

EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

TOOLS TO HELP MEN GROW TODAY

**SERVE
OTHERS**
GOD GETS THE GLORY

**ALSO
INSIDE**

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A Lesson in Grace page 8
Celebrating 30 Years! page 58
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Do you know a man who has a **driving passion** to see other men become **authentic disciples** of Jesus Christ? Share this letter with him.



Dear Brother,

Would you like to get trained to make a difference? Would you like to help churches in your area build a sustainable ministry that really transforms the hearts and minds of men? Would you like to be part of a movement that we pray God will use to bring revival to the men of America and the world?

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Now, we are building a team of field staff across America that are trained to help pastors and leaders implement these same principles. With nearly 100 men in the field, we're seeing dramatic results.

Churches who engage with one of our field staff reported that they are discipling 15 new men on average within the first year.

Go to www.mimfieldstaff.org today. We'd love to have you join us in the battle for men's souls!

Until every man is disciplined by another man,

Brett Clemmer

President, Man in the Mirror



EQUIPPING THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

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

MAN IN THE MIRROR IS MOVING SOON!



See MensDiscipleshipHQ.org.

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FIRST THINGS FIRST THE ULTIMATE MISSION

by Brett Clemmer

When Christ came to earth, it was part of God's plan to reconcile us to Himself.

And Paul tells us that God has given us that same ministry (2 Cor. 5:18). In a time of disharmony and ideological strife unseen by many alive today, the need for reconciliation has never been greater.

But while we may not have seen this before, it is nothing new. Jesus was born into a land where the prevailing religious views were looked at with derision by those in authority. The Jews were oppressed by an occupying force not just politically, but in daily life. The oft-mentioned right of a Roman soldier to have an individual carry his equipment for a mile is one example of this dominance.

But what did Jesus preach in the midst of this? Armed rebellion? Secret subversion? Social media ranting? (Had to throw that in there.) Actually, something much more radical: Love.

With phrases like, "Turn the other cheek," and "Take up your cross and follow me," Jesus prompted a response that was counter-cultural and even 'counter-human-nature.' Or at least fallen human nature. In Jesus mission to restore humanity to righteousness and right position with God, he

calls us to love and serve one another and the world.

But it turns out that loving and serving others is not just a matter of obedience. It's actually *good* for us. We were made for sacrificial love, because we're made in the image of a God whose response to His people's sin was to sacrifice his own Son to atone for it. A God of justice and holiness, yes. But also, a God of love.

Remember the powerful gift of a loving God.

Check out David Delk's take on this in his article, *Strength for Service*, and Glen Dry's example of how the opportunity to serve

plays a key role in literally *Transforming Men's Hearts*. And Managing Editor Lucy Blair gives us a heart-centered reminder of how it comes together in *A Lesson in Grace*.

As we head into the holiday season, Thanksgiving is an opportunity to remember not just the material blessings we have, but the powerful gift of a loving God. Advent and Christmas remind us that God's love was personified in the ultimate sacrifice.

Join us as we are on this ultimate mission to bring reconciliation to a world of brokenness. **MAM**



STRENGTH FOR SERVICE

by David Delk

We love for our ministry to be practical. So let me give some clear direction to our married readers—do not buy a vacuum cleaner as a gift for your wife.

It may be the best vacuum in America but please don't. Why? Because you don't want to give a gift that implies she needs to do more work. That's just not cool.

When we get a gift from another person, we expect it to be something for us to enjoy. That's how gifts between people work.

But the Bible tells a different story about the gifts we receive from God. "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11, esv).

Notice that Peter says God supplies the strength. Why does God need to give us strength? Think about what most of us consider "service." Maybe it's giving a couple bucks to a homeless person. Maybe it's stopping by the grocery store and picking up some food for a neighbor

because they've been in the hospital. That's service, right?

Do I need God's strength to give a couple bucks to a homeless person? Do I really need God's strength to grab a couple extra items at the grocery store and stop a block earlier and walk them up to the door of my neighbor?

If we're honest, most of us think of service as basically being nice to people. We listen to them when they need to talk and we may even pray for them. If they're going through some kind of hard time, we might help them—like if they need to move, then we'll go over and help load the truck. These kinds of things are not really all that hard, are they? It's kind of fun.

But Peter is writing about something more. He's talking about actually getting deeply involved in somebody's life. About doing things that are inconvenient, uncomfortable, difficult, hard, and sometimes maybe confrontational. That takes the strength that God provides.

Tim recently told me that his wife Jane had breakfast with a woman who was

going through some really tough times—in her marriage, her work, and her friendships. Jane knew that she should probably contact the woman and see if she wanted to go to breakfast again, so she asked Tim what to do.

He said, "You know what's going to happen, right? It's not enough to just go to breakfast. We will really have to get involved in their lives." Then he joked, "By the way, I don't want to do that, so don't ever talk to her again."

When people are hurting, checking in with them once a month is nice, but not sufficient. Texting someone, "I'm praying for you" doesn't cut it. It takes connecting to a person in a deep way, sacrificing, loving them, and giving ourselves away in order to have a chance to really see transformation in their life. It's hard. It's messy.

I'm writing to myself also. I almost always engineer my life for comfort and convenience, but frankly we all need some things in our lives that are difficult, uncomfortable, inconvenient, that make us feel inadequate, and like we don't know what to say. If you're not in a situation like that on a regular basis, you're probably not serving the way Christ has called you to serve.

Are you in a relationship that's too hard? Have you managed your life so that all your friendships and acquaintances and ministry opportunities are nice and convenient?

That brings us to the purpose of the gifts that God gives. Imagine you have a good friend who is not technologically oriented. When you're at their house you notice them taking a phone call on a flip phone. So, as a surprise, you buy them an \$800, large-screen smart phone. You bring it over and give it to them. They're so grateful.

Now imagine you came back a week later. Your friend's phone rings and he answers on his flip phone. You look down and notice the smart phone on the coffee table with a glass of iced tea on it.

When he hangs up, you say, "Why are you still using a flip phone?"

"I just kept using it."

You say, "What about the smart phone we bought you?"

He says, "That thing is the greatest coaster. It's amazing. It just keeps my table in perfect condition. I don't

have any rings on it anymore. It works for hot. It works for cold. Doesn't matter how much water drips down. That thing is incredible."

Now what would you be feeling? "What in the world have I done with my \$800?" Because when you give a gift, you want it to be used for the purpose it was made for.

The same thing is true with God. When He gives gifts, He wants us to use them for His purpose. What are you doing with the persistence that He's given you, or the entrepreneurial skill, or the empathy, or the insight, or the charisma? Too many times He sees us using those gifts and all we're

The same thing is true with God. When He gives gifts, He wants us to use it for His purpose.

TRANSFORMING MEN'S HEARTS GOING "KNEE DEEP" IN MISSION

by Glen Dry

Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. —1 John 3:18 (NLT)

Over the years I have noticed something that may impact how your ministry to men looks going forward and what you choose to invest in for long-term, sustainable transformation in men.

We have all worked to reach men using activities like weekend retreats, local service projects, men's prayer groups, wild game dinners, fishing trips, and the occasional men's breakfast, all of which I believe play a part in the picture of ministry to men. But when is the last time you got on a plane or a bus to dive knee deep into mission work in a place you do not know the language or the people? Most of the men that I walk with now are in this category of what I call "knee deep" men! These guys have gone places and done things that most men will never do.

Let's get real for a minute! Most men in our church world will never get on a plane or a bus to go do mission work anywhere for one main reason: Because you have not asked them to go with you. It starts with

you going knee deep into uncharted waters with language barriers, cultural conflicts, and increasing your faith to go beyond anything you are capable of accomplishing. Mission experiences force you to trust Jesus in ways you never dreamed and go places in your soul that have never been tapped.

Once a man has been on mission in some part of the world or even across our own land, he changes. **Something transformational happens deep in a man's soul on mission.** When he gets home, things are never the same. I have witnessed firsthand men who are more generous, thoughtful, grounded, and devoted to the calling to glorify Christ than the men who stay home.

As you look ahead in your personal or church ministry to men, include in your journey an adventure to Africa or Nicaragua, or even Louisiana or Alaska. I just know that men who go are never the same and seem to stick closer to Jesus than those I work with who stay home. Enjoy the ride! 



■ GLEN DRY

Pastor Glen A. Dry is the Founder and President of Man to Man Ministries, a ministry headquartered in Victoria, Texas committed to men's discipleship. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University and holds two master's degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to Cherylann Dry and has three children.

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A LESSON IN GRACE

by Lucy Blair

While waiting in line to order at the fast food restaurant, I had the pleasure of watching grace unfold before me (actually behind me).

It so happened that we were receiving poor service at the fast food counter, but good service happens in the most unexpected places with the most unlikely of people. Today I was lucky enough to get a front row seat.

A tall, pleasant gentleman in front of me chatted about the weather (he was right—it couldn't be more humid!). While he and I waited and chatted, his eyes kept drifting toward the door. Eventually he excused himself from the line, headed to the door and engaged the person standing near it. Thus, my lesson began.

I turned to see who my new friend was so interested in and I was surprised. It was obviously not a relative or an old friend. It looked like they'd never met. In fact, this man was, quite possibly, the dirtiest, most unkempt man I've seen in quite some time.

He wore what at one time must have been a white t-shirt and white painter's pants. No longer crisp or clean, they were dingy, holey, and awash in a dirty mixture of gray and tan. His hair and beard looked sticky. Embedded in them both were pieces of paper, food or trash. What few teeth he

had left were chipped and yellowed. Each time the door opened behind him the smell of alcohol and body odor wafted my way. His tough, leathery face was expressionless. He never lifted his eyes from the floor.

The confident, young man approached the stranger and quietly said, "Sir, let me buy you some lunch." No reply. Then he asked, "Could I get you something to eat or drink?" Nothing. The persistent offer came once more, "How about a burger or some chicken?"

He quietly waited for an answer. After a few seconds, the man must have mumbled something. All I saw was the kind stranger lean in to hear the answer again. I didn't hear the reply but they proceeded to get in line behind me.

With his gaze still focused on the floor, the disheveled stranger began to talk and explain his situation. Each time, he received much the same answer:

"It's been a bad couple of years."
"No need to explain, sir."
"I can't pay you back."

"Not a problem, sir."
"It's real nice of you, thanks."
"No need to thank me, sir."
"I should explain..."
"Not necessary, sir."

After I ordered and waited another *five to seven minutes* for my *pre-made* salad, I continued to observe these men. The stranger showed the young man his wrist bearing bright white, pink and neon green hospital bracelets. When they approached the counter to order, the homeless man removed his hat and exposed a recent injury or surgery.

The young man placed his order and then looked to his new friend. He ordered a sandwich and asked his host if he could get some fries. "Get what you want, sir." So he ordered fries and the young man asked, "How about some coffee or a Coke?" The man shook his head side to side and indicated no need for a drink.

Filling his own cup with soda, this Good Samaritan turned to the man and asked, "Hey, what size pants do you wear? How about shoes?" They laughed when the well-worn, homeless man revealed his sizes were quite a bit smaller than the young, athletic, African-American man. The stranger in need retorted, "But, I do have a belt!"

I received my lunch and walked to my car to continue my errands. The two of them continued their dialogue as they stood by the car next to mine. Here's the last I heard of their conversation:

The kind African-American asked, "You gonna stay here?" The man next to his shopping cart nodded his head up and down.

"I'll be back in 10 minutes. If I bring you a couple of my shirts, a pair of pants and some shoes, do you want them? Will you wear them?" Never looking up, the man agreed.

"Stay here and I'll bring some to you. Okay?" The homeless man clung to his cart and said he would stay.

This interaction stayed with me throughout the day. Not that many words were exchanged between these men. The real lesson was the humble and respectful attitude of the one offering his help. He

approached the man and asked to buy him lunch, as he would with any friend. His questions were genuine, humble and matter-of-fact. He didn't condescend to the man in need or treat him in a childish or pitying manner. He was kind, straight-forward

and not sickly-sweet. He didn't need the man to convince him he deserved help. He looked at the man, talked to him, and treated him with dignity. I guess you could say that he loved this man the way that Jesus loves you and me. May we go and do the same.

Lessons learned:

- Offer help, don't wait to be asked.
- Treat people as equals.
- Don't help because you feel bad, help because you can.
- When someone receives your help, be sure to leave them feeling respected.
- There's no need to complain about bad service at a fast food restaurant when good service is happening all around you. 

I guess you could say that he loved this man the way that Jesus loves you and me.

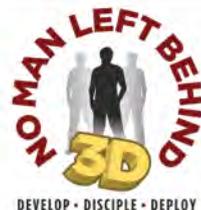
Is there a piece missing in your church's ministry to men?



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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:

- { } Understood that Christ is the only solution for meeting your needs.
- { } Reflected on your own financial investment for the kingdom of God.
- { } Examined the cultural influences on your own worldview and values.
- { } Studied Jesus' claims to decide if He was who He said He was.
- { } Discussed the valuable lessons learned from difficult times.
- { } Probed the book of Proverbs for lessons on the dangers of pride.
- { } Contemplated ways to humble yourselves in order to love others.
- { } Took an action step toward spending more time in prayer.
- { } Sought out some of the root causes or triggers of anger in your life.
- { } Learned new ways to avoid or not give into the temptation of anger.
- { } Decided on a practical step to battle evil in your community.
- { } Celebrated the true meaning of Christmas.
- { } Prayed that God would cultivate an authentic friendship in your life.



EQUIPPING YOUR MEN'S SMALL GROUP

Suggested Applications Steps

October 3-9

Throughout this week, you'll meditate on **the things that distract men and make them restless.** **SAS (Suggested Action Steps):** Give each man in the group a few minutes to identify one major area of temptation where you tend to be distracted from Christ. Then go around and have each man share his area and answer these questions: "What do you believe is one thing you are hoping to get from that temptation?" and "How could Christ satisfy that need?"

October 10-16

From these devotionals you will investigate **the difference between a Cultural Christian and a Biblical Christian.** **SAS:** One evidence of Cultural Christianity is how we invest our money. Give every man a small slip of paper and have them anonymously write down the percentage of their pre-tax income that they give to God's kingdom. Collect the papers and average them. Before you reveal the results, allow each man to guess what he thinks the percentage will be.

October 17-23

This week's devotionals will help you **examine how our worldly culture influences our worldview and values.** **SAS:** Make a list of things that Christians routinely do today that people 100 years ago would have been shocked by. Go through your list and discuss. Which are simply products of changing norms and which are sinful and in what ways? How have you been influenced negatively in one of these areas?

October 24-30

This week **your men will look at a few of the claims that Jesus made about Himself.** **SAS:** List a few of the claims that Jesus made and try to find the references that support them in the scriptures. Rank them in order of how possible they would be for an average man. Are you convinced that Jesus is who He said He was? Why or why not?

October 31-November 6

This week, you'll see some of the ways that **God uses difficult times to teach us to trust Him.** **SAS:** Have each man list a particularly difficult experience that he has gone through. Then, have each man share a truth that they learned about God during that time.

November 7-13

In these devotionals you'll contemplate **the relationship between humility and pride.** **SAS:** Using an online bible or a concordance, look up some occurrences of the word pride in the book of Proverbs. Read a few aloud and summarize the main point. What lessons does this teach you about the danger of pride?

November 14-20

This week you'll consider **how pride effects our perception and relationships with others.** **SAS:** List a few types of people that it is easy for you to look down on. Honestly consider why it is that you consider yourself better than them. What would need to happen for you to humble yourself and treat them with respect and genuine love?

November 21 -27

In the devotionals this week, you'll read about **the importance and value of prayer.** **SAS:** During the next week, at the end of each day record the amount of time that you spent doing mindless or aimless activities. Report on your findings each week. What would be a realistic step to substitute some of this poorly used time for time in prayer?

November 28-December 4

The theme for this week is **dealing with anger.** **SAS:** List a personal trigger that tends to make you respond in anger. Give each man a few minutes to consider why it is that this makes him angry. Try to get to the root causes as you allow each man to share his thoughts. For the next week, ask each man to record any events that trigger anger in his heart.

December 5-11

From these devotionals, **we learn about the dangers and subtlety of anger.** **SAS:** Ask men to share any events that happened last week where they were tempted to respond in anger. What happens if we allow ourselves to give in to anger? How can we get to the place where these same circumstances don't enflame anger in our hearts?

December 12-18

This week, you will be reminded about the **battle that Jesus is waging against evil and sin.** **SAS:** Make a list of the issues in your community where you most see the sting of the lack of the gospel. On other words, what are the areas of your community where evil is winning? Pick one and brainstorm one practical step your group could take to join the battle in this area.

December 19-25

From these devotionals, you'll learn about **Luke's account of the story of Christmas.** **SAS:** Celebrate the season with your family and friends.

December 26-31

These devotionals will remind you of **the importance of authentic relationships.** **SAS:** Ask each man to list a man with whom he can be brutally honest. It's hard for men to find friends like this, but it is invaluable. If men in your group don't have someone that confronts them and tells them the truth, ask them to pray that God would bring them that kind of friend early in 2017.



DAILY DEVOTIONS

October • November • December 2016

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. (Hebrews 12:1)

Men often fail because they don't manage their priorities. When we set and know our priorities, it reduces the pressure we feel when we must make decisions under fire.

After a tiring night, Jesus wanted to have some time to Himself. But Scripture tells us, "People were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent'" (Luke 4:42-43). Notice three things:

- People tried to keep Jesus from leaving. Without intending to, people will ask you to do things that meet their needs, but don't necessarily match your priorities.
- Jesus knew His purpose, and that determined His priorities. He did not let the emotion of the moment cloud His judgment.
- Jesus did what He was called to do. He chose the best over the good.

Every man must take personal responsibility and set priorities in five areas: his relationship with God, his relationship with his wife, his relationship with his children, his finances, and his health. From Jesus' example, we glean one important rule for priority living: make decisions on the basis of your priorities, not your pressures. ALM 25

Have you set priorities in those five areas of your life? Are you able to make decisions based on those priorities?

Daily Reading: Isaiah 62:6-66:24, Philippians 2:19-3:21, Psalm 73:1-74:23, Proverbs 24:13-16

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).

Monday—October 17 • Lessons from Elementary School

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. (1 Corinthians 5:6-7)

In today's Scripture, the apostle Paul compared sin to yeast. A little bit can work its way into the whole batch of dough. This is similar to the principle of diffusion. If you start with a clear glass of water, then use an eyedropper to squeeze some red food dye into the glass, within moments, the water will be tainted with a pinkish hue. The dye will spread throughout the water in the glass.

To be a cultural Christian in your parents' generation was to be like a clear glass of water with one drop of red dye. Then came Internet pornography, abortion on demand, explicit sex during prime time TV, songs that degrade women, and a drug culture that's hard to avoid. Now, to be a cultural Christian is like having the whole bottle of red dye poured into the glass. Today's secular culture is so polluted that being a cultural Christian means your worldview and lifestyle aren't just tainted pink. They are contaminated by failed, impoverished values that violate Scriptural principles.

MIM 25, Chapter 3

In your own words, describe how the danger of cultural Christianity has increased as our society has strayed further and further from biblical standards.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 30:1-31:26, 1 Timothy 2:1-15, Psalm 87:1-7, Proverbs 25:18-19

Correlating Scripture → (points to the top quote)

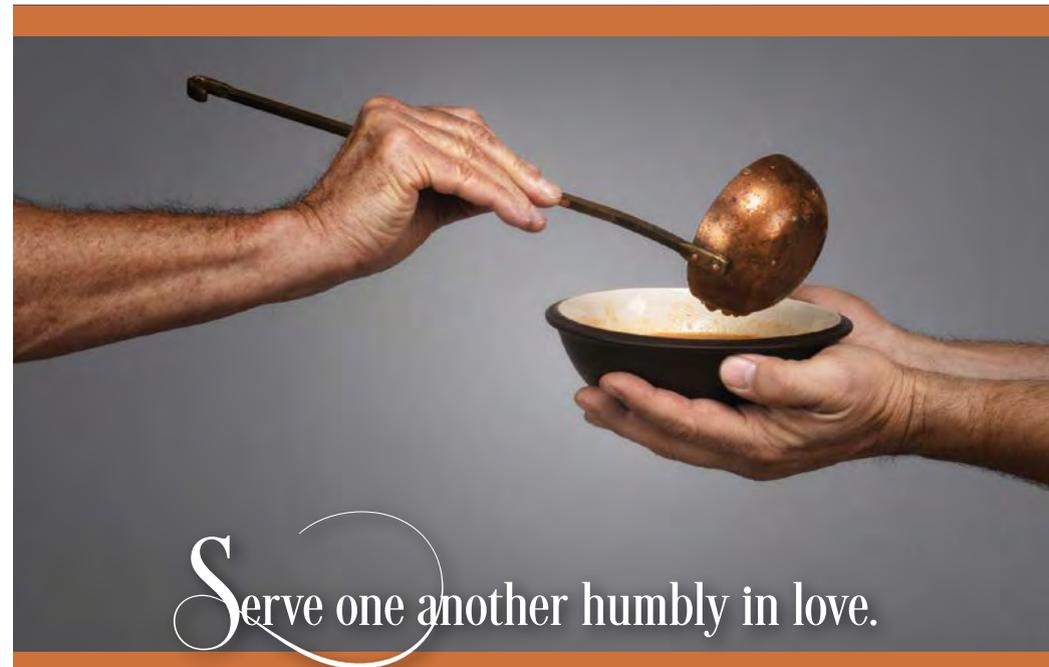
Source material → (points to the MIM 25 icon)

One-year Bible daily reading → (points to the Daily Reading line)

Discussion/journal questions → (points to the bottom paragraph)

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—Soul's Search for Rest	MIMBS 6—Quarrels and Divisions
MIMBS 2—Who Is This Man?	MIM 25, Chapter 3—Biblical Christian or Cultural Christian
MIMBS 3—As Long as it Takes	MIM 25, Chapter 16—Pride
MIMBS 4—A Man and Prayer	MIM 25, Chapter 18—Anger
MIMBS 5—Jesus Takes the City	Christmas Devos—Ruth Ford



Serve one another humbly in love.

—Galatians 5:13

My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. (Psalm 84:2)

Many men say to me, “I’ve known Christ for a number of years. I’m successful in my career. I’ve got the woman I want, the children I want. I thought I’d be happy at this point. Why am I so restless?”

In the visible world, men search for a sense of worth in three primary ways: wife, work, and wealth. Unfortunately, though, as a man progresses through life, he finds that finding meaning in his wife, his work and his wealth leave him weary. He faces a great irony. He has everything he thought he wanted, and instead of finding satisfaction, he finds that he is restless.

That’s not just a contemporary issue. Many centuries ago, St. Augustine wrote in his autobiography called *Confessions*, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

Even the best earthly things will never satisfy a divine hunger.  MIMBS 1

Have you ever felt restless? Do you feel that way now? How might you find your rest in God?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 1:1-2:30, Philippians 4:1-23, Psalm 75:1-10, Proverbs 24:17-20

Then a new king . . . came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.” So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. (Exodus 1:8-11)

The Old Testament offers stories that become metaphors for every man’s search for a sense of rest and well-being. In Exodus, the Israelites were held as slaves in Egypt. God heard their cry for deliverance. He met Moses and said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt . . . So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:7-8). God empowered and sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from slavery.

Egypt is a metaphor for ruthless oppression and bondage. You may feel like you are living there right now. Perhaps your soul is tormented, and you are restless. People are coming at you ruthlessly, and you feel far away from God.

You need to know that, when you cry out to God, He hears you. At exactly the right time, He will come and deliver you.  MIMBS 1

Have you ever “lived in Egypt?” Do you feel like you’re living there right now? Share your experiences with a brother and pray together for deliverance.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 4:19-6:15, Colossians 1:18-2:7, Psalm 77:1-20, Proverbs 24:23-25

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

The human heart is hungry for a sense of completion—a hunger that a person may try to satisfy with success, money, career, sex, or even real earthly love. But every man has a spiritual hunger, and if he tries to fill up on earthly stuff, he will find that it is all “junk food” and “cheap calories.” He may get a quick rush, but in the long-term, his hunger will not be satisfied.

Many years ago, tennis superstar Andre Agassi told a *Sports Illustrated* writer, “Without the cake, the icing sucks.” I don’t mean to offend by repeating his language, but his words do point to an important issue we all need to understand. Every man has a hunger that will not be satisfied by the sugary parts of life. You need some protein—some spiritual food that penetrates down into the deep part of your soul and fills that empty place with God’s grace.  MIMBS 1

How have you seen men around you try to satisfy their “hunger” with the icing alone? Have you looked for satisfaction in places apart from God? Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 2:31-4:18, Colossians 1:1-17, Psalm 76:1-12, Proverbs 24:21-22

He [Moses] was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. (Acts 7:38-39)

The Israelites left Egypt under Moses’ leadership. En route to the Promised Land, they spent time in the wilderness of transition, where God proved Himself as their provider and protector. Yet in their hearts, they rejected God’s leadership through Moses, and “their hearts turned back to Egypt.”

Imagine Egypt as representing the anxiety and oppression of life without Christ. Why do people stay in Egypt? Some were born there, and they just never left—they’ve never entered into relationship with their deliverer, Jesus Christ. Others returned because, in a difficult time in their transition to the Promised Land, their hearts turned back to the way things used to be. Still others are like Moses—they’ve returned to Egypt so they can rescue others.

If you feel restless and pressed, ask yourself why you’re in Egypt. It could be that you never really left. It could be that your heart has returned. Or it could be that God sent you back to rescue others. No matter what your reason, Jesus is only the way to find rest.  MIMBS 1

Have you ever found yourself dropping back into old habits that don’t really represent your new reality in Christ? How can you keep your eyes focused on the “promised land” of what God has in store for you?

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

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Moses led the Hebrew people out of their place of oppression in Egypt. Their eventual destination was the Promised Land, described in Scripture as a land of milk and honey—a place of contentment, fulfillment and rest. In a similar way, Jesus offers a place of rest to those who will accept His invitation to live in relationship with Him.

That promise stands in stark contrast to the world around us. Most of us live and work in a hostile environment—a cruel, harsh, competitive place that chews men up and spits them out. It’s a painful place that overwhelms us, because we never seem to “measure up” to the expected standard. Because of that, we can identify with today’s featured Scripture passage, written to those who are “weary and burdened.” That term originally applied to an overloaded ship that sat too low in the water, making it unsafe. Jesus says, “If you’re straining and carrying too much cargo, then come to Me, and I’ll give you rest.” Jesus invites us to release our burdens in His presence, trusting Him to bear the heavy part of the load.

Our ability to respond to Jesus’ invitation will depend heavily on our ability to believe that He can and will honor His promise. Hebrews 4:2 tells us the promise of rest “was of no value” to the Hebrew people who followed Moses, “because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.” The promise hasn’t changed—it’s still valid. So if you’re still laboring to the point that you feel weary and oppressed, perhaps you need to review what you know about Jesus. He’s willing and able to make good on His promise, if you will have the faith.  MIMBS 1

If you are not living in a place of contentment and rest, what is one major factor that stands in the way of your accepting Jesus’ promise?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 8:8–14:10, Colossians 3:1–4:18, 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:8, Psalm 78:32–79:13, Proverbs 24:27–34

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. (Ecclesiastes 2:10)

Roughly one in three Americans identify themselves as evangelical Christians. Compare that to two centuries ago, in 1800, when just one of every fourteen Americans belonged to an evangelical church. Statistics like these could suggest that Christianity is flourishing. In reality, though, Christian influence on our culture appears to be fading. That can be explained, at least in part, by trends identified many years ago by Dr. Francis Schaeffer. In his epic book titled *How Shall We Then Live?* Schaeffer underscored that the majority of people had adopted two impoverished values:

- Personal peace, described as being “let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people...”
- Affluence, described as judging success “by an ever-higher level of material abundance.”

To the degree that we’ve succumbed to those types of values rather than upholding true biblical principles, we’ve sacrificed our ability to influence our culture. Many enjoy the abundant availability of God’s Word without applying it to their daily lives. In the process, we’ve been lured into accepting the values of our morally bankrupt culture.  MIM 25, Chapter 3

Explain how Ecclesiastes 2:10, quoted above, relates to the issue of accepting “impoverished values” like personal peace and affluence, rather than pursuing God’s Word and applying it to our lives. Share your thoughts with another man.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 14:11–16:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:9–3:13, Psalm 80:1–19, Proverbs 25:1–5

Tuesday—October 11 • Cultural Christianity

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:22–25)

Many Americans who claim to be Christian have adopted a mind set that is more secular than biblical. Some have accepted a worldly view of the sexual ethics of cohabitation or pornography. Some have succumbed to rampant greed and materialism, or learned to wink at the needs of the poor. When we accept a cultural norm instead of a biblical standard, we’ve exchanged God’s truth for a lie. When we do what seems right in our own eyes, without regard to Scripture, we worship created things rather than honor the Creator.

The unfortunate result is that we succumb to cultural Christianity, meaning we pursue the God we want instead of the God who is. We prefer viewing God as a gentle grandfatherly type who lets us have our own way. We sense a need for God, but we want Him on our own terms. This type of “Christianity” is impotent, having little or no impact on the values and beliefs in our society.

 MIM 25, Chapter 3

We often want God to adapt to our whims instead of us adapting to Him. Look for a moment at your lifestyle. To what extent do you believe cultural Christianity describes you? Where have you seen the signs of worshipping a god you want?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 16:16–18:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:1–5:3, Psalm 81:1–16, Proverbs 25:6–8

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



October 3–9

Read aloud the devotional, “Hungry for Righteousness” found on page 16.

- Do you have a hunger for righteousness? How do you know that?
- Have you tried to satisfy that hunger with the “sugary” or “junk” things of life?
- In what ways has that hunger for righteousness been truly satisfied?

This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. (Luke 8:11–13)

During His ministry on earth, Jesus told a story about a farmer who went into his fields to sow some seed. The scattered seed fell on different kinds of soil, with different results. In a spiritual application, Jesus said the seed symbolized God's Word. The passage above explains the types of people represented by the first two kinds of soil. The first person rejects the message. Christ indicated that not everyone who hears about salvation will believe.

The second type of soil, rocky ground, represents those who are attracted to the Gospel, but when they face hard times, they give up on their faith. This type of cultural Christian has a counterfeit faith. Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). That's a pretty simple test. Obedience is the determining factor. But obedience must begin with knowing and internalizing the truth of Scripture.  MIM 25, Chapter 3

The apostle Paul challenged believers, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). If you were going to examine your own faith, what questions would you ask? What would your answers say about your faith?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 19:1–21:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:4–28, Psalm 82:1–8, Proverbs 25:9–10

Thursday—October 13 • Cultural Christian with Defeated Faith

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. (Luke 8:14)

Jesus told a story comparing a person who shares God's Word to a farmer who scattered seed. Some of that seed fell on thorny soil, representing people whose faith gets choked out by the pursuit of riches and pleasure.

Observing the purchasing habits of many evangelical Christians, I don't see much difference from our secular culture. The "typical family" in the U.S. right now carries about \$100,000 in household debt. Our culture encourages us to pursue instant gratification, refusing to say no to ourselves, or even to defer a purchase to a later date. When Christians spend like the "typical family," racing to acquire material possessions, we also will be bogged down with debt.

The resulting financial worries will choke out God's Word and make it unfruitful in our lives. This type of cultural Christian has a defeated faith. This person's lifestyle shows little difference from the lifestyle of a man who makes no claim to be in Christ. Many of these Christians have never understood, perhaps because they've never been told, what it means to be a biblical Christian.

 MIM 25, Chapter 3

What biblical advice would you give to a friend who claims to be a Christian, but is embroiled in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure? Ask another man to share his thoughts.

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

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' parable of the sower described a farmer scattering seed on four different kinds of soil. Each soil type represented a certain kind of person, and the result of the seed represented the response of a person to God's Word. The final category was "good soil," which represents those who "hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." I call these people biblical Christians. They don't live by their own ideas, but they intentionally seek to understand and apply God's Word.

A biblical Christian trusts in Christ alone for his salvation, and he desires to obey God's principles out of the overflow of a grateful heart. Obedience doesn't save us, but faith does.

People who claim Christ fall into two broad categories: biblical Christians, and cultural Christians. Cultural Christians don't base their priorities and their daily decisions on God's Word, but rather they succumb, often unintentionally, to the ethics prescribed by the secular culture around them. Cultural Christianity ushers in ambiguity about what it really means to be a Christian. It's a little like calling yourself a Republican or a Democrat. Today the labels reveal much less about what you really think and believe than they did 50 years ago.  MIM 25, Chapter 3

Would you describe yourself as more of a cultural Christian or a biblical Christian? Give three evidences for your answer.

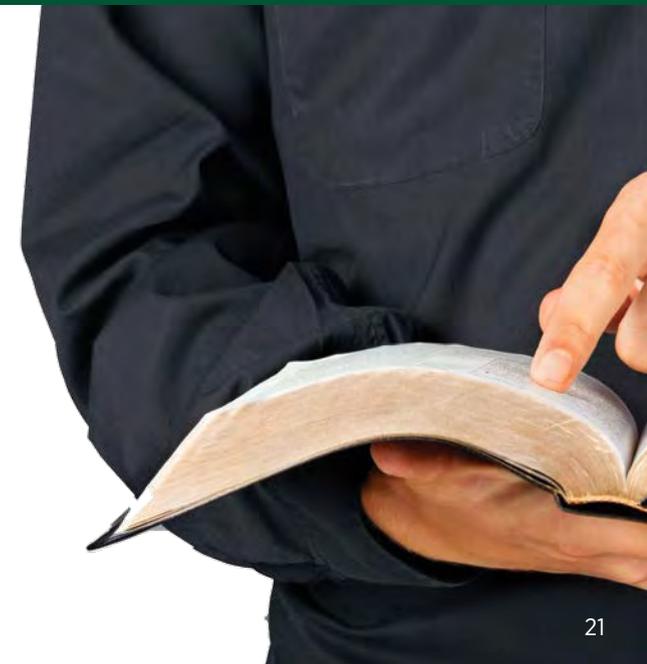
Daily Reading: Jeremiah 23:21–29:32, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3:18, 1 Timothy 1:1–20, Psalm 84:1–86:17, Proverbs 25:15–17

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

October 10–16

From the questions at the end of the devotional on this page, share the outcome of your answers.

- What attributes does the cultural Christian have?
- What attributes does the biblical Christian have?



Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. (1 Corinthians 5:6-7)

In today's scripture, the apostle Paul compared sin to yeast. A little bit can work its way into the whole batch of dough. This is similar to the principle of diffusion. If you start with a clear glass of water, then use an eyedropper to squeeze some red food dye into the glass, within moments, the water will be tainted with a pinkish hue. The dye will spread throughout the water in the glass.

To be a cultural Christian in your parents' generation was to be like a clear glass of water with one drop of red dye. Then came Internet pornography, abortion on demand, explicit sex during prime time TV, songs that degrade women, and a drug culture that's hard to avoid. Now, to be a cultural Christian is like having the whole bottle of red dye poured into the glass. Today's secular culture is so polluted that being a cultural Christian means your worldview and lifestyle aren't just tainted pink. They are contaminated by failed, impoverished values that violate scriptural principles.

 MIM 25, Chapter 3

In your own words, describe how the danger of cultural Christianity has increased as our society has strayed further and further from biblical standards.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 30:1-31:26, 1 Timothy 2:1-15, Psalm 87:1-7, Proverbs 25:18-19

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. (Revelation 2:2-4)

Ron Jenson rented a camper and traveled the country with his wife while working on his doctoral thesis. After interviewing 350 Christian leaders, he made this discouraging observation: "I found a great deal of zeal for God's work, but very little passion for God." Many of us are busy "doing," but we're not focused on maintaining a loving and healthy relationship with God.

At the most basic level, a person who enjoys a solid relationship with God understands the value of fellowship with Him through enjoying and studying His Word. Though Scripture is often filled with mystery, it still reveals a personal God who has unchanging, absolute principles and precepts. Jesus said our love for Him would be revealed through knowing and honoring His desires (for instance, see John 14:15), even when that requires costly lifestyle choices. The biblical Christian understands the difference between wrestling with Scripture in an effort to grasp its true meaning, versus trying to determine if it's really true. The first wrestling seeks the terms of surrender, while the second is a contest of our will against God's.  MIM 25, Chapter 3

On a scale of 0-10, with 0 representing no love at all and 10 representing complete adoration for God, how would you describe your relationship with God? What factors led you to choose that number? What would you like to see change?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 33:1-34:22, 1 Timothy 4:1-16, Psalm 89:1-13, Proverbs 25:23-24

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (Revelation 3:15-17)

Twentieth century British journalist and author Malcolm Muggeridge noted that, if you toss a frog directly into a pot of boiling water, it will immediately feel the heat and leap from the pot. But if you put the frog in a pot of cold water, and then slowly turn up the heat, the frog won't notice the change in temperature and won't leap out. As the water moves toward boiling, the inattentive frog will be cooked.

Like an unsuspecting frog in a cold pot, our cultural values have been slowly "cooked" over the past few decades. If someone had been cryogenically frozen a century ago and then brought to life today, I believe he probably would jump from this boiling pot we've created. But like the unsuspecting frog, oblivious to the changing temperature, our values have been slowly "cooked," and many of us simply haven't noticed. Many who identify themselves as Christians have accepted eroding cultural standards, giving the world the opportunity to dismiss our faith, saying, "It doesn't really make any difference anyway."  MIM 25, Chapter 3

Does your lifestyle offer hope to your non-Christian friends, or does it simply offer more disillusionment? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 31:27-32:44, 1 Timothy 3:1-16, Psalm 88:1-18, Proverbs 25:20-22

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, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)

When I became a Christian, I recognized that I could cooperate with God's work within me, and my internal changes would be revealed in my behavior. I asked Him for help on two serious, practical struggles. The first was cursing. Almost instantly, without any help or assistance from me, the cursing ceased. My wife commented, "Pat, you hardly curse at all anymore!" I was flabbergasted. I had made no conscious effort to stop, nor was I aware when the change occurred.

The other issue was my temper. While God quickly helped me with cursing, my temper lingered for five long, tearful years. Almost every day I had to ask for forgiveness. I shed tears and pleaded with God for help. But five years passed before my level of anger shrank to what I would call "normal." Here's the point: We didn't get to be the men we are overnight, and we may need to allow some time, perhaps even a long time, before we will see ourselves as the men we want to be.

 MIM 25, Chapter 3

Describe one habit you've been asking God to help you defeat in your life. How does today's devotional encourage you to stay in that battle rather than give up?

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

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:31-33)

Steve and his wife sold their business. He enrolled in graduate school out of state, and they purchased a home near the university. When they went to the closing, the mortgage company asked him to falsify some financial information. "It's no big deal," they said. "Everybody does it. It just goes in the file, and nobody ever looks at it. If you don't agree to this, we can't give you the loan."

Steve really believed God had led them to this decision to return to school. Now his peace was shattered. To complete the move, he would have to compromise his integrity. His decision was really quite simple: "Who do I put first in this decision? Will I give in to my desires, or will I follow Christ's desires?" Putting himself first would have been easy. After all, who would know? But he decided to put Jesus first, deciding to return to school locally rather than moving out of state. He has great peace with the results of his decision.

Many Christian men have given in to our culture's impoverished values rather than holding fast to the eternal principles outlined in God's Word. The biblical Christian makes his relationship with God his top priority, recognizing that his love for God will be revealed through his obedience. This is how we demonstrate to a weary culture that we love God and honor His truth.  MIM 25, Chapter 3

Describe a time when you faced a decision similar to the one described today. Did your decision reflect a commitment to your own plan, or to God's plan? Would you make the same choice today, or would you choose differently?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 37:1-44:23, 1 Timothy 6:1-21, 2 Timothy 1:1-2:21, Psalm 89:38-93:5, Proverbs 25:28-26:5

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

There's a joke about two men who met in a jail cell. One was dressed and groomed extremely well, so the other one asked, "What are you doing in here?" The sophisticated man replied, "I had a place on the Riviera, luxury cars, and lots of beautiful women around me all the time. I was living the kind of life that J. Thomas Riley had become accustomed to... until J. Thomas Riley reported his credit cards missing."

Sometimes men are so committed to accumulating wealth that they will do just about anything to get it. We build a life on something that seems solid, but is shaky at best. And worse, it seems to work for a while.

Many men see life as futile, but it's not because they didn't get what they wanted. It's because they did get it all, and they're still in bondage. You see, planning your life is a bit like building your dream house. You buy property and purchase the materials. Whether you're building a house or a life, your foundation is crucial. A faulty base affects the whole structure. A life that is built on any foundation other than Jesus Christ is futile. In the end, it will not yield a sense of satisfaction.

 MIMBS 2

If you evaluated your behavior the last few weeks, what would you conclude was your overarching goal? How does that reveal the foundation on which you are actually building your life?

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 44:24-47:7, 2 Timothy 2:22-3:17, Psalm 94:1-23, Proverbs 26:6-8

Tuesday—October 25 • Who Is Jesus?

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." (Luke 8:24-25)

Life holds lots of questions. You have to discern which ones are important, and which are superficial. For the important ones, the consequences can be significant if you give the wrong answer.

When you are building the foundation for your life, you really want to respond to a few questions correctly. You need to start with this crucial question: Who is Jesus?

Scripture is full of stories like we find in Luke 8, where Jesus' words or actions caused people to wonder about His identity. Their ability to accept the principles of His kingdom was largely based on who they thought Jesus was. Matthew 16 reveals that Peter (and we assume the other disciples) recognized Him as the Son of God. Jesus said we cannot come to that assumption on our own, but only as God reveals it to us.

Your own answer to that question will determine the strength of your foundation. That, in turn, influences the health and meaning of everything else in your life.  MIMBS 2

In 50 words or less, how would you answer someone who asked, "Who is Jesus?"

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 48:1-49:22, 2 Timothy 4:1-22, Psalm 95:1-96:13, Proverbs 26:9-12

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



October 17-23

What are some of the decisions that the men in your group are making in their daily lives?

- Describe the process you use to make an important decision.
- How does God's plan fit into your decision making process?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)

My Bible contains 34,450 words spoken by Jesus. If you get a version that marks Jesus' words in red ink, you probably could read them all in a few hours. It all boils down to the fact that He claimed to be God's only Son, sent to save everyone who will trust Him.

Jesus basically said there are two roads. A lot of people choose the wide road, but it leads to destruction. Then, He said, there is another road. It has a small gate and a narrow path, and only a few people find it, but it leads to eternal life. (See Matthew 7:13-14.) He said, "I am the gate," and, "I am the way" (John 14:6).

Jesus didn't look much like a Savior that we would invent. He had no money, no influential family, no political power, no organization, no army, and no friends in high places. He spoke to only a few thousand people in his lifetime, and He died a criminal's death. Yet today over a billion people call Him Lord. Frankly, I can see only one reason for Jesus' current influence. His claims are true.  MIMBS 2

*Jesus described two roads. Which one are you on?
Pray for a man you know that is on the wide road today.*

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 49:23-50:46, Titus 1:1-16, Psalm 97:1-98:9, Proverbs 26:13-16

Thursday—October 27 • Jesus' Resurrection Changed Everything

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

In His lifetime on earth, people said all kinds of things about Jesus. At one point His family questioned His sanity. The people He grew up with wanted to push Him off a cliff. Some thought He was demon possessed. Others wanted to stone Him, and His disciples ended up deserting Him. By any worldly standard, Jesus was a loser when He died. So why didn't His message simply die with Him?

Jesus' resurrection changed everything. The apostle Paul wrote, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, emphasis added). Paul went on to write, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (v. 17). Then he adds, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (v. 20). Jesus' death and His glorious resurrection offer a foundation that will not crumble, even when you face life's most difficult situations.  MIMBS 2

Talk with some brothers about what Christ's resurrection means. Why does Christianity fall apart if Jesus was a "good teacher," but never really rose from the dead?

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

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

If you are not a Christian, it is not okay to tell your Christian friend, "I'm happy you found something that works for you." If Jesus is not who He claimed to be, then He is either the most pitiful, deluded man who ever drew breath, or He is the most wickedly clever, deranged madman who ever lived.

If you are right and your friend is wrong, then your friend has foolishly pledged his allegiance to either a madman or a demon. If your friend truly has pledged allegiance to an imposter, then he has committed himself to the foolish laboring of returning kindness to those who mistreat him, loving those who hate him, putting others before himself, seeking the best for all men, and giving to the poor. Go get him, now—because he is about to throw his life away on a hoax.

But what if your friend is right? Then you are an utter fool not to join him by dropping to your knees and asking Jesus to teach you His ways. In 1 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul reminds us that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to those of us who know Jesus really did live up to everything He claimed, the death and resurrection of Jesus provide the foundation we need to live in a way that ultimately brings rest and satisfaction.  MIMBS 2

Do you consider the message of the cross to be foolishness? Or can you say with assurance that it is the foundation on which you are building your life? Explain your answer.

Daily Reading: Jeremiah 51:54-52:34, Lamentations 1:1-3:66, Titus 3:1-15, Philemon 1:1-25, Hebrews 1:1-14, Psalm 100:1-102:28, Proverbs 26:18-22

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

October 24-30

On a large piece of paper or white board make two headings: Wide Road and Narrow Path.

- List what this week's devotions had to say about each heading.
- Now list actions that you believe fit under each category.
- Discuss why one path is narrow and one path is wide.



But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people?” (Exodus 17:3-4)

Adlai Stevenson was an American statesman known for his skill in debate and oratory. When he was campaigning and running for president in the middle of the 20th century, a woman cried out, “Senator, every thinking person will vote for you.” Stevenson replied, “Madam, that is not enough! I need a majority.” I’m sure that statement summarizes what Moses felt as he tried to lead the Israelites away from Egypt. The vast majority of the Israelites resisted Moses’ leadership, so that the trip from oppression to promise involved years of wandering in the wilderness.

For us, Egypt can symbolize men’s efforts to find satisfaction by pursuing comfort or trying to rest in worldly ways. If you’ve turned your back on that and you’re walking toward God’s promise of rest, you might miss the things of the world that promise comfort. And you might wonder, “How long will it take to reach my place of rest?” Your journey probably will take longer than you expect, but God uses the journey to prepare us for what He has promised. 🖨️ MIMBS 3

Do you feel like you’ve been on the journey to the “promised land” for a long time? Looking at the journey, what are the most important lessons you’ve learned along the way? Share your top two or three with another man.

Daily Reading: Lamentations 4:1-5:22, Hebrews 2:1-18, Psalm 103:1-22, Proverbs 26:23

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:13-14)

On leaving Egypt, God immediately led the Israelites into the desert and toward the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his soldiers pursued them and eventually “trapped” them as they camped on the shoreline. In spite of everything God had already done to rescue these people, they were understandably terrified. Scripture says they “cried out to the LORD” (Exodus 14:10). They didn’t know God very well yet, but they did know enough to cry out to Him when they were in trouble. And God answered. Probably you know that He held back the Egyptian army with a pillar of fire, and He split the Red Sea so the Israelites walked through on dry ground. Then He allowed the Egyptians to be drowned when they pursued the Israelites into the Sea.

You and I often break our promises, but God never does. He allows calamity, and then He delivers us to prove that He will do what He promises. In your wilderness experiences, you will face a crucial faith question: Do you really trust God to take care of you? 🖨️ MIMBS 3

Are you completely sure that God will take care of you, no matter what? Why or why not?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 3:16-6:14, Hebrews 4:1-16, Psalm 104:24-35, Proverbs 26:27

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. (Exodus 13:17-18)

Pharaoh had repeatedly refused to accept God’s ultimatum, but after 10 massive plagues, he succumbed and allowed the Israelites to leave. Scripture tells us they were “marching out boldly” (Exodus 14:8). Why? Because of renewed confidence in the God who defeated their enemies. If they took the shortest route, they’d be in the Promised Land in about 11 days. But then God led them on a desert road.

The Israelites were on a journey to a Promised Land ruled by a God they didn’t really know. They had a hazy understanding of the God they followed, like when you see a figure far away in the twilight. But the time in the wilderness would teach them to know God deeply and to trust Him with their lives, their futures, their families.

Our relationship with God is similar. When we accept Christ as Savior, we usually have a general idea about who He is. But when we find Him faithful in the wilderness, that’s when we learn to trust Him. 🖨️ MIMBS 3

Describe a time when God proved Himself faithful in a difficult situation.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 1:1-3:15, Hebrews 3:1-19, Psalm 104:1-23, Proverbs 26:24-26

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. . . . The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.” (Exodus 15:1-3)

Today’s scripture is from the song the Israelites sang after God split the Red Sea so they could avoid their Egyptian pursuers. You may want to read the whole song, recorded in Exodus 15; it’s pretty amazing. Look at the attributes assigned to God just in these brief verses. He is their strength, defense, salvation. He’s the ultimate warrior. Frankly, the Israelites would not have known God that way if they had not been trapped with no natural way of escape. Their Red Sea experience planted faith in them for the future.

If you’re in the wilderness now, somewhere between Egypt and the Promised Land, let me encourage you. God reveals Himself in the desert. The Lord takes us through hard places, so He can be our strength, our defense, our salvation. He wants us to trust Him for everything. 🖨️ MIMBS 3

Describe a hard time that God used to teach you something that you have applied to other parts of your life.

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

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WORLD CHANGE
IF EVERY MAN WAS
DISCIPLINED
BY ANOTHER MAN?

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YOUR HELP.**

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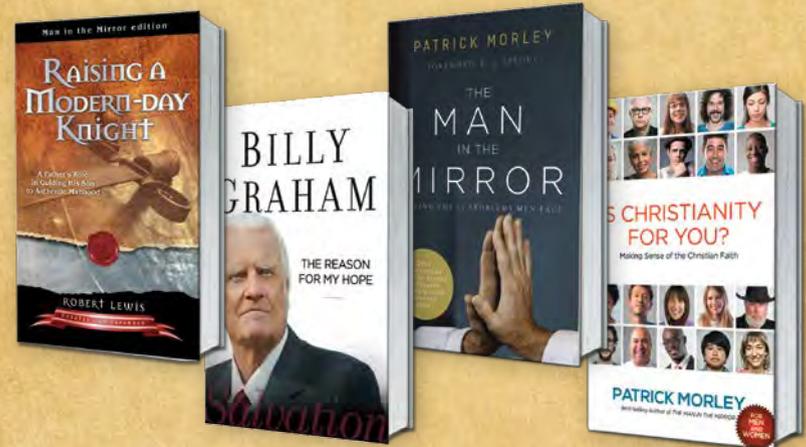
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QUOTES ON THANKSGIVING

“Sing to the LORD with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills.”

—Psalms 147:7-8

“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.”

—Abraham Lincoln,
Thanksgiving, Civil War, 1863

“Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

—Psalm 106:1

“Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.”

—William Faulkner

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

—1 Chronicles 16:34

“Pride slays thanksgiving, but an humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow.”

—Henry Ward Beecher

“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”

—2 Corinthians 4:15

“Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips, and shows itself in deeds.”

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1901

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

—Philippians 4:6

“Thou hast given so much to me, give one thing more—a grateful heart; not thankful when it pleaseth me, as if Thy blessings had spare days, but such a heart whose pulse may be Thy praise.”

—George Herbert

“To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything He has given us—and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him.”

—Thomas Merton

Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, LORD, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. (Psalm 116:7-9)

Several years ago, my friend David had just returned from a 10-day trip to Europe. He got up one morning and asked his wife if she'd like to go to breakfast. She declined, because she had scheduled a busy day. He played racquetball at noon, walked off the court and had a massive heart attack, passing away at the age of 53. David had entered his ultimate rest, and his death was “precious in the sight of the Lord” (v. 15).

Even though this was a tragedy for those left behind, I saw God work in remarkable ways. When God invades the difficult moments of our lives and infuses them with His presence and His grace, little by little we learn to trust Him. Each time, we get a glimpse of the rest available to us on a daily basis. Psalm 91 promises that the person who chooses to stay in the shelter provided by “the Most High [God] will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” Why? Because that person can say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust” (Psalm 91:1-2).

God works through our circumstances to perfect us and make us complete. Sometimes in that process, we get discouraged. That doesn't mean we're weak. It just means we don't know enough about God yet. He has more lessons for us to learn. No matter how hard things get, our circumstances offer the opportunity to know God better and to love Him more. Whatever you're going through today, you're one step closer to the end of the journey, preparing you to believe that God will ultimately take care of your soul, even in death.  MIMBS 3

Take some time to read and reflect on Psalm 116. The Psalmist says that God heard his cry for mercy, saved him from death, protected and delivered him. List some specific things God has done for you, and take some time to write your own psalm or prayer of thanksgiving.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 10:1-16:41, Hebrews 6:1-7:28, Psalm 105:16-106:12, Proverbs 27:1-6

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

For October 31–
November 6

From an easy-to-understand version of the Bible (New Living Translation, The Message, etc.), read Exodus 15:1-21.

- List some of the descriptions or characteristics of the Lord.
- How did the Lord take care of the Israelites?
- How does this relate to your life today?



Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Romans 12:16)

Morning is my favorite time of day, so I'm usually in a good mood. But nothing gets my day off to a worse start than a surly waitress at breakfast. Without a trace of a smile she slams the coffee cup down and splashes coffee on the wrist of a white shirt. Watch out, because here comes the silverware! CRASH! When that type of scenario happens repeatedly, any one of us can begin looking down on waitresses. Next time you're at a business luncheon, watch how participants treat food servers, and compare it to how they treat their colleagues. Often there's a wide gulf between the two.

Pride is a sin leading us to compare our strengths to someone else's weaknesses. Frankly, the sin of pride beguiles every Christian man. The most invisible of sins, pride seeps into the Christian life like water oozes into the moat around a sand castle on the beach. It creeps in with no effort on our part, but it requires all of our strength to keep it out.  *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

What are some ways you can identify pride in your own life? Ask another man for his thoughts.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 16:42-17:24, Hebrews 8:1-13, Psalm 106:13-31, Proverbs 27:7-9

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

I've read a cliché that says, "Humility is not thinking little of yourself; rather it's simply not thinking of yourself." A truly humble man has a godly opinion of himself based on his faith. He can be grateful for (and even proud of) who he has become because of Jesus' intervention in his life. But he can do that without comparing himself to other people. In essence, he can live by the definition of humility described in today's passage, by "not thinking of himself more highly than he ought."

Unfortunately, many men suffer from the wrong kind of humility. A sinful type of pride leads a person to compare his strengths to another person's weaknesses. But wrongful humility can lead a person to compare his weaknesses to other people's strengths. This type of self-deprecation is a grueling, harmful poison to the mind and spirit. As harmful as it is for a person to think too highly of himself, a person who succumbs to a negative self-image will sentence himself to a life of mediocrity.  *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

Describe the difference between the two types of humility explained above. List some ways you might succumb to the negative form of humility. How will you address those issues in your life?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 20:1-49, Hebrews 9:11-28, Psalm 107:1-43, Proverbs 27:11

Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. (Galatians 6:4-5)

Scripture describes two types of pride. The first, outlined in today's scripture, is not based on comparisons to other people, but instead on self-examination. The Bible stands as our yardstick for measurement. When we score well, we can congratulate ourselves, but not at the expense of others.

A second kind of pride is a spurious sense of superiority over others. C.S. Lewis once said, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." Jesus told a story about a religious leader and a tax collector (who usually associated with prostitutes, gluttons and drunks). These two men arrived at the temple simultaneously. The religious leader pompously thanked God that he was a better man than the tax collector, while the tax collector simply pleaded for God's mercy. Jesus said the tax collector left the scene "justified before God." He added, "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).  *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

What is the primary difference between the two types of pride described above?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 18:1-19:14, Hebrews 9:1-10, Psalm 106:32-48, Proverbs 27:10

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

If you were to ask the vice president of marketing at American Express for a product definition, they would say they offer prestige. When I started in the business world, I accepted that illusion. I got my father-in-law to cosign so I could get my first card—the standard green color.

Years later the Platinum Card came out. To qualify for this new level of prestige, I must spend a minimum of \$10,000 on my existing card within twelve months. I began putting everything I could on my card—airplane tickets, hotel charges, purchases of clothing. This was exactly what the company wanted. The cost for a Platinum level of prestige was more than seven times the annual fee for the green card I already owned.

I finally realized I wasn't pursuing the Platinum Card because of its extra benefits. I just thought it would make me feel more important than men who didn't have one. I understood I was letting myself be conformed to the pattern of the world around me, rather than allowing God to transform me by the renewing of my mind.  *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

How has your desire to feel more important than others lured you to make foolish decisions? How would you decide differently today?

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

Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 8:12–14)

God blessed my business career with abundance, prosperity and honor. As I mused with a friend about why God blessed me so, when other men of far greater talent struggled, he responded, “God is blessing you because He trusts you.” I’ve treasured those words. But somewhere along the way, my heart grew proud—not necessarily in arrogance, but in a subtle way of looking down on others and commending myself for superior accomplishment.

One day God decided to get my attention. He faithfully disciplined me with a test that lasted seven years. He put my business on its back, but it was the best education and the most spiritually rewarding time of my life. I wouldn’t want to repeat it, but I wouldn’t trade it for anything. It was God sparing me from a life of foolish pride.

All men tend to become satisfied and forget who God is and what He has done for us. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses cautioned the Israelites that when they become satisfied, they should praise the Lord their God and be careful not to forget Him.  MIM 25, Chapter 16

Describe a time in your life when your level of satisfaction and achievement made you susceptible to pride. What was the result?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 23:1–28:26, Hebrews 10:18–11:31, Psalm 109:1–111:10, Proverbs 27:13–16

I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before their eyes. In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin. (Psalm 36:1–2)

Sinful pride exists where there is no fear of God. This is a difficult concept to grab hold of, but the fear of God basically can be defined as a tremendous reverence for God which causes us to hate evil. God is love, but He is also holy and just. Scripture reminds us that He is “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29), and He deserves to be worshipped in reverence and awe.

A just God is worthy of reverential fear. If He were not just, He would simply be a permissive parent or a tyrant. We don’t fear permissive parents, because we know we can always talk them out of spanking. And we do fear an oppressive tyrant, because we expect to be judged without justice or mercy, punishing us beyond what we really deserve. The fear of God is a reverent understanding that He has all power and authority to respond to our sin by giving us what we do deserve. The fear of God keeps a man humble, while a lack of reverence for God feeds our sinful pride.  MIM 25, Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Today’s scripture says people with no fear of God “flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.” How have you seen that in your life? How can you grow in the fear of God?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 29:1–30:26, Hebrews 11:32–12:13, Psalm 112:1–10, Proverbs 27:17

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Do you use your wife’s hairspray? Probably not. So how did the Madison Avenue pinstripers get men to start buying hairspray? They packaged it in black cans. Black is the macho color. The Mafia drive black cars. Dark suits project a strong image. Black leather jackets are the classic icon of the tough guy. So if you want men to do something that is traditionally done only by women, appeal to the macho in the male ego, and paint the can black.

The next time you see one, compare the ingredients listed on a men’s black hairspray can to the ingredients listed on a woman’s white hairspray can. You’ll find there’s no difference inside the can, but just on the outside. The packaging is designed to allow the male ego to feel strong and powerful, like a proud lion. Much of what we do is to preserve the image we have of ourselves. The hairspray can simply shows how easily we deceive ourselves, and how much effort we put into making ourselves feel important.  MIM 25, Chapter 16

How does our desire to preserve our own image go hand in hand with pride?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 31:1–32:32, Hebrews 12:14–29, Psalm 113:1–114:8, Proverbs 27:18–20

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



November 7–13

Discuss how you have seen both pride and humility in your life.

- What is one area where you have been tempted to be proud in your life?
- Has God ever humbled you? What did He have to do to get your attention? What lessons did you learn?

God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. (James 4:6)

My incisive ways of analyzing and solving problems has been one of my greatest business strengths. It's my "go-to" asset in most cases, but it's not always what's needed. One day I returned home, only to be greeted by my wife's long face. She unfolded a typical neighborhood spat that all kids experience. But these weren't just any kids—these were our kids, and the day had been particularly difficult. I listened carefully and offered three easy steps to patch things up. I realized I had erred when she burst into tears. She wasn't really interested in my keen analytical powers. She just wanted someone to listen.

Our greatest strength at work may not be a strength at home. In the same way, when we become confident in our Christian walk, that strength can become a weakness if it leads to pride. Because Christians pursue a moral lifestyle, we can easily gloat that our morality is superior to those around us. But God prefers a humble sinner to a proud religious man. *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

Have you been tempted to gloat that your morality exceeds that of other people around you? How have you responded to that temptation? Share your thoughts with your group.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 33:1–34:31, Hebrews 13:1–25, Psalm 115:1–18, Proverbs 27:21–22

Thursday—November 17 • No Pecking Orders

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:35–39)

As a teenager I tried raising chickens. The venture began as a commercial enterprise, but it became more educational than profitable. My flock made its own chicken coop rules. The boss chicken could peck on anybody. Then there was the number two chicken, who could peck on anyone except number one. The number three chicken could peck on everyone except numbers one and two. And so it went. The poor chicken at the end of the pecking order was flat out of luck and truly henpecked!

We often organize society into similar pecking orders, but Christ came to usher in a new order. He required His followers to love their neighbors as themselves. That disintegrated the pecking order, challenging us to treat all people as our equals. Consider the surly waitress you recently encountered. Whether she was young or old, I guarantee she's working because she must, and her circumstances are less than rosy. Perhaps, instead of complaining, we should make an effort to demonstrate real love. Maybe we should even get really practical and double the tip! *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

Describe a time when you or someone you know upset the expected "pecking order." What was the result?

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

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community. (Proverbs 6:16–19)

Pride is the first of the seven cardinal sins listed in today's scripture. It's also a fountainhead of other sins. Through the passageway of pride, men pass into the sins of a hard heart. Pride is the patriarch of man's sin.

Once I was given a bit of advice, unsolicited, from a man not as commercially successful as I was. He counseled me not to build a particular building. I ignored his advice, thinking I was wiser. Within months I was in the grip of a gigantic fight for survival. The building wasn't leasing up fast enough, and the mortgage payments were eating us alive. My pride had led me to an error in judgment—a failure to seek counsel. Scripture warns us, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22).

Pride can lead to discord, jealousy, conceit, haughtiness, boasting, fits of rage, envy, arrogance, an independent spirit, hatred, self-righteousness, a judgmental and sanctimonious attitude. At its most basic level, pride is a gateway into a sinful lifestyle that may look good outwardly, but inside it is full of moral decay, and it does not please God. *MIM 25, Chapter 16*

Describe an area of your life—work, wife, kids, friends, etc. —where pride is hurting you. How? What can you do about it? Ask another man for his thoughts.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 37:1–41:26, James 1:19–4:17, Psalm 117:1–118:29, Proverbs 28:1–5

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

November 14–20

Discuss how pride affects men and what you can do about it.

- In which areas of their lives are men most tempted to be proud?
- Why do you think that is? What problems does this create?
- How can you avoid these dangers in your life?



And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6)

About 10 years ago, I had a chance over the Christmas holidays to go with my family and my wife's family to New York. While we were there, we went to see a Broadway show called *The Music Man*. Through a chain of relationships, we were invited backstage after the play. Suddenly I understood the great difference between sitting in an audience to watch people do something on stage, and actually conversing with the lead actor and lead actress.

Similarly, many people feel a sense of awe from watching God's activity, as if He were on stage. But the relationship is so much better when you actually enter into dialogue with Him through prayer. I like to say that prayer is the conversation that turns salvation into a close relationship. Think about someone you know who is a good conversationalist. That person probably spends as much time listening as talking.

Real prayer is like that, too. It's about talking with God—not at Him. The goal of real prayer has more to do with communion than communication.  MIMBS 4

This devotional says, "The goal of real prayer has more to do with communion than communication." What does that mean to you?

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 42:1-43:27, James 5:1-20, Psalm 119:1-16, Proverbs 28:6-7

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (James 5:16b-18)

Martin Luther famously commented once, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." He understood that prayer really is the most effective use of time. Our world depends on work. But prayer is more powerful than work, because it releases forces that will not be contained.

Summer is always a difficult financial season for ministry. But several years ago, we faced a particularly challenging summer. The stock market had bottomed out and giving fell off. I was building my faith and praying a couple of passages related to God supplying our needs. We had 20 full-time staff. Payday was five days away, and we had absolutely no money for payroll. I wrote in my journal, "God, I don't believe You have failed me, but I feel You have failed me." I was honest, because I'm in relationship with God. But I expressed my belief in His sustaining power. By payday, we had the money we needed.

Prayer accomplished what work could not do.  MIMBS 4

Describe a time in your own life, or in the life of someone you've observed, when prayer accomplished what work could not do.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 45:13-46:24, 1 Peter 1:13-2:10, Psalm 119:33-48, Proverbs 28:11

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1)

I used to row a skull—a 25-foot long boat that weighs about 42 pounds with full rigging. At one point, I had been doing this for about eight years, and my neighbor said, "You really look peaceful out there when you're rowing. You look so calm." I laughed, because the picture he painted was the total opposite of what was really happening.

You see, a skull is something like a giant toothpick. It's long and skinny, and it has absolutely no stability. I took a few lessons the first year I had it, and then I didn't learn anything more after that. Practice does not necessarily mean progress. I realized that, unless I learned something new about the art of rowing, I probably would never get any better.

The same is true of prayer. People who really are committed to conversing with God usually know they need to sit from time to time with Jesus, in the "school of prayer." Scripture gives worthwhile lessons and examples to teach us more and more about prayer.  MIMBS 4

What one thing have you learned most recently about prayer? Share your thoughts with a few other men.

Daily Reading: Ezekiel 44:1-45:12, 1 Peter 1:1-12, Psalm 119:17-32, Proverbs 28:8-10

Saul said, "Let us go down and pursue the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive." "Do whatever seems best to you," they replied. But the priest said, "Let us inquire of God here." (1 Samuel 14:36)

A man who really wants to relate with God will find prayer becoming the disposition of his heart. The Old Testament records a stark contrast between Israel's first king, Saul, and the young man who followed him, David. Saul repeatedly failed to understand God's purpose. He rashly went ahead with his own plans rather than praying and submitting to God's plans. In the end, his kingdom was stripped from him and his family.

For David, prayer was generally the disposition of his heart. He sought God repeatedly. As a result, Scripture calls him a "man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22). He spent significant time with God, until God's desires became David's desires.

God has not established set rules or methods for prayer. Some people pray through a daily list; others keep a prayer journal. I often pray through the Lord's Prayer. I mention a phrase, then let my mind wander to the application of each phrase in the things I am facing. Pray in the way that works for you, and in the process make prayer the disposition of your heart.  MIMBS 4

List the situations you are facing right now. Has prayer been your first response in each of those situations? Take some time now and pray through these needs.

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

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

Occasionally young men will tell me they're too busy to pray. They have young children, they're heavily involved at church, and they're working their way up the ladder in the career. I tell them, "I used to be that way, too. I'll tell you what changed things for me."

I discovered that, when management guru Peter Drucker would meet with a young executive, one of the first things he required was a chart showing how the young man or woman invested time. Inevitably, the executive was surprised. So I charted how I was using my time. I found I had a one- to two-hour block every evening when I was watching TV. Even if that's just weekdays and not weekends, that's five to ten hours per week. And I wasn't watching specific programs, but I was absorbing whatever was on in that time slot. Most of it was lusty and sensual, and it was tempting me to think things I didn't want to think. I said to myself, "I want to spend more time with God, and less time being tempted." So I started going to bed two hours earlier rather than watching TV, and getting up two hours earlier to spend time in Bible study and prayer.

Some people think I'm crazy when they hear I'm up at 4 a.m., but for me, it's worth it. I'm conversing with the Lord of the Universe. We might not want to admit it, but the reality is, each of us will end up doing exactly what we really want to do. If you really want to have a close relationship with Jesus, you can have it. But you have to do the things included in the definition of "close relationship," and one of those things is having conversation. It doesn't matter if you're young or middle-aged or old—God has given an open invitation. He says, "Let's talk." How will you respond?  MIMBS 4

How are you responding to God's invitation to enter into conversation with Him?

Daily Reading: Daniel 1:1–4:37, 1 Peter 3:8–5:14, 2 Peter 1:1–21, Psalm 119:65–112, Proverbs 28:14–18

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (James 1:19–20)

Daniel and his wife were driving home from a welcomed night out for dinner. Baltimore's streets teemed with traffic. As Daniel slowed for a red light, a cab driver swerved into the narrow space in front of Daniel's car. Daniel leaned on the horn and yelled expletives, but when the light turned green, the driver took off.

"I'm going to teach him a lesson!" Daniel muttered. He chased the cab down the street, honking and screaming and waving his hands. Finally, the cab driver caught a red light, and Daniel pulled alongside the passenger door. He ranted to no avail, because the cab's window was rolled up. After about 30 seconds, the cab driver leaned over, rolled down his window and dryly asked Daniel, "What do you want me to do—drop dead?"

Everyone faces situations that produce anger. I'd guess that 99 percent of the time, our motivations are anchored in selfishness and impatience. Angry words are like irretrievable arrows released from an archer's bow. Once they land, the damage cannot be undone.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Describe a situation in the last few weeks that made you angry. How did you respond? Now examine your motivations. What was the root cause of your anger?

Daily Reading: Daniel 5:1–31, 2 Peter 2:1–22, Psalm 119:113–128, Proverbs 28:19–20

An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins. (Proverbs 29:22)

Anger lurks behind the closed doors of most of our homes. Personally, I've never lost my temper at the office. Frankly, I wouldn't want my colleagues to think I couldn't control myself. And I'm glad to say, I've become more patient with each passing year. But I have to admit, when we had children at home, rarely a week passed without the sparks of family life providing good tinder for a roaring fire of anger.

We put on a good show at work and in our social gatherings, but how you are behind the closed doors of your own private castle is how you really are. Anger destroys the quality of our personal lives, our marriages, and our health. When anger pierces the soul of the home, the lifeblood of the family starts draining away. You may notice that a secretary seems to find you attractive. You reflect on how your wife no longer appreciates you. It never occurs to you that, if the secretary knew the angry you, she would find you about as desirable as a flat tire.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Do you find it easier to hold your temper in public, or in the confines of your own home? Why do you think that is true?

Daily Reading: Daniel 6:1–28, 2 Peter 3:1–18, Psalm 119:129–152, Proverbs 28:21–22

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



November 21–27

After reading this week's devotions, discuss the importance and priority of prayer.

- What are some reasons why prayer is important?
- Have you seen this in your own life?
- Has prayer ever been a struggle for you? What lessons did you learn through that time?

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared. (Proverbs 22:24–25)

- **Freddie Flash** has a short fuse. Freddie explodes at the slightest provocation, but because his anger subsides quickly, he thinks the harm is inconsequential. It hasn't dawned on him that it's not the single occurrence but the frequency that has branded him as someone to avoid. He has an anger frequency problem.
- **Cary Control** doesn't become angry every day, but when his long fuse finally burns down, the dynamite explodes! He loses control and strikes out with a verbal tirade that makes his wife's knees wobble and his children flinch in terror. He has an anger intensity problem.
- **Gary Grudge** never has an outburst of anger, but he seethes and plots revenge. He has an anger duration problem.

Freddie Flash, Cary Control, and Gary Grudge illustrate three different expressions of anger, but they all may be triggered by the same circumstance. A lack of explosion doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of anger. A person who seems calm on the surface may simply be hiding the anger seething inside.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Which of these three examples most clearly illustrates the way you deal with anger? List some ways this has impacted those closest to you.

Daily Reading: Daniel 7:1–28, 1 John 1:1–10, Psalm 119:153–176, Proverbs 28:23–24

Thursday—December 1 • What Sparks Anger?

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. (Psalm 37:7–8)

In a life fully surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ, certain situations offer an opportunity to become angry or to trust God with yet another area of our lives:

- **Violation of rights.** Everyone believes they have certain rights. On a physical level, for instance, we each feel we have certain “space” rights. Psychologists tell us we consider an 18-inch zone in front of our faces as private. When someone violates our right to that space, one common response is anger.
- **Disappointment with one's station in life.** Many men become bitter with anger when they begin to suspect that their “oyster” doesn't carry the pearl they wanted. For a person who isn't content with what he has, the issue isn't usually getting more, but it's in learning to be content.
- **Blocked goals.** Setting and achieving realistic goals can be a great source of personal satisfaction. But when we don't achieve our goals, anger often results.

Today's scripture gives a biblical response to each of those three issues: Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Which situation listed above is most difficult for you? Why? How can you move to a more and more biblical response?

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

Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

A desire to follow Jesus and imitate Him will produce the opportunity to demonstrate that commitment through our responses to situations that kindle our anger.

- **Irritations:** Nothing is more irritating to me than a sticky shirt. You know what I mean—you climb into a car that's as hot as an oven. Within minutes, sweat drips down your face, and your T-shirt is soaked. When you reach your destination, you crawl out of the car, but your shirt doesn't—it's still stuck to the seat. If you're like me, when you're irritated, you can be more easily provoked.
- **Feeling misunderstood:** Dr. Henry Brandt once said, “Other people don't create your spirit; they only reveal it.” When my feelings get hurt, and anger begins its predictable rise, I try to remind myself that the other person isn't making me angry; they only reveal the anger already there. We often think people don't understand our feelings, our attitudes, our abilities and potential. They probably don't. But holding a pity party doesn't resolve the misunderstanding.
- **Unrealistic expectations:** I expect strangers to let me down. But when my Christian friends let me down, it tends to upset me. Sometimes we don't build enough slack into what we expect from our loved ones. No one is perfect. Everyone trips up sometimes, and we need to build some freedom into our expectations.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Ephesians 4:31–32 says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Choose one circumstance described above, and explain how this passage defuses the potential anger in that situation.

Daily Reading: Daniel 9:1–12:13, 1 John 2:18–4:21, Psalm 121:1–123:4, Proverbs 28:27–29:4

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

November 28– December 4

After reading these devotions, discuss your experience with anger.

- Has there ever been a time that your anger got you into trouble?
- What happened? What were the consequences?
- How has God helped you to overcome your anger?



But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. (Colossians 3:8)

With God's help, most men can work to "rid themselves of anger." This may be a slow process, but most men gradually will see improvement. Occasionally, though, a man will have a problem with anger because of an illness or emotional disorder. A man abused as a child has a higher statistical probability of having the same anger problem as his own father. A man whose frequent and intense eruptions of anger alienates family members, or worse, cause a man to strike family members during his angry outbursts, should seek professional counseling immediately.

Frankly, most of our anger is rooted in sin, and it has two characteristics in common: selfishness and impatience. We are happy as a clam when people agree with us, let us have our own way, and give us what we want. But the reality is, they don't always see it our way, and our selfishness and impatience often leads to outbursts.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

Has your anger ever alienated a loved one? How did you respond? What was the result? Share your experience with another man.

Daily Reading: Hosea 1:1–3:5, 1 John 5:1–21, Psalm 124:1–8, Proverbs 29:5–8

Tuesday—December 6 • Is Anger Ever Justified?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah 58:6–7)

Anger may erupt in our homes when the phone rings just as the family is sitting down to dinner. Irritation may rise with an associate who is habitually late. We may rage at the subcompact that dives into the space ahead of us as we slow down for a red light. Many of our outbursts are actually expressions of selfishness and impatience. Yet sometimes anger is a very appropriate response. Unfortunately, many things that *should* make us angry usually *don't*.

God clearly calls His followers to "loose the chains of injustice." When we observe a miscarriage of justice against another person, a controlled, focused anger—some would call it righteous indignation—can propel us to work for a positive result. For instance, when the stench of prejudice and bigotry fills our nostrils, this type of anger will consume righteous men with a passion to correct the evils they see. The greatness of our country rests on a bedrock of our hatred of injustice.

 MIM 25, Chapter 18

Describe one type of injustice that disgusts you and inflames your anger. How can that anger fuel you to work for change with that specific issue?

Daily Reading: Hosea 4:1–5:15, 2 John 1:1–13, Psalm 125:1–5, Proverbs 29:9–11

Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest. (Proverbs 26:2)

Each of us occasionally feels the biting sting of betrayal, and it may ignite our anger. The first time I spread my wings in business to fly higher, the pellets started whistling by my ears. "He doesn't have the necessary expertise... I heard he's having cash flow problems..." As the undeserved rumors and snide remarks made their way back to me, I was devastated. I was trying to rise above the quagmire of mediocrity, but I felt like people were aiming their proverbial shotguns at me.

One morning I lamented to God over this unfair criticism. He drew my attention to the proverb quoted above. Since then I don't concern myself with what others say about me. I simply recall God's promise, given to everyone who is falsely maligned. In some mysterious way, by God's intervention, an undeserved curse will not rest in the hearer's mind. You probably remember hearing juicy gossip about someone you know, and you discerned that it wasn't true. Trust that God can do the same for you.  MIM 25, Chapter 18

How can this verse placate anger in a situation where you've been falsely maligned, and you feel betrayed? Ask another man for his thoughts.

Daily Reading: Hosea 6:1–9:17, 3 John 1:1–14, Psalm 126:1–6, Proverbs 29:12–14

Thursday—December 8 • Paying a Penalty

A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; rescue them, and you will have to do it again. (Proverbs 19:19)

Anger has its own consequences. Our company once had an executive who became angry at the slightest provocation. He terrorized the secretarial staff, and none of the other executives wanted to work with him. I continued to forgive and forget, until word finally reached me about the impact of his anger. He had alienated most of the leasing brokers in town, and these were people we relied on to help lease our buildings. The straw that broke the camel's back came when I learned he was chewing out tenants who were calling in routine maintenance requests.

One morning I asked him to come to my office. "Fred," I said, "I love you. I really do. But the business portion of our relationship has come to its natural conclusion. You're fired." A hot-tempered man must bear the consequences of his actions, or he will never learn how to control his anger.

 MIM 25, Chapter 18

Proverbs 19:19 stands as a warning for people who regularly give in to their temper. How does this apply to you? How does it apply in your relationship with someone else who is hot-tempered? Explain your answer.

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

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26–27)

Anger usually works its way into sin. Patience brings peace, while anger usually sparks anger in others. Before long, our remark about the other guy’s ugly tattoo escalates into accusations about our mother’s heritage. Ephesians 4:26–27 gives the best guideline for handling anger. It includes three bits of wisdom: Control yourself; don’t go to bed mad; understand that anger leaves a crack where the devil can gain a foothold in your life.

Scripture gives many guidelines that help us respond to anger:

- **Keep control.** “Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end” (Proverbs 29:11).
- **Overlook offenses.** “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11).
- **Appease anger.** “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

If you’re an angry man, and you want to change, the first thing you need to understand is that you can’t do it on your own. But Jesus in you can and will give you the power to succeed—usually over time—if you invite Him to guide you, to help you identify the reasons for your anger, to forgive you and then change you into an unselfish and patient man.  MIMBS 5, Chapter 18

Are you willing to seek forgiveness for the times you’ve sinned in anger, and to ask God to change you into an unselfish and patient man? Write a brief prayer and put it in your Bible where you can refer to it often.

Daily Reading: Joel 1:1–3:21, Amos 1:1–6:14, Revelation 1:1–3:6, Psalm 128:1–130:8, Proverbs 29:18–22

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, it’s easy to get pulled into the text—the encounters, conversations and miracles. We can forget, however, that we are a part of the story.

Try reading Scripture on three levels. The first is a “what you see is what you get” real-time reality; Jesus is doing what Jesus is doing—pursuing people and things according to His Father’s purpose.

The second level is that every time Jesus is doing what He is doing, He is simultaneously training His disciples. He knows they’re watching His every move, and He’s investing in them so that they will be equipped to invest in others.

But the third level is that every time Jesus is doing what He is doing, He is also intentionally training us. Jesus knew His actions and words would be recorded and discussed by millions of people in every age to come. We must look carefully at what He chooses to reveal to us, and why.  MIMBS 5

Do you tend to read about Jesus’ life as a historian, witness, or participant? What does each level show you?

Daily Reading: Amos 7:1–9:15, Revelation 3:7–22, Psalm 131:1–3, Proverbs 29:23

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1–2)

Every person is fighting some battle and needs to be redeemed or delivered. With every step He took and word He spoke, Jesus knew that we would be reading about how He looked for and fought these battles.

When Jesus arrived in Capernaum in Mark chapter 1, He identified where each person was losing his battle. He saw sheep without a shepherd and acted. He delivered those who needed to be delivered and redeemed those who needed to be redeemed.

He came to each situation with two things: power (“He taught them as one who had authority” [Mark 1:22]), and purpose (“Jesus replied, Let us go...so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” [Mark 1:38]). Perhaps most significantly, He prayed. Verse 35 says Jesus got up early in the morning and went to a place to be alone and talk with God.

Power, purpose and prayer. Those were Jesus’ weapons in the battles He faced. They should be ours as well.  MIMBS 5

What are some of the battles other men in your life are fighting? How can power, purpose and prayer help in these battles?

Daily Reading: Obadiah 1:1–21, Revelation 4:1–11, Psalm 132:1–18, Proverbs 29:24–25

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



December 5–11

Read the devotional aloud from December 7.

- Why is betrayal such a difficult thing to experience?
- Have you ever been betrayed by someone close to you? What was that like? How did you move beyond it?

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. (Mark 1:21)

There is a story told about two researchers who were going to collect data about the religious practices of the people in a small village in India. On the way, they accidentally ran over and killed a large cobra. Later, the villagers told them, “We worship the cobra god and give it something to eat twice a day.” Nervously, the researchers showed them the dead cobra, and then told them about the real God. Immediately upon hearing this, many villagers became Christians.

It’s significant that the very first recorded action of Jesus upon arriving in Capernaum was to teach the truth of the real God in the synagogue. Jesus knew the nature of the most pressing battle: the people were living in ignorance, unequipped and lost.

The researchers didn’t miss the pattern of Jesus. They recognized that the people were in darkness due to their ignorance and they taught them the Word of God. And just like that, because these researchers were willing to go where the battle was and fight it, light burst in  MIMBS 5

What is an opportunity you will have in the next week to speak the gospel into a dark place? Pray with some brothers that you will be prepared for the battle.

Daily Reading: Jonah 1:1–4–11, Revelation 5:1–14, Psalm 133:1–3, Proverbs 29:26–27

Thursday—December 15 • Battles of Deliverance

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. (Mark 1:32)

After Jesus taught in the synagogue, He heard that Simon’s mother-in-law was bedridden with a fever. The Word tells us He “went to her, took her hand and helped her up” (Mark 1:31).

The battle of many in that synagogue was ignorance, but this woman’s battle was illness. Jesus didn’t dismiss it as unimportant or tell her it would pass on its own. Not all battles are about spiritual redemption. Jesus approached every type of battle with the same power and sense of purpose.

Jesus existed to bring victory, and modeled the details for us, His followers, in Scripture. Now we are the ones doing the teaching, battling evil and healing disease, empowered by His Spirit. His Spirit is enticing you to go where the battle is, no matter if it’s physical, financial, emotional, or spiritual.  MIMBS 5

Is someone experiencing a battle that you feel equipped to help bring victory? Pray that God would open your eyes to opportunities to reveal Him in this way.

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

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. (Mark 1:38)

Though successful ministries may differ in style, format, age, size, etc., three common components are always present: vision, determination, and a sustainable strategy. The same is true for all of us as we prepare for spiritual battle.

Vision—Jesus gives us a vision to reach people when He calls us to make disciples. But it’s easy to become so consumed by our own battles that we grow blind to the battles others are facing. Pray fervently, invest in relationships, and look for opportunities to see needs and meet them. Mark Batterson, in his book, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*, reminds us that “playing it safe is risky. Lion chasers are always on the lookout for God-ordained opportunities.” Don’t grow passive and lose your vision of the battle plan.

Determination—Be committed to figuring out how to get it done no matter what. “Let us not become weary in doing good,” the Word encourages us, “for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

A Sustainable Strategy—The simple story of what happened in Capernaum is the foundation for the most sustainable strategy that has ever been introduced into human history. No government or institution has sustained itself as long as Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus taught the Word of God to redeem the people and free them from ignorance. He went and met people right where they were to deliver them.

Our vision is to seek and save the lost. We must be determined to meet the challenge and reap the harvest. And finally we must have a strategy that is sustainable—one that relies not on our power, but the power of the Holy Spirit.  MIMBS 5

Do you have a vision right now for reaching people? If not, what stands in your way? Talk about this with your group.

Daily Reading: Micah 5:1–7:20, Nahum 1:1–3:19, Habakkuk 1:1–3:19, Revelation 7:1–9:21, Psalm 135:1–137:9, Proverbs 30:5–10

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

December 12–18

From the devotion “Battle Plan” on this page, what are three essentials to life and a successful ministry?

- Why is vision so important to success?
- Why do life and ministry take determination?
- How does a sustainable strategy serve you in life and ministry?



In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. (Luke 2:1-3)

Luke addressed his account of Jesus' earthly life to a specific individual, and he explained his purpose like this: "I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4, emphasis added). Luke adds historical detail which eliminates any comparison to the "once upon a time" fairy tale feeling characterizing myths from other religions.

Luke describes a baby born to a virgin. He refers to a host of angels announcing the Savior's birth. Most of us know the story, but maybe our familiarity causes us to lose track of how extraordinary and incredulous these events really are. Luke's historic backdrop provides a gritty, real life context for this supernatural event. A first-century reader could easily verify, or perhaps even remember, an edict from Caesar affecting the entire Roman world. Luke offered a specific time / place context that supports the historical reality of this one-time event, the birth of a baby destined to offer eternal salvation to a broken world.

Galatians 4:4 tells us, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman ..." How do the historical events listed in today's passage demonstrate the importance of the timing of Jesus' birth?

Daily Reading: Zephaniah 1:1-3:20, Revelation 10:1-11, Psalm 138:1-8, Proverbs 30:11-14

Tuesday—December 20 • A Humble Beginning

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:6, 7)

Following a low point in his life, George Frideric Handel received words intended for a long vocal work. Inspired by the scriptural words, in the summer of 1741, Handel began composing. He often lost sleep and skipped meals, writing the entire *Messiah* within just a few weeks. Historians tell us Handel's assistant found him in tears as he completed the incomparable "Hallelujah Chorus." Handel said he almost thought he saw heaven open, allowing him to glimpse God. That renowned chorus, often sung at Christmas, reveals Christ as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (see also Revelation 17:14 and 19:16), sovereign over every earthly power.

Yet Luke reveals that same Jesus as a baby with a humble beginning. He shows a teenaged woman, separated from her family and giving birth in an unfamiliar place. He describes crowded conditions requiring that young lady to use a manger as a crib for her newborn. This picture of the King of kings, ensconced in an animals' feeding trough, speaks of the tremendous humility Jesus expressed in His willingness to identify with our humanity.

Philippians 2 describes Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (verses 6-8). Why is Jesus' humility remarkable? Write a prayer of thanks for Jesus' willingness to identify with you in your humanity.

Daily Reading: Haggai 1:1-2:23, Revelation 11:1-19, Psalm 139:1-24, Proverbs 30:15-16

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (Luke 2:8)

Despite the reality that many great biblical heroes (including Moses and David) were shepherds, the New Testament culture considered shepherding to be a lowly vocation. Judaism's oral law, collected and written in the Mishnah, actually describes shepherds as incompetent. It even warns people to avoid buying anything from a shepherd, assuming it would be stolen property. Some scholars tell us shepherds were considered so untrustworthy, they were not allowed to testify in court.

Yet God chose shepherds as the first non-family witnesses to the birth of Jesus. He reversed social expectations, trusting outcasts with a message that had significance for the entire world—good news that Jesus the Savior had arrived. Even from His birth, Jesus identified with the lowly and offered dignity to the outcast. God didn't share the news of salvation's greatest gift with the religious or political elite. Rather, He chose the least likely witnesses around Bethlehem, and He used them to share the good news of salvation throughout the region. Anyone with a negative reputation can still find dignity and purpose by listening for and obeying God's message.

Through an Old Testament prophet, God told His people, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Reflect on several of the ways that Jesus turns conventional wisdom upside down. How does that encourage you in your own life?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 1:1-21, Revelation 12:1-17, Psalm 140:1-13, Proverbs 30:17

Thursday—December 22 • Spreading the Word about Jesus

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:15)

In Scripture, the angels actually told the shepherds how to identify the newborn Messiah. He would be the one wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (see Luke 2:12). No other baby in Bethlehem would fit that description. The shepherds hurried to see the promised Messiah for themselves. Their story included incredible, supernatural elements that might stretch their hearers' ability to believe. Their culture disrespected their profession and considered them to be untrustworthy scoundrels. Yet this band of shepherds didn't seem to hesitate, wondering whether anyone would believe them. They just were so full of excitement, they "spread the word." Scripture indicates all who heard responded with amazement. The message of Jesus authenticates itself in the hearts of all that God calls.

In a similar way, when we've encountered Christ, our response should be to share with others. We can't control their response, but we certainly can give them the opportunity to respond with amazement as they see the reality of Jesus, born anew in our lives.

*Do you have confidence in the message Jesus?
How can you share Him with another person today?*

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

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God... (Luke 2:27-28)

Forty days after Jesus was born, as required by Old Testament law, Jesus' parents presented Him at the Temple. No angelic fanfare preceded their arrival. No heavenly entourage alerted people to Jesus' identity. Yet two people—one male and one female—picked them out from the crowd, recognizing this newborn Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Simeon is described as a man expectantly awaiting the fulfillment of God's promise that he would live to see the Messiah. Scripture tells us nothing about Simeon's background—not even his marital status or his occupation. But we do know his character, for Luke describes him as "righteous and devout," also indicating he was able to discern and obey the Holy Spirit's voice.

Verses 36-38 describe a meeting with an elderly prophetess named Anna—a long-time widow whose lifestyle was worship, prayer and fasting at the temple. Both of these godly people recognized and understood the true identity of the baby held in Mary's arms.

Woodrow Wilson once said, "All things come to him who waits—provided he knows what he is waiting for." These two senior saints, beloved of God, searched Scripture and acquainted themselves with the Holy Spirit. While so many others in the crowd remained oblivious to the presence of God in their midst, these two recognized their Savior, because their daily choices prepared them to know Who they were waiting for.

Read Luke 2: 22-38. List the character qualities identified in Simeon and Anna. How can you apply yourself to developing those same character qualities?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 4:1-8:23, Revelation 14:1-16:21, Psalm 142:1-144:15, Proverbs 30:21-31

A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city; disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel. (Proverbs 18:19)

Several years ago during a NASCAR race, Tony Stewart nudged Jeff Gordon's back bumper. Gordon crashed into the wall and was out of the race. In an interview a few minutes later, Gordon said something like, "The next time Tony's holding me up, it'll only take about a half a lap for him to be out of my way." I remember thinking, now that's escalating a quarrel.

Quarrels and disputes can be quite expensive. Wrecked cars are nothing compared to wrecked relationships. We all offend brothers on occasion—sometimes on purpose! But the practical advice of the Bible leads us to resolve these conflicts. Jesus even put it in the "top two" when He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19).

When you're facing conflict, remember that being a peacemaker requires strength and courage, but it also offers a great reward.  MIMBS 6

From your own experience, describe a quarrel that led to division and separation. How could the participants have avoided the costly result?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 9:1-17, Revelation 17:1-18, Psalm 145:1-21, Proverbs 30:32

Tuesday—December 27 • No Divisions

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another... that there may be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

The apostle Paul addressed a division that occurred in the Corinthian church. Factions were being created in the congregation. Paul used a positive approach with the Corinthians, urging them rather than commanding them. But his language is very strong. If things were not resolved, he saw a split coming.

Paul had invested about 18 months with this congregation. He spoke as a spiritual older brother when he wrote, "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). Paul basically says, "I'm a little surprised that after all you've received, you still are behaving like cultural Christians rather than real Christians."

Paul clearly cared for this group of believers, and he also cared about how they represented Jesus to others. Love often requires gracious confrontation, so both parties can avoid the high cost of division and separation.  MIMBS 6

Do you have a spiritual "older brother" who can speak forcefully and lovingly into your life? If so, how has he helped you through difficult situations? If not, how could you find someone to fill that role?

Daily Reading: Zechariah 10:1-11:17, Revelation 18:1-24, Psalm 146:1-10, Proverbs 30:33

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP



December 19-25

As you celebrate Christmas, give God glory by:

- Loving your family.
- Having fun with friends.
- Showing care to people in your community.

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

Jesus said His followers would be noticed because of their love for one another. Jesus did not say, “All men will know you are my disciples when you finally establish a perfect theology.” Having correct doctrine is extremely valuable. But when all is said and done, theology is the result of someone trying to see God clearly while looking through warped glass. That’s the imperfect result of a finite man trying to comprehend an infinite God. You can try to perfect your theology, but at the end of the day you have to surrender to a little mystery.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is that we should love God, and the second is that we should love our neighbors. So perhaps today, we need to be less concerned about asking who is right and who is wrong on the finer points of theology. And instead, we need to ask ourselves, “How can I love other Christians in a way that others will know I am a disciple of Jesus Christ?” *MIMBS 6*

*Have you felt pressure to have a “perfect theology”?
Have you ever found yourself putting this above loving a brother in Christ?*

Daily Reading: Zechariah 12:1–13:9, Revelation 19:1–21, Psalm 147:1–20, Proverbs 31:1–7

Thursday—December 29 • Restoring a Brother

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1–2)

Every man eventually will face at least one major disagreement with a Christian brother. Several years ago I talked to a man who was on the verge of walking away from one of his friends, because he was embarrassed by the man’s behavior. His friend was acting very worldly, doing things like ragging on sales clerks and blowing up at waitresses.

We talked about the situation, and we dealt with this question: What would brotherly love do? We came to the conclusion that he shouldn’t terminate the relationship, but neither should he leave things at status quo. He would confront the friend, like Paul confronted the Corinthians when he noted, “My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you” (1 Corinthians 1:11).

Paul jumped into the middle of the issue that threatened their unity. Very few people really enjoy conflict. But at some point, true love will prayerfully and gently initiate some difficult conversations. *MIMBS 6*

*Have you ever been confronted “prayerfully and gently”? What was the result?
Explain how it might have ended differently if you had been confronted in anger.*

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

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Proverbs 12:18)

About five years ago, my wife Patsy broke her ankle. It never healed correctly, so eventually she had outpatient surgery to put in some screws and a plate. I don’t know what the doctors used for her anesthesia, but when we left, she was pretty loopy. On the way home, she asked me if I had called our daughter. I told her yes, I had. Ten minutes later she asked the same question. And 10 minutes later she asked again. I was thinking, *Wow! I didn’t know foot surgery could affect the brain!* That’s how much she was thrown off balance by the medication.

Patsy was supposed to keep her foot elevated for several days, and then she was scheduled for a follow-up appointment. So that first evening, I was doing my best to care for her, but frankly, she just didn’t want to accept the limitations required by her doctor. We ended up in one little quarrel, then another little quarrel, and then another.

I do not enjoy conflict at all, but finally I initiated a hard conversation. I reached way into our past and said, “Patsy, do you remember that a few years ago you and I made a covenant that if one of us ever got sick, we would do our utmost not to be a difficult person to the caregiver?” Instead of getting mad and letting the situation escalate, I went right at it. I wasn’t angry or hostile or reckless. I tried to be gentle and to consider what was best for Patsy. But I didn’t ignore the situation either.

Positive confrontation isn’t easy or fun. But it is an expression of love. It brings healing and it protects relationships, because it defuses quarrels and heals divisions. *MIMBS 6*

How might these lessons apply to a situation you are currently facing in your workplace? How about in your home? Or in your church?

Daily Reading: Malachi 1:1–4:6, Revelation 21:1–22:21, Psalm 149:1–150:6, Proverbs 31:10–31

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

December 26–31

Have each person write their name in the middle of a sheet of paper, then write the names of every person they have a relationship with, drawing a line from their name to each person listed.

- Looking at your paper, what do you notice? Do you have more or less relationships than you thought?
- Draw lines between people who have relationships with each other (e.g., your wife to your child). How interconnected are your relationships?
- If you have an unresolved conflict with one person, how does that affect other people on your paper? How would you counsel someone who is in a conflict with someone based on your own network of relationships?



WHAT GOD HAS DONE 30 YEARS OF MAN IN THE MIRROR

by David Delk

Is there any chance that God could use a big vision and a few eager staff in Orlando to reach and disciple the men of America and the world?

Could He use their efforts to help rescue millions of men, to transform marriages, and to restore godly fathers to children? Thirty years ago this might have seemed like wishful thinking—now, because of God’s faithfulness and our wonderful partners, it’s beginning to look like just a matter of time.

In 1986, Patrick Morley began teaching a men’s Bible study in Orlando, which still meets each Friday. In 1989, he authored *The Man in the Mirror*, a book stemming from his own search for meaning, purpose, and a deeper relationship with God. The book became a best seller and in 1991, Dr. Morley transitioned from his privately-held real estate business and founded the ministry that is now Man in the Mirror.

Since its inception MIM has developed a variety of innovative discipleship and training products that equip church leaders to disciple the men in their churches. In contrast to many other men-focused ministries—MIM focuses on equipping church leaders to disciple all the men in their church and community.

MIM’s programs, products, and services include numerous leadership training

events, a book distribution program, hundreds of resources (CD/DVD series, books, curricula, Bible studies, etc.), a robust website, a radio minute, a quarterly devotional magazine, various newsletters, and other resources, all geared toward transforming the hearts of men. In addition, it has forged partnerships with several large denominations, providing ready access to receptive pastors and leaders. MIM has had ministry interactions with more than 30,000 churches.

The Friday morning Bible study is currently attended in person by approximately 125 men and viewed online by another 10,000. MIM encourages leaders across the country to set up groups to study together over the internet.

In 2002, MIM created a training curriculum based on *No Man Left Behind* that it offers through various live training events and as online video courseware. The NMLB material helps leaders build a sustainable disciple-making ministry for every man in the church.

The Journey to Biblical Manhood is a comprehensive and flexible model for men’s discipleship. It gives churches the

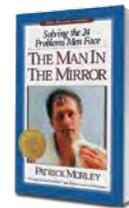
framework and pre-packaged tools they need to implement the No Man Left Behind concepts.

And now, Man in the Mirror has nearly 100 field staff across the country who are trained as coaches and consultants to help churches reach and disciple men. Those churches who engage with a field staff report that they are discipling 15 new men within the first year.

We are on our way to providing a field staff within driving distance of every church in America. If we can work with 30,000 churches (10 percent of the churches in America, and we are working with more than 1000 now), then we could see more than 500,000 new men becoming disciples each year.

We are eager to see God send a true revival to churches and men that will revive America and the world. 

Historical Ministry Highlights



1986—The Friday morning Bible study begins in Orlando, Florida

1989—Pat Morley writes *The Man in the Mirror*; it becomes a best seller

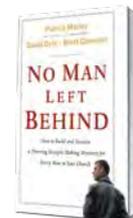
1995—Man in the Mirror begins doing events at local churches to help them reach and disciple men (we have now done over 1200 events with churches)



2000—1.15 million copies of *The Man in the Mirror* are distributed on Father’s Day through an initiative currently called “Books! by the Box” (now almost 10,000,000 books distributed)

2002—Man in the Mirror begins offering video of Pat Morley’s Friday Morning Bible Study online (now more than 150,000 sessions are downloaded each year)

2002—Man in the Mirror begins training leaders in what will become the No Man Left Behind Model (now trained more than 5,000 leaders and 5,000 churches)



2006—*No Man Left Behind* is published (authored by Pat Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer; based on the training curriculum used since 2002)

2011—*The Journey to Biblical Manhood* is designed and launched to help churches implement the principles of the No Man Left Behind model



2011—Efforts begin to recruit a field staff within driving distance of every church in America

2016—Man in the Mirror reaches the milestone of 100 field staff; thousands of churches engaged; churches report discipling 15 new men within the first year of working with a field staff member

doing is staring at our own navel asking, “How can I make my life better?”

It’s hard to admit, but that’s often the truth. It’s like the guy with the smart phone using it as a coaster. This is not what God gave you these gifts for. God gave you gifts so that you could bless other people and to make a difference in the world. Why are you hoarding them for yourself?

We’re supposed to serve and bless and make a difference in the lives of others. Peter says, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”

A man who worked with a Christian ministry visited our campus regularly when I was in college. Every time you were with him, you felt like you were the most important person in the world. It was obvious he had no agenda other than whatever you needed. It was so contagious and so magnetic.

He wasn’t a really charismatic guy. But he was a man who was radically committed to being other-centered and it made a huge difference in your life. That’s what Peter is telling us. We need to be oriented to others.

But even that is not the whole story. What is the ultimate goal of serving? Peter

says it’s “Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11, NLT). We serve to make a difference, but ultimately we do it because it glorifies God.

Many times when you serve people it does not work out the way that you wish it would. People don’t appreciate it. People

don’t see it the same way that you do. People get offended. People take it for granted.

Our church has a ministry to the homeless. About 12 years ago, one of the leaders said something that I’ll never forget. “We don’t minister to homeless people so that they will change. We minister to homeless people because Jesus told us to.”

That is so powerful because when we expect we’re going

to get a certain response from the people we serve, what happens when we don’t get that response? We get disappointed. We get frustrated. We want to give up.

Peter says, “When we serve, using the gifts that God has given us, we are ultimately bringing glory to God.”

A self-oriented life always leaves us a shadow of the man we could have been. You’ve seen guys who get to the end of their run and they’ve lived for themselves. Everyone around them is very uneasy

about their life and their impact. People connected to them in business are ambivalent. Their family doesn’t know what to think or say. It’s a waste.

A self-oriented life always leaves you empty. The way to become a spiritually happy man, the way to flourish as a man, is to give ourselves away. Jesus said, “If you want to find your life, you have to lose it for my sake” (Matthew 16:25).

Here’s a question: “Are you using your strongest gifts for the good of others?” God’s given you the ability to accomplish things, to be powerful. It could be your determination. It could be your relationship skills. It could be your analytical abilities. It could be resources that you have available to you, like relationships. Are you using those not just to benefit yourself, but are you using those to be a blessing in the lives of other people?

The greatest way that we can serve is actually getting into a real person’s life in such

a way that we are helping them become a disciple of Jesus Christ. We ought to be helping a real person become a committed, mature follower of Jesus. Are you involved in someone’s life in a deep enough way to actually produce a disciple?

It’s very easy for most men to have casual interactions. It’s harder to be vulnerable and transparent and go deep. But we all need to be involved in a person’s life in a substantial enough way that there’s actually a reasonable chance that that person may become a disciple of Christ.

If we’re not influencing at least one person like that, there’s probably something wrong with the way that we’re serving. God has called each one of

us to use the gifts that He’s given to serve others for his glory. So work hard to have a deep, intentional, spiritual impact in one person’s life. You’ll love it and God will get the glory. 

The greatest way that we can serve is actually getting into a real person’s life in such a way that we are helping them become a disciple of Jesus Christ.



■ DAVID DELK

David Delk serves as CEO of Man in the Mirror. He is the author or co-author of five books, including *The Marriage Prayer*, *Dad in the Mirror* and *No Man Left Behind*. David has served as President of the National Coalition of Ministries to Men, and has served as a visiting lecturer in Biblical Studies at Reformed Theological Seminary. David and his wife Ruthie live in Orlando, Florida.



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