died laughing! When he removed it, he had a huge purple mark in the middle of his forehead.

When we submit to our own desires, or to the world, it’s like sticking a suction cup on our foreheads. We may not see the resulting mark, but people around us do. They can distinguish between a man who is radically submitted to Christ, versus a man who loves Jesus but is actually submitted to something else. To become like Christ, we have to live moment by moment under Jesus’ authority. Certainly, we can enjoy activities like golf or hunting or college football or gardening or families. But we don’t let them rule us. Every person submits to something. Philippians 2 says every knee will bow before Jesus. Will you do that now, or will you wait till later?  MIMBS 9

List some of your favorite activities. How can you discern whether you are living in submission to them or to Jesus?

Daily Reading: Numbers 26:1–29:40, Luke 2:36–3:38, Psalm 60:1–62:12, Proverbs 11:15–19

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

March 13–19

Do you have people in your life who hold you accountable when it comes to spiritual things?

- If so, how have those relationships impacted your spiritual growth?
- If not, what keeps you from entering into those kinds of accountable relationships?



And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Paul makes it clear that all of history hinges on one question—did Jesus Christ actually rise from the dead? Despite all the modern theories to the contrary, the New Testament writers knew that Christianity was a useless religion if Christ was not raised.

By being raised from the dead, Christ proved His power over sin’s ultimate curse: “You shall surely die” (see Genesis 3:2). He demonstrated that He has the power to “[bring] many sons... to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Whatever your sin, suffering, or shame, Christ’s resurrection power is available when you trust in Him by faith.

As we prepare for Easter season, remember that we worship a God who is alive, active, and at work in the world. His Holy Spirit speaks powerfully to the hearts and minds of men. His gospel of grace changes lives. His kingdom is breaking into this world.

Our God is Lord of all, even death.  MIMBS 10

Take a few moments to write down three reasons why Easter is important to you. If you’re married or a dad, make sure to make this coming Easter as meaningful as possible for your family, perhaps by sharing your thoughts. Share these ideas with some other men as well.

Daily Reading: Numbers 30:1–31:54, Luke 4:1–30, Psalm 63:1–11, Proverbs 11:20–21

Tuesday—March 21 Behavior or Belief?

As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart. (Proverbs 27:19)

In the 1500’s, a movement began in the Catholic Church known as the Reformation. There are three great figures in the Reformation—John Calvin, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. All were great leaders, but Zwingli focused part of his energy on reforming morals—how people behaved. It seems that Calvin and Luther were more interested in starting with changing what people believed. History tells us that Luther’s theological reformation is what really captured the world.

Those differences still exist in theological circles today. Should we be attacking the behavior problems of people or should we be looking at what people believe?

Both are important, but Scripture repeatedly reminds us of the significance God places on the heart. Romans 10:10 says, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” And Acts 15:8: “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.”  MIMBS 10

Why do you think Luther’s focus on reforming people’s beliefs had a greater impact than Zwingli’s focus on morality? Is your faith community more focused on heart issues or behavior issues? What about in your own life?

Daily Reading: Numbers 32:1–33:39, Luke 4:31–5:11, Psalm 64:1–10, Proverbs 11:22

If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work. (2 Timothy 2:21 NLT)

When our daughter was very young, we prayed for her every day. We prayed for protection, health, friends, and for her to love God. We also prayed for the young man that she would one day marry. It was impossible to know who that young man would be, what he would look like or what he would do for a living. Truthfully, those things didn’t matter to me. The one thing I prayed for was that our daughter would marry a man with a clean or pure heart.

What does it mean to have a clean heart? What does that look like? A well-groomed, educated man may or may not have a clean heart. A king or a president may have an impure heart. A garbage man, a fisherman or tax collector may have a pure heart.

Why would I pray that prayer? She’s my daughter, that’s why we prayed that way. It wasn’t her husband’s wealth or earthly status that concerned me—it was, and is, his standing with God.  MIMBS 10

What does a pure heart or clean heart mean to you? In what ways is your heart clean? In what ways is it unclean?

Daily Reading: Numbers 33:40–35:34, Luke 5:12–28, Psalm 65:1–13, Proverbs 11:23

Thursday- March 23 • Heart-to-Heart

But God told Samuel, “Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 THE MESSAGE)

When Israel needed a new king, Samuel looked at all of Jesse’s sons for the successor to Saul. God reminded Samuel not to concentrate on what the king would look like. Appearances can be deceiving. A strong, rugged-looking man might have looked like a great king, but that’s not the king God needed. God could see the heart of the man who would rule His people. The man God chose to be the king of Israel was David, “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

Was David perfect or without sin? We know that David sinned and had great failures in his life. He committed adultery and murder. But in Psalm 16:2 we see that David was well-aware of his need for God when he wrote, “I say to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.’”

God isn’t looking for perfect people. He is looking for people who constantly recognize their need for Him.  MIMBS 10

Have you ever known someone who looked like they had it all together, but their life ended up being a big mess? Could you see it coming? Why?

Daily Reading: Numbers 36:1–Deuteronomy 1:46, Luke 5:29–6:11, Psalm 66:1–20, Proverbs 11:24–26

Leaders who know their business and care, keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and cheap. For who among us can be trusted to be always diligent and honest? (Proverbs 20:8-9 THE MESSAGE)

I've taught a men's Bible study in Orlando for 25 years. We have seen men's lives changed as they have turned their hearts over to God. We've prayed with many through sickness, financial crisis, loss of a spouse, wayward children and much more.

At the same time, some of our guys have been to jail. Others have cheated on their business partner or left their wives. How do you study and listen to God's Word and then participate in sin?

Richard Baxter, author of *The Reformed Pastor*, says there are four groups of Christians:

- Those who are young and weak—they may have been Christians for a long time, but they have not grown and their faith is weak.
- Those who need special help because they labor under some particular corruption or addiction which makes them a trouble to others and a burden to themselves.
- Those who demand help because they have fallen into some scandalous sin and/or have lost their former love for God.
- Those who are strong and need our assistance to preserve the grace they have, to make further progress and to improve their strength in the service of Christ.

Each of those groups has a heart issue. Everyone needs to allow God to continually search his heart and ask Him to meet those needs. We can study and learn Scripture, but unless we allow God to have full access to our heart, we are in danger.  MIMBS 10

Which group of Christians are you in today? Is there a part of your life or a piece of your heart that you've held back from God? Are you willing to let Him search your whole heart today?

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 2:1-6:25, Luke 6:12-7:35, Psalm 67:1-68:35, Proverbs 11:27-31

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29)

Most men echo the question asked of Jesus in today's scripture. "What must I do to achieve what God requires?" We want to fix things, to make things happen, to produce and create. We want to feel we are contributing, making things better, pulling ourselves "up by our bootstraps." Yet Jesus responded that believing is the primary "work" expected from His followers.

Jesus demonstrated that the gospel is so much bigger than just what we do. It starts with our deepest need, which is to love and worship God. He knows that work, obedience, lifestyle, and Christ-likeness come on the other side of belief and worship. You simply cannot short-circuit the process. You cannot "willpower your way" to living like Christ. It only comes through true worship. The apostle John intentionally stressed this, for he used the word "believe" more than a hundred times in his gospel. In fact, as he concluded his writing, he explained his purpose: that people would believe, and in believing they would have life (see John 20:31).  MIMBS 11

How have you tried to "short-circuit" that process by moving straight toward a behavioral checklist without first settling the issue of faith and belief?

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20, Luke 7:36-8:3, Psalm 69:1-18, Proverbs 12:1

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



March 20-26

What are the four groups of Christians list in the devotional on this page? Take a few minutes and think of some friends or family who might fall into these categories.

- How might you pray for those friends or family who came to mind?
- What is it that you have been holding back from God? Do you see that you may need to submit that area of your life to Him?

Tuesday—March 28 • Daily Trust

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew." (John 2:7-9a)

Jesus attended a wedding where the host family ran out of wine. Hospitality was huge in this culture and a host's reputation could suffer for such an oversight. But beyond that, a person could actually be sued if he didn't treat guests in a certain way.

Jesus responded by turning water into wine. In fact, he provided the best wine. He demonstrated that we can trust Him with the frustrations we face every day. You may be irritated by an annoying boss, or by kids who don't do their homework. Perhaps you couldn't find your car keys this morning, because someone else used your vehicle and didn't put the keys where they're supposed to be. You can respond to these kinds of annoyances by creating systems to establish some measure of control. But it won't really help if you don't learn to trust that God is bigger than your circumstances. Realize that, no matter what happens, you'll be okay. God loves you, and He can show you how to be His man, even in difficulties.  MIMBS 11

List three situations that tempt you to control rather than trust. How will you guard your response to those circumstances?

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 9:1-10:22, Luke 8:4-21, Psalm 69:19-36, Proverbs 12:2-3

He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (John 4:16-18)

Jesus was passing through Samaria when He encountered a woman at a well. John 4 notes they were discussing theology, when suddenly Jesus asked her to bring her husband. Simply put, Jesus was calling this woman to repent and turn away from using her sexuality to fulfill a need for male approval. He linked sexuality and lifestyle choices to worship. He demonstrated that, in order to follow Him, we must pursue a lifestyle of repentance.

I regularly meet men who are playing with fire. Some have gotten into habits of being nice guys, decent husbands, and good fathers, yet they are watching pornography and getting emotionally connected to women other than their wives. Most think they can control the result. Satan shows the bait, but he hides the hook, and six months down the road, those men generally find their lives totally out of control. We need to repent, walking away from the temptation to worship money, comfort, sexuality, even our children, or anything else that stands in the way of our worshiping Christ alone.  MIMBS 11

What area of your life has potential to distract you from worshipping Jesus? What safeguards have you built in your life to ensure you're living a lifestyle of repentance in regard to that temptation?

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 11:1-12:32, Luke 8:22-39, Psalm 70:1-5, Proverbs 12:4

Thursday—March 30 Radical Sacrifice

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:3)

John 12 describes a dinner honoring Jesus. Mary, a sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, made a radical sacrifice at that dinner. She brought a pint of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. Her gift to Jesus was the equivalent of a year's wages for a common laborer.

Recognizing who Jesus really is provides motivation for going beyond our suburban American, nice-guy Christianity where we live in our houses, smile and wave at our neighbors, keep our hair short, get good grades in school, and refuse to curse. The gospel leads to an intentional lifestyle that transforms the world. We can join God in reaching people and demonstrating the values of His Kingdom, rather than focusing on maintaining status or clinging to our comfort and security. For instance, what would motivate someone to keep driving an old car rather than buying a new one, so he could invest his car payment in a ministry that reaches underprivileged children in his community? People should know from our choices that the gospel has truly gripped our hearts.  MIMBS 11

Do people around you know that the gospel has truly gripped your heart? Talk about your answer with another man.

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 13:1-15:23, Luke 8:40-9:6, Psalm 71:1-24, Proverbs 12:5-7

And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:37-40)

In 1896, a pastor in the Midwest wrote a book titled *In His Steps* that became a worldwide phenomenon over the next 20 to 30 years. The author, Charles Sheldon, diagnosed the shortfalls of common Christian practice, summarizing his prescription with a phrase designed to make people think about how they interacted with the world. That famous phrase was “What Would Jesus Do?” For about 50 years, that phrase faded from attention, and then in the 1990s, someone resurrected it, shortening it to WWJD.

The message inherent in the Gospel of John, though, presents a different question. Instead of WWJD, John seems to ask AIBG—Am I Believing God? In today's scripture, Jesus addressed religious leaders, saying even though they spent much time studying scripture, they missed the point because they didn't believe in Him. Throughout his gospel, John described a Savior who has proven His faithfulness, and who invites us to believe in Him. In fact, John implied that any self-righteous efforts to change our behavior and work our way into His favor will actually separate us from Him. Sometimes the very worst thing is being a nice guy, because nice guys don't think they really need God.

I've found that focusing on what Jesus has already done is much more helpful than wondering what He would do in any specific situation. Christianity is not about manipulating people to be better citizens. It's about living in the realm of what Jesus has already accomplished. We become the men God wants by believing in Christ and worshipping Him alone. Then He begins to change us from the inside out.  MIMBS 11

How does self-righteous effort get in the way of actually becoming like Jesus?

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 16:1-17:20, Luke 9:7-27, Psalm 72:1-20, Proverbs 12:8-9

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

March 27-31

Think about situations in your life when you have faced fear, joy, surprise, loss and disappointment.

- How did those situations affect you? Was it positive or negative?
- In which of those situations, did you attempt to take control?
- In which of those situations was it easier to trust God?



6. Church

A wily wolf doesn't attack the flock. He waits for a lone sheep to stray away. Here is a great irony: Generally speaking, the least involved people in church are the ones who need it most. Yet the church often ministers best to the most involved members. The solution? If you are a needy person, get more involved (don't rail against the system). For the already involved, spend time reaching out to people on the fringe of your church. Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

Sample Goal: I will seek ways to be actively involved in my church.

My Goal: _____

7. Ministry

Brother Lawrence said, "I tell you that this sweet and loving gaze of God insensibly kindles a divine fire in the soul which is set ablaze so ardently with the love of God that one is obliged to perform exterior acts to moderate it." We belong to Jesus. Use your spiritual gift for the glory of God by loving and serving others. I'm praying in faith that your life will make a difference—in your calling as a spouse, parent, provider, churchman, witness, servant, and friend. Read Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:9-11.

Sample Goal: This year I will gain a better understanding of my spiritual gifting, and ask my pastor for a way to use it.

My Goal: _____

8. Money



When the 10th of the month rolls around your landlord isn't looking for Jesus, he wants cash! Money is very important, but it won't solve all our problems. Most men think that money will do what it won't, and that God won't do what He will. Pray for a "conversion of the wallet." Be generous. Be a steward. Read Matthew 6:24; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

Sample Goal: This year I will tithe by faith and save five percent.

My Goal: _____

9. Health

If we don't take care of ourselves it's because we don't think we have time. Yet no one else can take responsibility for our private lives. Health is mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wholeness. Health is a gift from God, but we are responsible to create a proper balance with rest, recreation, nutrition, and exercise.

Sample Goal: I will study one new subject completely foreign to my normal routines

(e.g.; astronomy, interior design, sailing) and exercise three times each week.

My Goal: _____

10. Friendship and Accountability

Most of us could name six pallbearers, but few of us have a friend we could call at 2:00 a. m. Mother Theresa was once asked, "What is the greatest problem facing the world?" She answered without hesitation: "Loneliness." You will be fortunate in life if you have three real friends. Friendship is hard work. It takes time to build trust. Accountability—a step deeper—means giving a few people permission to ask you how you are really doing. Nothing will do more to keep you on track. Read Proverbs 27:6, 17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; John 13:34; Galatians 6:1-2; Philippians 2:4

Sample Goal: This year I will start an accountability group with three men.

My Goal: _____

11. The Bible

If you want to know God's will, read God's will. The Bible is God's will. Oswald Chambers suggests, "Unless in the first waking moment of the day you learn to fling the door wide back and let God in, you will work on a wrong level all day; but swing the door wide open and pray to your Father in secret, and every public thing will be stamped with the presence of God." Most of us have heard, "I knew about God, but I didn't know God." Perhaps a greater problem today is that people do know God, but they don't know about Him. Your life won't change in any significant way without regular study of

God's Word. Read Psalm 1:1-3, 119:9-11 and 89-104; John 20:30-31; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Sample Goal: This year I am going to read through The One Year Bible and memorize one Scripture verse each month.

My Goal: _____

12: Prayer

Pray throughout the day, because praying once a day is like eating one potato chip. Prayer is constant conversation with a Father who wants to give you everything you need. Prayer is hard work—but it releases the power of God into human actions. A man interviewing for a position with our ministry asked, "Are you a praying ministry?" His interviewer answered, "Yes." Then he said, "Just so there is no misunderstanding, what I'm asking is not whether you believe in prayer, but do you pray?" Let's not just believe in prayer—let's pray! Prayer is the currency of our personal relationship with Jesus. Matthew 6:5-15; Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Sample Goal: I will spend time in prayer before making any major decision. I will begin each day with prayer.

My Goal: _____

Imagine one year from now, and you have allowed God to work in your life through one or more of the above areas. Your life may completely change through the setting and pursuing of goals. God would be honored and glorified through your surrendered heart.

CHURCH, LET'S KEEP IT STRANGE! **THAT'S THE PLAN**

Adapted from a Weekly Briefing by Patrick Morley. For more Weekly Briefings go to maninthemirror.org/weekly-briefing.

Christian, in case you haven't noticed, you are part of a strange group. You don't fit in. You are like a square peg in a round hole.

Just think: You read an ancient book and actually try to do what it says. You visit nursing homes, shelter the homeless, counsel unwed mothers, and pray for those who wrong you. Who else does that?

It's been that way from the beginning. The Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, said, "Those impious Christians! They not only take care of their own poor, but ours as well!"

The positive impact of the Christian church is a singular achievement—and there isn't a close second.

Consider how the church meets the needs of our families: Weddings, baptisms, communion, confirmations, funerals, evangelistic outreaches, worship services, preaching, choir, spiritual education, ministry opportunities, softball leagues, small groups, Sunday school classes, retreats, women's groups, men's groups, nursery, Mother's day out, and hospital visits. No institution supports marriage and family like the church.

What would America look like without the church? Where would be the great hospitals, schools, and universities? Where would be the soup lines, the

coalitions for the homeless, the rescue missions? Would anyone be doing inner city youth work, supporting kids in foster care, or providing homes for unwed mothers? Who would be the voice of justice, and the hands of mercy?

Not to mention who would be the feet of the gospel of salvation? And who would be the light in the darkness, the salt seeking to preserve society and culture?

Jesus Christ and His gospel are the hope of the world. We, his body, the church, of which Christ is head, though deeply flawed and far from perfect, are, and always has been, God's primary and most effective means of bringing Christ and his gospel to the world (Colossians 1:18, 24).

We have to be different, because we are not of this world. And even though we are not of this world, Christ, in us, is the hope of the world.

As someone said, "The church has many critics, but no rivals." God has and can use a surrendered church to bring radical transformation to broken people.

So church, we really have no choice: let's keep it strange out there! 

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1. Spend more time with God
2. Read God's Word
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