BUILT TOGETHER

A GUIDE FOR MEN'S MINISTRY



Reaching men, walking with them toward Jesus,
and running a men's ministry that lasts

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Built Together

Reaching Men, Walking With Them Toward Jesus, and Running a Men's Ministry That Lasts

Andrew Dominguez

Built Together: Reaching Men, Walking With Them Toward Jesus, and Running a Men's Ministry That Lasts

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Before You Begin

> *in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in **the** Spirit.*
>
> Ephesians 2:22 (SLB)

Look around your church on a Sunday morning and count the men. Then think about the men who aren't there: the husbands who drop their families off and keep driving, the dads who used to come, the guys from work who would never set foot in a church but would gladly help you move a couch. Now think about the men who are there but sit in the same seat every week, shake a couple of hands, and are out the door before the last song is over.

For years I tried to carry my struggles alone. I thought a man should handle his own problems. It took hitting bottom, and letting a pastor and a few trusted men into my life, to show me how wrong I was. God never designed Christian men to walk through life alone. We stay standing when we walk together.

Every one of those men matters to God. Every one of them was made to know Jesus, to be known by other men, and to do real work in God's kingdom. This book is about how to reach them, how to walk with them toward Jesus, and how to build a men's ministry that keeps doing it year after year.

Who This Book Is For

I wrote this book for three kinds of readers.

The first is the pastor who knows his men need more than a sermon once a week, but who already has more on his plate than he can carry. You don't need to run the men's ministry yourself. You do need to bless it, shape it, and stay close to it. Part Three will show you how.

The second is the man who has been asked to lead the men's ministry, or who feels God nudging him to start one. Maybe you said yes before you knew what you were getting into. That's all right. Most of the men God used in the Bible were in over their heads too.

The third is the ordinary man who just wants to help another man follow Jesus. You don't need a title for that. You need a name, a phone, a cup of coffee, and a willingness to show up. Part Two is written for you. If you aren't leading anything, read Parts One and Two and the closing word. Part Three is for the men running things, and you can come back to it later.

How the Book Is Built

The book has three parts.

Part One: Why Men, and Why It Matters looks at the men who are missing, how Jesus built men, and what men really need.

Part Two: Walking With One Man lays out a simple picture I call the Workshop Path. It has five stations: Open the Door, Know His Name, Ground Him in Christ, Build Him Up, and Send Him Out. Each station gets its own chapter, along with a chapter on what to do when a man is hurting.

Part Three: Running a Men's Ministry is the practical side: getting the pastor and a few good men on board, putting your plan on one page, laying out the year, running events that lead somewhere, building groups that last, and keeping it all going without burning anyone out.

Every chapter ends with **Talk It Over**, six questions for a core team, a small group, or a man reading on his own, and **Try This Week**, one concrete step to take before you read the next chapter. Don't skip that part. A men's ministry is not built by reading about it.

At the back you'll find working tools in Appendix A: a one-page plan, a Name List layout, a Health Check, a follow-up call guide, an event checklist, a group leader checklist, an agenda for your first core team meeting, a First 90 Days roadmap for a new point leader, and a one-page card for when someone is in danger. Copy them, change them, and make them your own. Appendix B lists passages to open with a man for the conversations you are most likely to have, and Appendix C suggests a few books for further reading.

Using This Book With a Group

This book works best when men read it together. Here are three simple ways to do that.

A sixteen-week group. Read one chapter a week and spend most of your time on Talk It Over. Close each meeting by having every man say out loud which Try This Week step he will take, and start the next meeting by asking how it went. Read the closing word on your own at the end.

An eight-week core team. If you are starting or rebuilding a men's ministry, read Parts One and Two in the first three weeks (Chapters 1 to 3, then 4 to 6, then 7 to 10), skimming the stories and slowing down on the Workshop Path. Then take one Part Three chapter a week for the last five weeks (Chapters 11 and 12 together, then 13, 14, 15 and 16). Pick two Talk It Over questions each week and spend the rest of the time on the tools in Appendix A, so you finish with a real Plan on a Page and a real Name List.

One-on-one. Two men can read a chapter apiece and meet for coffee. Skip the questions that don't fit, and keep the Try This Week step. It works well for a point leader preparing the man who will lead after him.

Whichever plan you use, start on time, end on time, and pray for the men on your list by name before you go home.

Why "Built Together"?

I like to build things with my hands. If you've ever built anything out of wood, you know that a strong piece is rarely one solid block. It is a lot of smaller pieces, cut to fit, glued and clamped, and given time to set. Each piece is stronger because it is joined to the others.

That is the picture Paul gives in Ephesians 2. God is building His church, and He is not building it out of loners. He is fitting us together, one life joined to another, into a dwelling place for His Spirit. A man who follows Jesus alone is like a board leaning against the shop wall. He might be good wood, but he isn't holding anything up. Put him together with other men, under Christ, and he becomes part of something that will stand.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). When I don't quote a passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself, and I hope you will.

When I say "the pastor and elders," I mean whatever leaders your church has under Christ, whether that is elders, deacons, a church board, or a bishop. In a larger church, "your pastor" may be a staff pastor the senior pastor has put over the men. Follow the way your church is set up.

This book is about ministry to men, but it is not a book against anyone. Strong men's ministry makes for stronger marriages, stronger families, and a stronger church for everyone in it. The women in your church will thank you for it.

When I describe a man by name in these pages, like "Picture a man named Curtis," I am painting a picture to make a point. Those men are examples, not real people. Where I share something from my own life, I'll tell you plainly that it's mine.

This book is personal for me. There was a season in my life when I was at my lowest. I had dug a hole so deep I couldn't see a way out, and I was carrying more shame than I knew what to do with. I finally walked into my pastor's office. He didn't judge me, and he didn't turn me away. He listened. Then he told me some of his own story, and for the first time in a long while I knew I wasn't alone.

It wasn't an overnight change. But that man walked beside me until I found my way back to God, back to hope, and back to myself. He saw something in me that I could no longer see. God also gave me a friend of more than forty years, and other men He put in my path at just the right time. I'll tell some of those stories as we go. They are the reason this book exists. I know what one man can do for another, because men did it for me.

A Few Words You'll See

A few terms come up again and again. Here they are in one place so you don't have to wonder.

- **Workshop Path:** five stations for walking with a man toward Jesus (Chapter 4).
- **Where a Man Stands:** five kinds of men you'll meet, so you know what kind of help fits (Chapter 4).
- **Next Step rule:** every event and every conversation offers one clear next step (Chapter 4).
- **Name List:** a private list of every man connected to your church, each with one man checking on him (Chapters 6 and 12).
- **Point leader:** the one man who leads the men's ministry under the pastor (Chapter 11).
- **Core team:** usually four to eight men who share the work with the point leader. In a small church, two or three is plenty (Chapters 11 and 13).
- **Talk It Over and Try This Week:** the questions and the one step at the end of every chapter.

- **Plan on a Page, Year at a Glance, and Health Check:** the one-page plan, the yearly calendar, and the twice-a-year review (Chapters 12, 13, and 16).

Let's get to work.

Part One: Why Men, and Why It Matters

Chapter 1: The Empty Seats

> *What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that has been lost until he finds it?*
>
> Luke 15:4 (SLB)

Next Sunday, try something. Get to church a few minutes early, find a seat where you can see the room, and just watch. Watch who comes in, who they come in with, and where they sit. Then, after the last song, watch who leaves first.

You will learn a lot in one morning. You will see wives who come alone and slide into the same row every week. You will see a mom wrangling three kids by herself while her husband is home, or at the lake, or out on a shift. You will see older men who have been there for decades, and a few younger men standing near the back wall with their arms folded. And if you keep watching, you will notice a man who parks close to the exit, walks in during the first song, and is back in his truck before the pastor finishes the closing prayer.

I am not writing this to shame anyone. I am writing it because I think most of us have stopped seeing what is right in front of us. We get used to the shape of our own church. We know who is there, and we stop asking who isn't.

Look Around on a Sunday

You might ask, "Is it really that bad?" I can't answer that for your church. I can only ask you to look. Don't count heads for a report. Look at faces, and think about the men who belong to those faces: the husbands, the sons, the fathers, the brothers, the friends from work. Many of them aren't in the room.

Some of them have never been in any church. Some came for a while and drifted. Some come every week and nobody knows them. A few are carrying something so heavy they can barely get out of bed, and they would never tell you.

Here is the plain truth I want to start with: when the men of a church are missing, or present but untouched, the whole church feels it, even if no one says so. The men's absence shows up in the nursery schedule, in the short list of people who can help a family load a moving truck, in the number of boys who have never seen a grown man pray out loud. It shows up at home most of all.

I remember one Sunday morning looking around the sanctuary as the service started. Families were settling in and the worship team was playing, and I noticed something I hadn't paid much attention to before: the empty seats where men should have been. Mothers sat alone with their kids. Wives worshiped without their husbands. Young boys sat there with no dad beside them.

I started wondering where those men were. Working? Struggling? Questioning their faith? Feeling like church had no place for them? Whatever the reason, their absence was loud. A man's absence can speak

just as loudly as his presence. I walked out of church that day with a question that has stayed with me ever since: who is reaching out to these men, and what are we doing to bring them back?

Two Kinds of Empty Seats

When I say "empty seats," I mean two different things, and both matter.

The first kind is easy to picture. These are the men who aren't there at all. Some are married to women who attend. Some have kids in the youth group. Some live three houses down from the church and drive past it every Sunday on their way to get donuts. Many of them would call themselves Christians if you asked. They just don't see what church has to do with their real life, or they tried it once and it didn't take, or no one ever asked them to come.

The second kind is harder to spot because the seat looks full. A man is sitting in it. He sings when he has to, he puts something in the offering, and he shakes the pastor's hand on the way out. But nothing is happening inside him. Nobody at church knows what he does for a living, what keeps him up at night, or whether he prays at all. He is present in body and absent in every other way. In a lot of churches, this is the most common kind of man in the building.

Picture a man named Curtis. He has attended the same church for eleven years. He knows the parking lot, the coffee, and the order of service. He could tell you the pastor's favorite illustrations before he uses them. But if his marriage started to come apart on a Tuesday, Curtis wouldn't know a single man at church he could call. He would sit in his truck in the driveway and try to figure it out alone. That is an empty seat, even though Curtis is in it every week.

Why do so many men stay away? I can only tell you what I've seen. A lot of men feel like church asks them to sit still and listen, and they're built to do something. Some were hurt by a church or turned off by a man who said one thing on Sunday and lived another way on Monday. Some carry shame and figure they'd be found out. Many have a work schedule that church was never built around. And a lot of them, if you asked, would tell you the simplest reason of all: nobody ever asked them.

I want you to hold both kinds of men in your mind as you read this book. The man who is missing and the man who is present but untouched are both men Jesus loves, and both are men your church has a real chance to reach.

What It Costs

You might ask, "Why single out men? Shouldn't the church care about everyone?" Yes, it should, and it does. This book isn't about caring for men instead of women, or instead of children, or instead of anyone. It is about noticing a gap and doing something about it. When men are missing, everyone around them pays for it.

Think about a home first. A wife who prays for her husband for years while he stays on the couch carries a weight that is hard to describe. Kids notice what Dad does on Sunday morning far more than what he says about it. A boy who never sees his father open a Bible will usually assume that faith is something for

mothers and grandmothers. A girl who never sees her father pray learns something too. None of this is said out loud. It is just learned.

Think about the church. A congregation without many men engaged often runs on the same small group of tired volunteers. The same five men set up chairs, fix the roof, run the sound, and serve on every committee. They are worn out, and nobody is coming up behind them. Meanwhile there are dozens of men in the pews with skills, time, and a deep (if buried) desire to matter, and nobody has ever asked them to do anything.

Think about the town you live in. Men who are walking with Jesus coach Little League differently. They run their businesses differently. They treat the people who work for them differently. They are slower to walk out on their families and quicker to help a neighbor. When a church helps men grow, the good spills out the doors and down the street.

None of this is an argument that men matter more than anyone else in the church. It is an argument that when a man is missing, the people around him feel it, and most of them will never say so out loud. A church that notices the men isn't neglecting the women and children. It is doing one of the most practical things it can do for them.

Not every man has a wife or children, either. Single men, widowers, and divorced men are just as much a part of the body, and they often feel the loneliness of church more sharply than anyone. A church that walks with its men walks with them too.

And think about the man himself. This is the cost we talk about least. Many men are lonely in a way they would never admit. They have coworkers and fishing buddies and a fantasy football league, but no one who knows what is really going on inside them. They are carrying guilt they don't know how to set down. Some are one bad week away from a decision that will wreck their lives. A man like that doesn't need another program. He needs the God who made him, and he needs a few brothers who will walk with him toward that God.

The Shepherd Who Goes After One

So what does God think about the man in the back row, or the man who never comes at all? Jesus answered that question with a story.

In Luke 15, the religious leaders were grumbling because Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. So He told them about a shepherd with a hundred sheep who loses one. The shepherd doesn't shrug and say ninety-nine is a pretty good number. He leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the one until he finds it. When he finds it, he puts it on his shoulders and carries it home, and he throws a party. Then Jesus tells us what the story means.

> *I say to you that in the same way there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, rather than over ninety-nine righteous **ones** who have no need of repentance.* (Luke 15:7)

Notice who does the seeking. The sheep doesn't find its own way back. The shepherd goes out. That has been God's way from the beginning. Long before Jesus told this story, God spoke through the prophet

Ezekiel against the leaders of Israel, who had fed themselves and neglected the flock. Then God said what He would do about it.

> *For thus says the Lord GOD: Look, I, I Myself, will search for My flock and seek them out.*
> (Ezekiel 34:11)

In the same chapter, God says He will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick. That is a good description of the work in front of us. Some men are lost. Some are scattered. Some are broken. Some are just weak and worn out. God cares about every one of them.

When Jesus met a short, crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus in a sycamore tree, He invited Himself over for dinner, and the man's whole life turned around. Jesus summed it up this way.

> *for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which has been lost.* (Luke 19:10)

And when Jesus looked at the crowds who followed Him, He didn't see a problem to be managed. He saw people.

> *And having seen the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd.* (Matthew 9:36)

"Weary and thrown down." I can't think of better words for a lot of men I see in parking lots, at hardware stores, and in the back rows of churches. They aren't monsters. They are tired. They are confused about what a man is supposed to be. They have been told to be strong and to keep it together, and they are running out of strength. Jesus looks at men like that with compassion, and He asks us to do the same.

Built Together

The theme verse for this book comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul had just explained that we are saved by grace through faith, not by anything we do (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then he described what God is making out of the people He saves. It isn't a pile of loose bricks. It is a building, a temple where God Himself lives.

> *in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in **the** Spirit.*
> (Ephesians 2:22)

I love the words "built together." Anyone who has done a glue-up in a workshop knows what this looks like. You can have beautiful boards, each one cut straight and planed smooth, but until they are glued edge to edge and clamped tight, they are just boards. Join them, and you have a tabletop that will hold up for generations. The strength isn't in one board. It is in the joint.

That is what God is doing with His people, and it is what He wants to do with the men in your church. A man isn't meant to follow Jesus alone. He is meant to be joined to Christ first, and then joined to other believers. Paul says the same thing another way in 1 Corinthians 12, where he compares the church to a body.

> *And the eye is not able to say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* (1 Corinthians 12:21)

A lot of men act as if they don't need anyone. A lot of churches act as if they don't need the man in the back row. Both are wrong. The man needs the body, and the body needs the man. When one part hurts, Paul says, the whole body hurts with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). The empty seats aren't someone else's problem. They are a wound in the body we belong to.

Paul even says that the members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary (1 Corinthians 12:22). The man who seems least likely to matter, the one who barely talks, the one with the messy past, the one who looks like he would never fit in a Bible study, isn't extra. God put him near your church for a reason.

One more thing before we go on: men's ministry is never apart from the rest of the church. When men are built up in Christ, wives are helped, kids are helped, and the whole congregation is stronger. Men's ministry is one crew working on one building, under the direction of the church's pastor and leaders. It isn't a separate club with its own clubhouse.

The Goal: Every Man's Next Step

So what are we aiming at? I want to put it in one sentence you can remember: **help every man your church can reach take his next step with Jesus.**

Let me unpack that a little, because each part matters.

"Every man" means we aren't satisfied with a handful of committed men who show up to everything. Those men are a gift, and we need them. But a men's ministry that only serves the men who already come is a club. Jesus went after the one. We should be thinking about the whole list of men connected to our church, by name, and asking what would help each of them.

"Your church can reach" is an honest limit. You can't reach every man in your city by next spring, and you aren't supposed to try. Start with the men God has already put near you: the men in your pews, the husbands of the women in your pews, the dads of the kids in your youth group, the men who live on your street and work in your building. That is a long enough list for most of us.

"His next step" means we meet each man where he is. For one man, the next step is just coming to a breakfast. For another, it is hearing the gospel clearly for the first time. For another, it is getting honest in a small group about his anger. For another, it is starting to walk with a younger man the way someone once walked with him. We don't ask a man to jump to the top of the staircase. We help him take the step in front of him.

It is worth saying what a next step isn't. It isn't a pledge card, and it isn't a promise to become a different man by Easter. A next step is the one thing that is actually in front of him. For the man who hasn't been inside a church in twenty years, the next step may be eating a plate of eggs in a fellowship hall on a Saturday with a friend beside him. For the man who has sat in the same pew for eleven years, it may be answering one honest question from one other man. For the man whose marriage is coming apart, it may be letting somebody drive him to a counselor. None of those sound like much. Every one of them is a step a man can actually take, and a man who takes one step is far more likely to take the next.

I should be honest about one thing here. Not every church organizes this the same way, and that is fine. Some good churches have a men's breakfast, a men's retreat, and a dozen men's groups. Others put men and women together in mixed small groups and have very little that is "men only." Some small churches have one faithful older man who quietly checks on every younger man in the congregation and has never called it a ministry. I am not going to tell you there is only one right structure. What I will tell you is that, whatever your structure, somebody needs to be asking whether the men are being reached, known, and helped to grow. If nobody owns that question, it usually doesn't get answered.

"With Jesus" keeps us honest. The goal isn't a bigger men's breakfast, a better retreat, or a busier calendar. Those can be good tools. But the goal is that men would know Jesus, trust Him, love Him, and follow Him. If we lose that, we have lost everything. Salvation is a gift of God's grace, received by faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose bodily from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Everything we do in men's ministry should point a man toward that good news and help him live in it.

Start With One

I know how this can feel. If you are a pastor, you might be thinking about the forty other things on your plate. If you are a man who just cares about other men, you might be thinking, "Who am I to start anything?" If you have tried men's ministry before and watched it fizzle, you might be thinking, "Here we go again."

You might ask, "Where do I even start?" Start with one man.

Think of one man who is in an empty seat, either the missing kind or the untouched kind. Picture his face. Say his name to God. That is where this begins. Jesus told a story about a shepherd who went after one sheep, not a shepherd who drew up a five-year plan for the flock. Plans matter (I am a project manager, and we will get to plans), but plans serve people, not the other way around.

Picture a man named Marcus who decides to do just that. He doesn't launch anything. He just starts praying for one guy at work and asks him to grab lunch. Six months later the coworker is coming to church with his wife, and Marcus has learned more about listening than he ever expected. That isn't a program. That is a man taking the next step himself and helping someone else take his.

I know what this looks like from the other side. There was a time when I was going to church, listening to the sermons, and trying to figure out what God wanted from me, but something was missing. I had questions about my faith, my purpose, and where my life was heading. I was surrounded by people and still felt alone.

What I didn't know was that someone had noticed. A man in our church saw past my Sunday morning face. He didn't wait for me to ask for help. He reached out, took an interest in my life, listened to my questions, and told me about his own walk with God. He wasn't trying to impress me with what he knew. He just didn't want me searching alone. There was no program and no meeting to sign up for. He gave me his time, and it changed the direction I was heading. One man did that for me, and it made all the difference.

In the next two chapters we will look at how Jesus built men and what men really need. Part Two walks with one man around the Workshop Path, and Part Three gets practical about running a men's ministry. Please don't skip Part One. If we get the why wrong, the how won't matter much.

Before you turn the page, go back to that Sunday morning picture. The seats are still there. Some of them are empty. Some of them are full of men who are a long way from God, even while they sit in church. God sees every one of those men, and He is still in the business of seeking and saving the lost. The question is whether we will go with Him.

Talk It Over

1. When you picture your own church on a Sunday morning, which men come to mind as missing, and which come to mind as present but untouched?
2. Which "cost" of men's absence from church (to homes, the church, the community, or the man himself) have you seen most clearly? What did it look like?
3. Read Luke 15:3-7. What does the shepherd's behavior tell you about how God sees the man in the back row?
4. Ephesians 2:22 says we are "being built together." Where in your own life have you tried to follow Jesus alone, and how did that go?
5. How would you put the goal of "helping every man take his next step with Jesus" into your own words? What part of it is hardest for you to believe is possible?
6. Who is one man in an empty seat that you could start praying for by name this week?

Try This Week

Write down the name of one man who is either missing from church or present but untouched. Pray for him by name every day this week, and before Sunday, do one small thing to let him know you noticed him: send a text, invite him to lunch, or just find him after the service and ask how his week went.

Chapter 2: How Jesus Built Men

> *And He goes up on the mountain and summons those whom He Himself wanted; and they went to Him.*
>
> Mark 3:13 (SLB)

If you wanted to change the world, how would you go about it?

Most of us would think big. We would want a stage, a crowd, a budget, and a plan to grow fast. We would look for the most talented, best educated, most connected people we could find. We would build an organization.

Jesus did something that still surprises me every time I read it. He had all the power of heaven, and He spent most of His three years of public ministry with a small group of ordinary men. He fed crowds and taught thousands, yes. But again and again the Gospels show Him pulling away from the crowd to be with the Twelve, and sometimes with just three of them. He poured Himself into a few men, and then He sent those men out. Two thousand years later, we are still feeling the effects.

If we want to know how to minister to men, we should start by watching how Jesus did it.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street. I mowed his lawn, and he took me to church and led me to Christ. He did not start with a lecture. He spent time with me and invited me along. That invitation changed the direction of my life.

He Called Them by Name

The first thing Jesus did was call specific men. He didn't put up a sign-up sheet. He walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers casting a net, and spoke to them directly.

> *And Jesus said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."* (Mark 1:17)

Look at what is in that sentence. There is an invitation: "Come after Me." There is a promise: "I will make you." And there is a purpose: "fishers of men." Jesus didn't ask Peter and Andrew to become religious experts first. He asked them to come along, and He promised that He would do the shaping. They would become something they weren't yet.

Later, Mark tells us that Jesus went up on a mountain and called to Himself the men He wanted, and they came. Then he tells us why.

> *And He appointed twelve, so that they might be with Him, and so that He might send them out to preach* (Mark 3:14)

I want you to notice the order. First, "that they might be with Him." Then, "that He might send them out to preach." Being with Jesus came before being sent by Jesus. That order matters for everything we do in

men's ministry. Men aren't built by being handed a job. They are built by being with someone who knows the Lord, and then they are sent.

Jesus also didn't treat His men like a crowd. He knew them. He gave Simon a new name, Peter. He nicknamed James and John "Sons of Thunder," which tells you something about their tempers (and probably made the other disciples laugh). He knew who was quick to speak, who doubted, and who was keeping the money bag. He knew them by name, and He knew their hearts.

And before He chose them, He prayed. Luke tells us that Jesus went off to a mountain to pray and spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them (Luke 6:12-13). The Son of God didn't pick His men casually. He talked to His Father about them first. Later, on the night before the cross, He prayed for them at length, asking the Father to keep them and make them holy in the truth (John 17:9-19). Jesus prayed for His men before He called them, while He was with them, and as He was leaving them.

That is a good place for us to start too. Before you build a list, plan a breakfast, or recruit a team, pray for men by name. Ask God which men He wants you to walk with. You may be surprised by the names that come to mind.

He Let Them Come and See

In John 1, two of John the Baptist's followers start walking after Jesus. He turns around and asks them what they are looking for. They ask Him where He is staying. His answer is one of the most relaxed invitations in the whole Bible.

> *He says to them, "Come and see." They went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. Now **the** hour was about **the** tenth.* (John 1:39)

No lecture. No pressure. Just "come and see." They spent the afternoon with Him, and before long Andrew went to find his brother Simon to tell him they had found the Messiah. A few verses later Philip does the same thing with Nathanael. When Nathanael scoffs at the idea that anything good could come from Nazareth, Philip doesn't argue. He says, "Come and see" (John 1:46).

That is how many men come to faith. Someone they trust says, "Come and see." Come to breakfast. Come help with this project. Come sit with me on Sunday. The invitation is low pressure, but it is personal, and it comes from a man who already knows the way.

He Did Life With Them

Read through the Gospels with this question in mind: where was Jesus when He taught His men? You will find Him in boats, on hillsides, walking dusty roads, at weddings, at dinner tables, in a friend's living room, by a well, and in a garden at night. A lot of His best teaching happened on the way somewhere.

Jesus and His men ate together. They traveled together. They got caught in storms together. They argued, and He corrected them. They were confused by His parables, and He explained them later in private. They watched Him heal, pray, weep, get angry at injustice, and take time alone with His Father. Then He sent

them out two by two to try it themselves, and when they came back and reported all they had done, He took them aside to rest and talk (Mark 6:7, 30-31).

This is how a craftsman trains an apprentice. You don't learn to cut a dovetail by reading about it. You stand at the bench next to a man who knows how, you watch his hands, you try it yourself, you ruin a few boards, and he shows you what went wrong. Over time his habits become your habits. Jesus built men the same way. He let them watch, then He let them try, then He sent them.

And here is the part that should encourage us: Jesus didn't hide His friendship behind His authority. Near the end, in the upper room, He told them something that must have stunned them.

> *No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, because all things which I heard from My Father I have made known to you.* (John 15:15)

Friends. The Lord of glory called these fishermen and tax collectors His friends. He didn't stop being their Master. But He opened His life to them. If we want to build men, we have to be willing to do the same thing on our smaller scale: to let men see our real lives, not just our Sunday faces.

Early in my working life I worked alongside a man who became much more than a coworker. He saw something in me I hadn't seen in myself, and instead of just telling me what to do, he let me work beside him. I watched how he handled pressure, made hard calls, admitted when he was wrong, and treated people with respect no matter their position. He didn't keep his faith in one box and his work in another. His patience, honesty, and humility showed up on the job every day.

He challenged me when I needed it and encouraged me when I doubted myself. Most of what I learned from him came in ordinary moments: a hard day, a problem to solve, a plan that fell apart. He never preached me a sermon, but I learned a lot about following Jesus just by watching him. He let me see his life up close, imperfections and all. That is what Jesus did with the Twelve, and this man did a small version of it for me.

He Was Patient When They Failed

The disciples weren't quick studies. They fought over who was the greatest, more than once, even at the Last Supper. They tried to send away children Jesus wanted to bless. James and John wanted to call down fire on a village that wouldn't welcome them. They fell asleep when Jesus asked them to pray. When Jesus was arrested, they all ran.

And Peter. Peter is the patron saint of men who talk too soon. He was the one who stepped out of the boat and then began to sink. He was the one who declared that Jesus was the Christ and then, soon after, tried to talk Jesus out of the cross. He swore he would die before he would deny Jesus. That same night he denied Him three times by a charcoal fire.

Jesus knew that was coming. Look at what He said to Peter before it happened.

> *But I begged for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.* (Luke 22:32)

That verse is worth reading slowly. Jesus didn't say "if you turn back." He said "when." He saw the failure coming, and He had already prayed for Peter's recovery. And He already had a job waiting for Peter on the other side: "strengthen your brothers." Peter's failure wouldn't be the end of his usefulness. It would become part of his ministry.

Peter wasn't the only one. Thomas missed the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection, and he flatly refused to believe it until he could touch the wounds himself. Jesus could have written him off as a skeptic. Instead, a week later, He came back and offered Thomas exactly what he had asked for: "Bring your finger here" (John 20:27). Jesus met the doubter where he was, and Thomas answered with one of the clearest confessions in the Bible: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

I think every man who works with other men needs to take this to heart. The men you walk with are going to let you down. They will skip the group, fall back into old sins, say something foolish, or disappear for a season. Some of them will hurt you. If Jesus was patient with Peter, we can be patient with the men God gives us. Patience isn't the same as ignoring sin. Jesus named Peter's failure plainly. But He never gave up on him.

He Restored Peter by a Fire

After the resurrection, Peter went back to fishing. I don't think he was being rebellious. I think he didn't know what else to do with himself. He had failed the One he loved most, and men who fail often go back to the last thing they knew how to do.

Jesus met him there, on a beach, at dawn, after a long night of catching nothing. He told them where to drop the net, and it filled so full they couldn't haul it in. Peter jumped into the water and swam to shore. And there was Jesus, cooking breakfast over a charcoal fire (John 21:9).

Think about that detail. The last time Peter stood by a charcoal fire, he denied Jesus three times. Now Jesus has built another one. He fed His men first. Then, after breakfast, He turned to Peter.

> *He says to him the third time, "Simon **son** of Jonah, do you love Me dearly?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me dearly?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You dearly." Jesus says to him, "Feed My sheep."*
> (John 21:17)

Three denials, three questions. Jesus didn't pretend the failure never happened. He went right to the wound, and Peter was grieved. But every question came with a new assignment: "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," "Feed My sheep." Jesus wasn't just forgiving Peter. He was putting him back to work.

This is what restoration looks like. It is honest about what happened. It is personal, face to face, not a memo. It happens in a setting of care (breakfast on the beach, not a courtroom). And it ends with the man being trusted again. A lot of men in our churches are sitting on the beach after their own failures, thinking they are done. Some of them were leaders once. Some of them never felt worthy to begin with. They need someone to build a fire, cook them breakfast, and ask them the hard and hopeful question.

Ordinary Men, Extraordinary Results

A few weeks after that breakfast, Peter stood up in Jerusalem and preached, and thousands believed. Not long after that, he and John were arrested and hauled before the same religious leaders who had condemned Jesus. The leaders expected to scare a couple of fishermen. Instead, they were puzzled.

> *Now seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and having perceived that they were unlettered and ordinary men, they were marveling; and they were recognizing them, that they had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13)

"They had been with Jesus." That was the only explanation. Peter and John had no degrees and no titles. What they had was three years of walking with Jesus, and the Holy Spirit living in them. That was enough to turn the world upside down.

This should take a lot of pressure off you. You don't need a seminary degree to help another man follow Jesus. You don't need to be a great speaker or have every answer. You need to be with Jesus yourself, and you need to be willing to let another man be with you. God has always done His best work through ordinary men who spent time with His Son.

It should also change how you look at the men in your church. That quiet guy who works on HVAC systems, the retired trucker, the young dad who barely has time to shower: any of them could be the next Peter or John. Jesus didn't pick the men the world would have picked. He still doesn't.

Look at the mix He chose. Matthew was a tax collector, which means he had collected money for the rulers who answered to Rome and was seen as a traitor. Simon the Zealot may have come from a movement that wanted Rome thrown out by force. Put those two in the same boat today and you would expect a fight before lunch. Jesus put them in the same group on purpose and made them brothers. A men's ministry should expect the same kind of mix: the plumber and the attorney, the man with tattoos up both arms and the man in the pressed shirt, the guy who votes one way and the guy who votes the other. What holds them together isn't that they like the same things. It is that they are following the same Lord.

Presence Before Programs

So what does all of this mean for us? If I had to boil it down to one phrase, it would be this: **presence before programs.**

Programs aren't bad. Jesus was organized. He sent men out in pairs with clear instructions. He fed five thousand people by having them sit down in groups of fifty and a hundred, which is a crowd-control plan any event coordinator would respect. In Part Three of this book we are going to talk a lot about plans, calendars, and teams, and I believe in all of it.

But a program can't do what a man can do. A breakfast can't notice that a guy's hands are shaking. A curriculum can't sit in a hospital waiting room. A sign-up sheet can't call a man who hasn't been seen in three weeks and say, "I miss you, brother. What's going on?" Only a man can do that.

When men's ministry starts with programs, it tends to measure success by crowds and calendars. When it starts with presence, it measures success by whether men are actually being known, loved, and helped to follow Jesus. Think of the program as the scaffolding and the men as the building. You need scaffolding to build, but nobody drives across town to admire it.

Picture two churches. The first has a polished men's event every quarter, with a good speaker and great food, and a hundred men show up. Then they all go home, and nothing happens until the next event. The second church has a monthly breakfast that draws thirty men, but every one of those thirty is known by name by another man who checks on him during the month. Ask yourself which church will see more men changed over five years. I think you know the answer.

Here is what presence before programs looks like in plain terms. It means we start with a few men who are with Jesus and willing to be with other men. It means we expect most of the real work to happen side by side, in ordinary places, on ordinary days. It means we are patient with failure and quick to restore. And it means we always have an eye on sending, because Jesus was with His men so that He could send them out.

I was once part of an effort to launch a men's ministry at our church. There was real excitement at the start. We knew men needed a place to grow in their faith, build friendships, and hold each other up. But once the planning started, egos got in the way. Too much of our energy went to personalities, competing opinions, and who would be in charge. We argued over direction and responsibilities, and without steady guidance from our pastoral staff, the ministry never got moving.

Looking back, our biggest mistake was that we were building a ministry instead of building relationships with the men we wanted to reach. We spent hours on structure, leadership, and activities and lost sight of the actual men who needed a friend and someone to walk beside them. Men don't need another program run by personalities and titles. They need men who care about them, leaders who serve with humility, and a pastor who gives direction. Jesus didn't build His disciples through committees. He built them by being with them.

What Jesus Did Not Do

It helps to notice a few things Jesus didn't do with His men, because we are often tempted to do them.

He didn't wait for them to be ready before He called them. Peter was still Peter on the day he was called and for a long time after. If we wait for men to clean up before we invite them in, we will be waiting a long time.

He didn't try to build all of them at the same speed. Peter, James, and John saw things the others didn't, like the Transfiguration. Jesus gave time to the whole group, but He went deeper with a few. That isn't favoritism. It is wisdom. Some men are ready for more, and you can give them more.

He didn't do everything Himself. He gave His men real work: distribute the bread, go to the next village, find a donkey, prepare the Passover room. Men grow when they are trusted with something that matters.

He didn't flatter them. Jesus loved His men, but He told them the truth. When Peter tried to talk Him out of the cross, Jesus rebuked him in front of the others. When the disciples argued about who was greatest, He sat down, called a child over, and taught them that the first must be last. When they lacked faith in a storm, He said so. Men can tell the difference between a friend who only says nice things and a friend who loves them enough to be honest. The second kind is rare, and men trust him.

He didn't rush them. Three years isn't very long, but it was long enough for Jesus to walk with these men through hundreds of ordinary days. He let them ask the same questions more than once. He explained the same things again. Real growth in a man takes time. He will circle back to the same question more than once, and that isn't wasted motion.

And He didn't leave them alone. Before He went back to the Father, He promised to send the Holy Spirit, and He promised, "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Any man we build will eventually need to stand on his own feet, but he will never stand alone. He will have the Spirit of God, and he should have a few brothers around him.

Talk It Over

1. Mark 3:14 says Jesus chose the Twelve "so that they might be with Him" before He sent them out. Why do you think that order matters?
2. Who was the first man who said some version of "come and see" to you about Jesus? What made his invitation work?
3. Jesus did a lot of His teaching on the road, in boats, and around meals. Where are the places in your life where you could do the same with another man?
4. Read Luke 22:31-32 and John 21:15-17. What do these passages teach you about how to treat a man who has failed?
5. Acts 4:13 says the leaders took note that Peter and John "had been with Jesus." What would it take for people to say that about you?
6. In your church, where have programs gotten ahead of presence? What is one change that would put men back at the center?

Try This Week

Pick one ordinary thing you already do this week (an errand, a project in the garage, a drive to a job site, a walk) and invite another man to come along. Don't plan a lesson. Just be with him, listen more than you talk, and at some point ask him, "How are you really doing?"

Chapter 3: What Men Need

> *For if they fall, the one will raise up his companion; and woe to him, the one who falls and there is no second to raise him up.*
>
> Ecclesiastes 4:10 (SLB)

Ask a man how he's doing, and you will almost always get the same answer: "I'm fine." Sometimes he means it. Often he doesn't.

"I'm fine" is one of the most useful phrases a man has. It ends the conversation. It keeps people from asking more questions. It protects him from looking weak. And it lets him keep carrying whatever he is carrying, alone, for one more day.

If we want to minister to men, we have to learn to see past that phrase. Not by prying, and not by forcing men to talk about feelings they don't have words for yet, but by understanding what men actually need and offering it in a way they can receive. That is what this chapter is about.

I want to be careful here. Every man is different, and I am not going to tell you that all men like steak, hunting, and football. Plenty of godly men would rather read a book or work in a garden. But there are some needs that show up in man after man, rooted in how God made us and in what sin has done to us. When a church meets those needs with the gospel, men respond.

The "I'm Fine" Mask

Picture a man named Glen. He is fifty-two, married, with two kids in college. He has a steady job as a plant supervisor. He goes to church most Sundays. If you asked his wife, she would tell you he is a good man, and she would be right.

But Glen hasn't had a real conversation with another man in years. His friends from high school drifted away. His work friends are work friends. He has a brother he talks to at Thanksgiving. When his father died last spring, Glen handled the funeral, the estate, and his mother's move, and then he went back to work the next Monday. Nobody asked him how he was doing, and if they had, he would have said, "I'm fine."

Glen isn't unusual. Look around your own church and you will find many men like him. They are surrounded by people and almost completely alone. They have learned that the safest thing a man can do is keep his struggles to himself.

God never meant it to be this way. Before sin ever entered the world, before anything was broken, God looked at the first man and said something wasn't right.

> *And the LORD God said, "**It is** not good **for** the man to be alone; I will make for him a helper corresponding to him."* (Genesis 2:18)

The first answer to that loneliness was marriage, and a good marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to a man. But a wife can't be a man's only friend, and she shouldn't have to be. Men also need other men. They need brothers who will stand next to them, tell them the truth, and pick them up when they fall.

A Man Needs a Brother

The writer of Ecclesiastes spent a lot of time looking at life "under the sun," and he didn't find much to be cheerful about. But he did notice one thing that works.

> *The two **are** better than the one, in that they have a good reward for their toil.* (Ecclesiastes 4:9)

Then he gives the reason, which is the verse at the top of this chapter: a man who falls alone has no one to lift him up. A few verses later he adds that a threefold cord isn't quickly torn apart (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

The Bible is full of men who had a brother like that. Jonathan and David are the best known. Jonathan was the king's son and could have seen David as a rival. Instead, he loved him, protected him, and at one low point went out to find David in the wilderness and helped him find strength in God (1 Samuel 23:16). Think about Aaron and Hur standing on either side of Moses, holding up his tired arms so Israel could win the battle (Exodus 17:12). Moses was the leader. He still needed someone to hold his arms up.

And there is the familiar proverb.

> *Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor.* (Proverbs 27:17)

Anyone who has sharpened a chisel knows that sharpening involves friction. It isn't always comfortable. Metal comes off. But the result is an edge that can do real work. A brother in Christ will sometimes rub you the wrong way, because he is willing to say what you need to hear. That is a gift, even when it doesn't feel like one.

When I say a man needs a brother, I don't mean he needs a men's ministry. I mean he needs at least one other man who knows him, prays for him, and would notice if he disappeared. Everything else in this book is built on that.

More than forty years ago I met a man who would become one of my closest friends. If you had told us that back then, we would have laughed. The truth is, we didn't like each other. Our personalities clashed, we disagreed on plenty, and we were both too proud and too stubborn to see much good in the other man.

But over the years, through shared experiences, hard conversations, arguments, and the curveballs life throws, something changed. Dislike turned into respect, respect turned into trust, and trust turned into a friendship neither of us saw coming. We have seen each other's wins and failures and walked each other through some hard seasons. We still don't agree on everything. He has never been afraid to tell me what I needed to hear instead of what I wanted to hear, and I have learned to value that. Brotherhood isn't about always seeing eye to eye. It's about standing shoulder to shoulder when life gets hard. Sometimes the man you least expect turns out to be the brother God knew you needed.

A Man Needs Purpose

Look back at Genesis 2, just a few verses before God said it wasn't good for the man to be alone.

> *And the LORD God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.* (Genesis 2:15)

Before the fall, before there were thorns and sweat, God gave the man work. Work isn't a curse. It is part of how God made us. A man was made to build, tend, protect, and make things better than he found them. When a man has no sense that his life is accomplishing anything that matters, something in him starts to die.

That is why so many men get lost at certain points in life. The young man who doesn't know what to do with himself. The middle-aged man who has reached the goals he set at twenty-five and realizes they didn't satisfy him. The retired man who goes from being needed every day to watching television until lunch. Each of them is asking, in his own way, "What am I for?"

The gospel has a big answer to that question. Paul says we are saved by grace, not by works, and then in the very next breath he says we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared for us ahead of time (Ephesians 2:8-10). A man doesn't work to earn God's love. But once he has received it, God has work for him to do. We will come back to this in Chapter 10, because it is at the heart of sending men out.

This also means men's ministry has to think about every season of a man's life. A twenty-two-year-old who just started his first job is asking whether his work matters at all. A forty-five-year-old who is good at his job may be asking whether that is all there is. A sixty-eight-year-old who just retired may be asking whether anyone still needs him. They all need to hear the same truth: God made you on purpose and for a purpose, and He isn't done with you. The retired man, in particular, is often the most underused man in the church. He has time, skill, and years of experience, and many younger men would love to learn from him if someone made the introduction.

For now, here is the simple point: a church that only asks men to sit and listen is missing something. Men need to be told the truth, and they need to be given something to do with it.

A Man Needs Truth He Can Use

Most men respect straight talk. They want to know what God says, what it means, and what difference it makes on Monday morning. They tend to tune out when a teacher wanders around a point without ever landing on it.

The Bible isn't a vague book. It speaks to how a man handles money, how he talks to his wife, how he treats the people who work for him, what he does with his anger, where he lets his eyes go, and how he raises his kids. James says we should be doers of the word and not just hearers who fool themselves (James 1:22). Men need teaching that gets to the doing part.

That doesn't mean watering things down. It means teaching the Bible plainly, honestly, and with application. The Bereans in Acts 17 are a good model. They received Paul's teaching eagerly, and then they

went home and checked it against the Scriptures every day (Acts 17:11). Men can do that. They can handle real Bible study. What they don't need is fluff, and they can smell it from a long way off.

Picture a man named Tony who has been coming to a Sunday class for years. He has heard a lot of good lessons. But when his teenage son starts lying to him and skipping school, Tony realizes he has no idea what the Bible actually says about being a father in a moment like this. He knows a lot of verses. He doesn't know what to do on Tuesday night. Teaching that serves men connects the Word to that Tuesday night. It asks, "So what does this mean for how you talk to your son?" and then stays with the question until there is an answer a man can act on.

Truth also has to be honest about the hard parts. Men know life is hard. If we pretend that following Jesus makes everything easy, they will stop believing us the first time their life falls apart.

A Man Needs a Mission Bigger Than Himself

There is a difference between a purpose and a mission. A purpose is what a man is for. A mission is the work he is part of, alongside others, that is bigger than he is.

Read Nehemiah 3 sometime. It is a long list of names, and at first glance it is about as exciting as a parts catalog. But look closer. Goldsmiths, perfume makers, district officials, priests, and a man working with his daughters are all repairing sections of the wall around Jerusalem, many of them right in front of their own houses. Each crew had a section. Nobody could do the whole wall. Together, they finished it in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15).

Or think about the four men in Mark 2 who dug through a roof to get their friend to Jesus; we will come back to them.

Men come alive when they are part of something like that. A service day where a crew of men, sent through the church, fixes a single mom's porch. A team that drives every week to a prison to lead a Bible study. Four guys who decide they are going to keep praying for a friend until he comes to faith. A mission gives men a reason to get up early, a reason to work together, and a reason to keep going when it gets hard.

Side by Side, Not Face to Face

Here is something practical that has shaped how I think about ministering to men. Many men don't open up best sitting across a table with someone staring at them, asking how they feel. They open up side by side.

Side by side doesn't have to mean heavy lifting. For a man in a wheelchair, an older man, or a man with a bad back, it might be a long drive, a ball game, a chess board, or sitting with a fishing line in the water.

Think about where men have their most honest conversations. In a truck on a long drive. On a fishing boat when nothing is biting. Standing at a workbench, both looking at the same project. Fixing a fence. Waiting in a deer stand. Washing dishes after a church dinner. Their hands are busy and their eyes are pointed at something else, and somehow that makes it easier to say what's really going on.

> *Counsel in the heart of a man **is** deep waters, and a man of understanding will draw it out.* (Proverbs 20:5)

I love that picture. What is in a man's heart is often deep, and he may not even know how to get to it himself. It takes a man of understanding to draw it out, the way you lower a bucket into a well and bring it up slowly. You don't do that by shouting down the well. You do it with patience.

So if you want to help a man open up, give him something to do with you. Ask him to help you move a dresser. Invite him to ride along on an errand. Work on a project together. Then, somewhere in the middle of it, ask a real question and wait. You may be surprised how much comes out when he doesn't feel like he is being interviewed.

This isn't a rule. Some men love a long talk over coffee, and you should give them that. But if face-to-face conversations keep hitting a wall, try putting a project between you.

Shame and Grace

Underneath the "I'm fine" mask, many men are carrying shame. Shame is different from guilt. Guilt says, "I did something wrong, and I need to be forgiven." Shame says, "I'm beyond fixing, so I'd better hide." A man who feels guilt can confess and be forgiven. A man who lives in shame tends to hide. The gospel answers both: Christ forgives the guilt, and He makes the man new (2 Corinthians 5:17), so he doesn't have to hide anymore.

Some of that shame comes from real sin: things he has done, things he is still doing, things he has never told a soul. Some of it comes from things done to him. Some comes from failures that weren't sins at all: a business that went under, a marriage that ended against his wishes, a son who walked away from the faith. Whatever the source, shame tells a man to stay quiet, keep his distance, and never let anyone see.

David knew what hiding was like. Many readers connect Psalm 32 with the season after his sin with Bathsheba (compare Psalm 51). Whatever the occasion, he wrote about what keeping quiet did to him.

> *When I kept silent, my bones wore out through my roaring all the day.* (Psalm 32:3)

Hidden sin eats a man alive. But the same psalm goes on to tell what happened when David finally confessed: God forgave the guilt of his sin (Psalm 32:5). John promises the same thing to every believer: if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

Men need to hear, again and again, that the gospel isn't a reward for men who have it together. It is good news for sinners. Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and everyone who trusts in Him is forgiven completely.

> ***There is** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 8:1)

No condemnation. Not "less condemnation." Not "no condemnation once you clean up." None. A man who really believes that can finally stop hiding. He can tell the truth about himself because his standing with God doesn't depend on looking good.

Jesus' invitation isn't to strong men who have it all together. It is to tired ones.

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

Notice who Jesus is inviting. Not the men who have earned it. Not the men who have cleaned up first. The weary ones. The ones carrying a load they can't put down. If that describes a man in your church, he is exactly the man Jesus is calling.

A church that wants to reach men has to be a place where that invitation is real. That means leaders who are honest about their own struggles (wisely, not for show). It means groups where a man can say "I blew it" and be met with grace and truth, not gossip and not a shrug. And it means knowing when a man's struggle is bigger than what a friend can carry. If a man is talking about ending his life, or is in danger, or someone else is, don't keep that to yourself. Get him help right away: call 911 if he is in immediate danger, and in the U.S. he can call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. We will talk much more about caring for hurting men in Chapter 9.

For years I carried a secret. I was struggling with alcohol. I told myself I had it under control, but deep down I knew better, and I had gotten very good at hiding it. Even my friend of more than forty years, the one I told you about earlier in this chapter, didn't know how bad it was. Part of me wanted to tell him, but shame and fear kept getting in the way. What would he think of me? Would he see me differently?

The longer I hid it, the heavier it got, until I couldn't carry it alone anymore. So I told him the truth. It was one of the hardest and most humbling conversations of my life. It didn't fix everything, but it broke the silence that had kept me trapped. I had been afraid of judgment, and what I got was grace grounded in truth. Shame had told me that admitting my weakness would cost me his respect. Grace showed me it was the beginning of my freedom. Sometimes the first step toward healing is a man finding the courage to say, "I'm not okay, and I need help."

What Men Do Not Need

It is just as helpful to say what men don't need. Good churches sometimes miss men, not because they don't care, but because they offer the wrong thing.

Men don't need another guilt trip. Many men already know they are falling short as husbands, fathers, and followers of Jesus. They hear it at home, and they hear it in their own heads. A men's event that amounts to an hour of "Step up, men, you're failing" may get some nods, but it rarely changes anything. Conviction from the Holy Spirit leads a man to Jesus. A guilt trip just makes him want to leave early. Call men to repentance, yes, but always hand them the gospel with it.

Men don't need a show. Smoke machines, a celebrity speaker, and a motorcycle on stage may draw a crowd once. But men are good at spotting when they are being marketed to. They would rather have real food, a real conversation, and a real man telling them the truth from the Bible than a production. Keep it simple and honest. (A good brisket never hurts, though.)

Men don't need to be managed. This one is close to my heart, because I have spent my career managing projects, and I know the difference between managing a schedule and managing a person. Men can tell when they are being treated as a number on an attendance chart or a slot on a volunteer roster. They don't want to be handled. They want to be known. Later in this book I will give you plenty of tools for

organizing a ministry, but every one of them exists to help real men be known by name and cared for, not to process them.

And men don't need perfection from you. You don't have to be the most spiritual man in the church to help another man. You have to be honest, you have to care, and you have to keep pointing to Jesus.

When you put all of this together, what do men need? They need a brother who knows them. They need purpose, the knowledge that God made them for something. They need truth they can use from God's Word, taught plainly. They need a mission bigger than themselves. And underneath all of it, they need grace: the good news that in Christ they are forgiven, accepted, and free to stop hiding.

None of that requires a big budget or a staff position. It requires men who are willing to be with other men, side by side, the way Jesus was with His disciples. In the next chapter we will lay out a simple picture for doing that with one man at a time. I call it the Workshop Path. But before we get there, think again about Glen, back at work the Monday after his father's funeral, telling everyone he's fine. What would it take for one man in your church to notice him, sit next to him, and ask again?

Talk It Over

1. When was the last time you said "I'm fine" when you weren't? What kept you from saying more?
2. Read Genesis 2:18 and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Who is the man in your life who would lift you up if you fell? If you can't name one, what has gotten in the way?
3. Which of the needs in this chapter (a brother, purpose, truth you can use, a mission) feels most missing in your life right now?
4. Where have you had your most honest conversations with another man? What does that tell you about how to approach other men?
5. How would you explain the difference between guilt and shame to a friend? Why does Romans 8:1 matter so much for a man living in shame?
6. Have you seen a church offer men a guilt trip, a show, or management instead of what they really need? What could have been done differently?

Try This Week

Find one man you know who seems to be carrying something, and invite him to help you with a simple task this week: a project in the garage, an errand, yard work, anything with your hands busy. Somewhere in the middle of it, ask him one honest question ("What's been the hardest part of this year for you?") and then be quiet long enough for him to answer.

Part Two: Walking With One Man

Chapter 4: The Workshop Path

> *whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*
>
> Colossians 1:28 (SLB)

Every good workshop has some kind of flow to it. Rough lumber comes in the door. It gets stacked and left to season. Then it moves to the saw, the jointer, and the planer, then to the bench for joinery, then to the glue-up and clamps, and finally to finishing. When it leaves the shop, it is something useful: a table, a cabinet, a cradle for a grandchild. Nobody planned it as a factory line, but over time a good woodworker arranges his shop so that the work moves naturally from one station to the next.

I want to give you a simple picture for walking with one man toward Jesus. I call it the Workshop Path. It isn't a program and it isn't a curriculum. It is a way of seeing where a man is and what might help him next. You can carry it in your head, sketch it on a napkin, or use it to plan a whole ministry. In Part Three we will build a lot on top of it. But it starts with one man.

One Man at a Time

Before we look at the path, I want to settle something. This book is about reaching every man your church can reach. That sounds like a big number. But you never actually reach a crowd. You reach one man, then another, then another.

Paul understood this. Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul says "every man" three times in one sentence: he admonishes every man and teaches every man so that he may "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Paul's word there means every person, and that includes every man in your church. He was a missionary to entire cities, and he still thought in terms of one person at a time being brought to maturity in Christ. The word "perfect" there means grown up, mature, complete, finished the way a good piece of furniture is finished. That is the goal for every man: not just that he would show up, but that he would grow up in Christ.

Jesus taught crowds, but He built men one at a time. He knew that Peter needed something different from Thomas, and Thomas needed something different from Matthew. The Workshop Path helps us do the same. It gives us a shared way to ask, "Where is this man right now, and what is his next step?"

The Five Stations

The Workshop Path has five stations arranged in a circle, with Jesus at the center. Here they are.

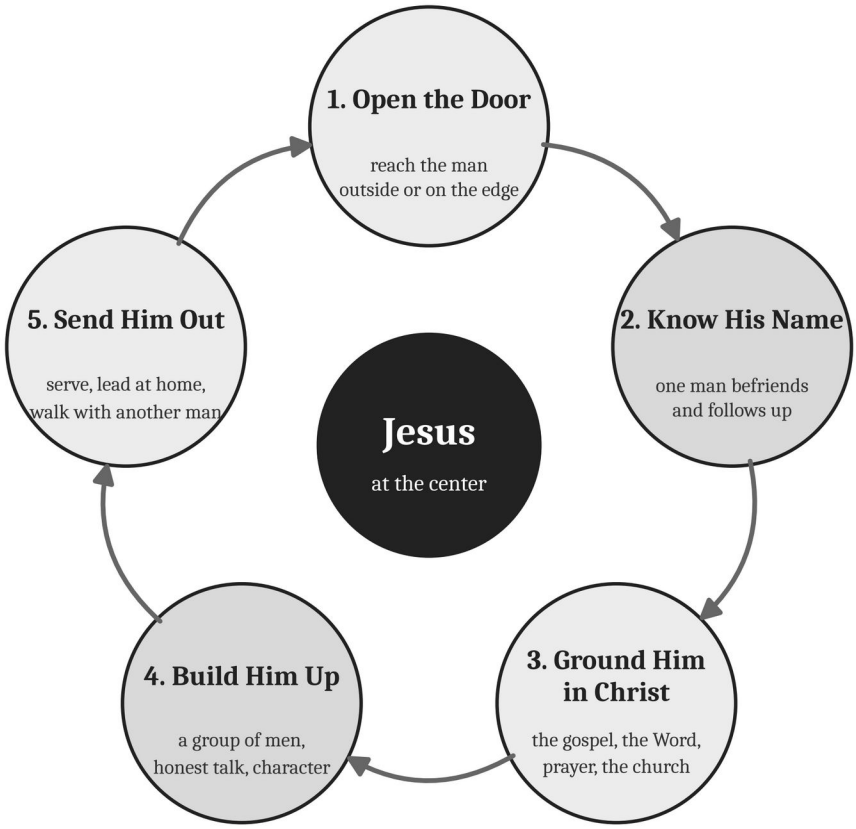


Figure 1. The Workshop Path

1. Open the Door. This station is about reaching men who are outside the church or on its edges. It is invitations, neighborliness, and events that are easy to bring a friend to. It is the coworker you ask to lunch, the neighbor you help with his fence, the dad at the ballfield you get to know over a few seasons. A man at this station may not be ready for a Bible study. He may be ready for a cookout. The goal here is simple: give him a reason and an invitation to come closer.

2. Know His Name. Once a man comes through the door, one man befriends him. Not a committee, not a welcome packet. One man who learns his name, his wife's name, what he does for work, and what he cares about. That man follows up within a week, and he keeps showing up. Much of this friendship happens side by side, the way we talked about in Chapter 3. The goal at this station is that the man is known. If he stopped coming, someone would notice and call him.

3. Ground Him in Christ. Here a man hears the gospel plainly and has a chance to respond to it. If he has trusted Christ, he is helped to know he belongs to God (what we call assurance), and he starts building the basic habits of a believer: reading the Bible, praying, being part of a local church. Some men come to this station new to faith. Others have been in church for years and never got the foundation. Either way, a house built on sand won't stand, so we make sure each man is on the rock.

4. Build Him Up. At this station a man is in a small group of men, having honest conversations that go past sports and weather. He is growing in character in the hard places: temptation, anger, money, work, marriage, and fatherhood. He is learning to confess his sins to trusted brothers and to receive restoration when he falls. This is where most of the long, slow growth happens, like wood seasoning in a stack. It can't be rushed.

5. Send Him Out. Every man has work to do in God's kingdom. At this station a man is serving in the church and community, seeing his daily job as a calling from God, leading his home as a servant the way Christ loves the church, and walking with another man the way someone walked with him. Paul put it this way to Timothy, and it is the verse that closes the circle.

> *and the things which you heard from me through many witnesses, commit these to faithful men, who will be sufficient to teach others also.* (2 Timothy 2:2)

Then the man who has been sent out goes and opens the door for someone else. That is why the path is a circle. The last station leads right back to the first, with a new man.

Jesus at the Center

I want to explain why Jesus is in the middle of the drawing and not at the end of it.

It would be easy to draw this as a line with Jesus as the finish line, as if a man works his way through four stations and then gets to Jesus. That isn't the gospel. A man doesn't earn his way to Christ by attending events and joining a group. He is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and that can happen at any station. Some men come to faith at a cookout. Some come to faith in a hospital room. Some have known Jesus since they were boys.

Jesus is at the center because every station points to Him and depends on Him. We open the door so men can come to Him. We learn a man's name because Jesus knows his name. We ground him in Christ, not in our church's way of doing things. We build him up so he will look more like Jesus. We send him out because Jesus sends His people. If any station stops pointing to Jesus, it becomes just another activity.

Jesus is also at the center because He is the One who does the real work. Paul said it plainly to the Corinthians, who were arguing about which teacher they followed.

> *I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing **it** to grow.* (1 Corinthians 3:6)

That verse takes the pressure off. You can invite, befriend, teach, and send. You can't change a man's heart. Only God can. Our job is to be faithful at whatever station we are working, and trust God with the growth.

A Circle, Not a Ladder

Here is the most important thing I can tell you about the Workshop Path: **the stations aren't a ladder a man climbs once.**

Men don't move neatly from one station to the next. A man might be well grounded in Christ and active in a group, and then lose his job and stop coming to anything. Now he needs someone to know his name all over again. A man might be serving faithfully and fall into a sin that costs him his marriage. He may need to go back to the ground floor and be reminded of the gospel like a brand-new believer. That isn't failure on the path. That is what life looks like.

It also works the other way. A man who just walked in the door might be ready to serve on a work crew next Saturday, long before he would ever join a Bible study. Let him. Swinging a hammer next to a few believers may be the very thing that opens him up to the gospel. Men skip around, and that is fine.

Jesus gives us a good picture of how growth works in a parable about seed.

> *For the earth bears fruit by itself: first a blade, then a head, then full grain in the head.*
> (Mark 4:28)

Growth comes in stages, and it comes on God's timetable, not ours. You can't yell at a seed to grow faster. But you can tell the difference between a blade and a head of grain, and you can give each one what it needs. The Workshop Path helps you see what stage a man is in so you can care for him wisely.

I'll be honest with you. There have been more times than I care to admit when I backslid in my faith. My own choices, pride, and distractions pulled me away from God, and more than once I ended up in a pit I had dug with my own hands. The hardest part was that I knew better. I knew God's Word, I had tasted His grace, and I still wandered.

But I can see a pattern now that I couldn't see while I was living it. Every time I wandered, God stayed faithful. Every time I stumbled, He put someone in my path: a pastor, a trusted friend, or a man who simply noticed I was struggling. None of them came with condemnation or reminded me how far I had fallen. They met me where I was, not where I should have been. A man's walk with God isn't a ladder he climbs once and never comes down. Sometimes we fall, and sometimes we need another man to reach down and help us stand again. I am living proof of both.

Where a Man Stands

The Workshop Path describes what we do. Now we need a way to describe the man in front of us. Over time you will meet five kinds of men. I call this "where a man stands."

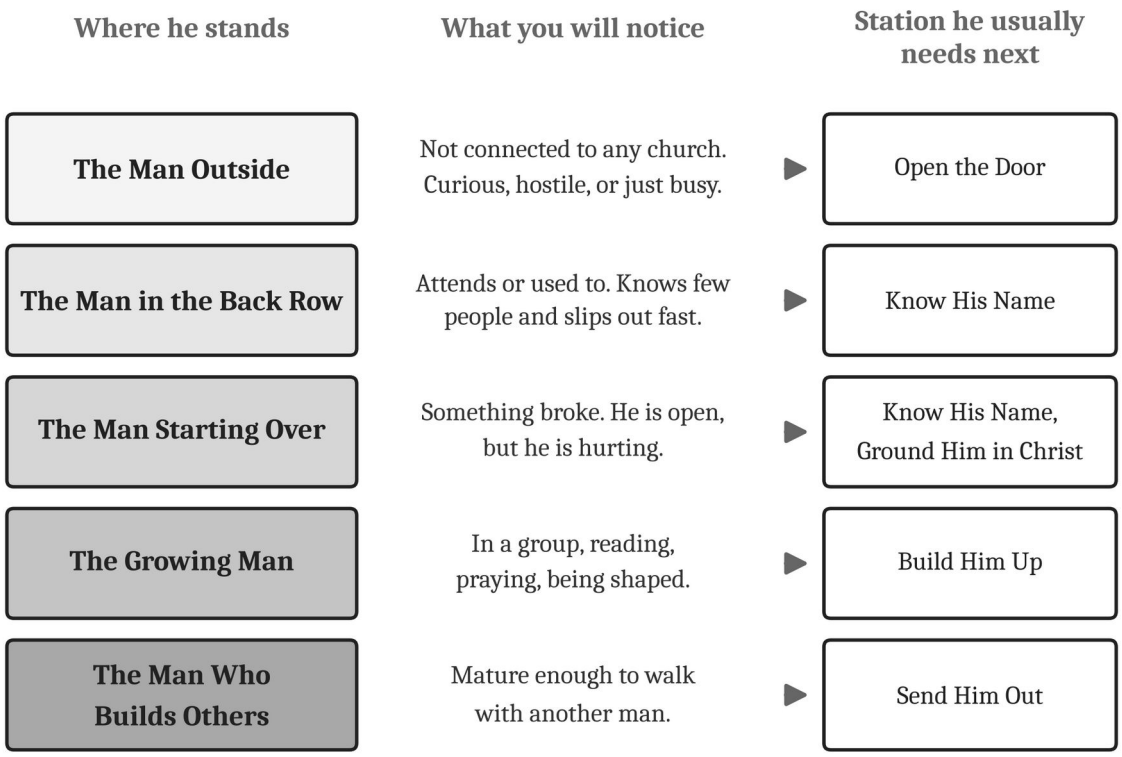


Figure 2. Where a Man Stands

The Man Outside. He isn't connected to any church. He may be curious about God, hostile to religion, or just busy and indifferent. He might be your neighbor, your coworker, or the husband of a woman in your church. Picture a man named Luis who coaches his son's soccer team, works long hours as an electrician, and thinks church is fine for his wife but not for him. He isn't against God. He just doesn't see the point.

The Man in the Back Row. He attends, or used to. He knows few people and slips out fast. He may have been in church his whole life or started coming recently with his family. Picture a man named Pete who has come to the early service for three years, always sits in the same spot near the back, and couldn't tell you the name of one other man in the church. Nobody has ever asked him to do anything.

The Man Starting Over. Something broke. It might be sin, or loss, or a divorce, a lost job, an addiction coming to light, or a health scare. He is open in a way he wasn't before, but he is hurting. Picture a man named Walt whose wife asked him to move out last month. He showed up at a men's breakfast for the first time in years, sat by himself, and barely ate. He isn't looking for a program. He is looking for a lifeline.

The Growing Man. He is in a group, reading his Bible, praying, and being shaped. He has bad weeks, but he is moving in the right direction. Picture a man named Darnell who started meeting with two other men on Monday nights a year ago. He has started praying with his wife at night, which he never did before. He still has plenty of rough edges, but you can see the grain coming out.

The Man Who Builds Others. He is mature enough to walk with another man. He isn't perfect, but he is steady, humble, and faithful. He is a future leader, whether or not he has a title. Picture a man named

Hector, a retired mail carrier who always seems to have a younger man in his truck, headed to breakfast or to help someone move. He would laugh if you called him a leader. But he is one.

Paul gave the church at Thessalonica a short instruction that fits this list well.

> *Now we exhort you, brothers: admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient toward all.* (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Notice that Paul doesn't give one response for everyone. The disorderly man needs a warning. The fainthearted man needs encouragement. The weak man needs help. And all of them need patience. That is what knowing where a man stands is for. It keeps us from giving every man the same thing.

How to Tell Where a Man Is

You might ask, "How do I know where a man stands? I can't just ask him which category he's in." No, please don't do that. Nobody wants to be labeled. These descriptions are for you and your team, not for name tags.

The answer is simpler than it sounds: pay attention. A shepherd learns his sheep by being with them. Proverbs says it this way.

> *You shall surely know the face of your flock; set your heart on the herds* (Proverbs 27:23)

Here are a few things to watch and listen for. Is he connected to the church at all? Does any man at church know him by name? When he talks about God, does he sound like someone who knows Jesus personally, or someone who knows about church? Is something going on in his life right now that has knocked him off his feet? Is he in a group? Is he already pouring into someone else, even informally?

Most of the time you will learn these things by spending time with him and asking good questions. "How did you end up at this church?" "What was church like for you growing up?" "What's the hardest thing you're dealing with right now?" "Who are the guys you're closest to?" Then listen more than you talk.

Measure twice, cut once. It is better to take a few conversations to understand a man than to guess wrong and hand him the wrong thing. A man who is Starting Over doesn't need to be recruited for the parking team. A man in the Back Row probably isn't ready to lead a group. A Growing Man may be bored if all you ever invite him to is another breakfast.

And remember that men change. Where a man stands today isn't where he will stand next year. Check in again. Your church will eventually keep a simple list of every man connected to it, with one leader assigned to each and a note about his next step. We call that the Name List, and we will build it in Chapters 6 and 12. For now, just start paying attention to the men God has put near you.

Finding His Next Step

Once you have a sense of where a man stands, the question becomes: what is his next step? Not his next ten steps. Just the next one.

Here is a simple table to get you thinking. It is a starting point, not a rulebook. Real men will surprise you.

Where he stands	The station that usually fits	A next step you might offer
The Man Outside	Open the Door	An invitation to something easy: a cookout, a service day, a ball game
The Man in the Back Row	Know His Name	Coffee or lunch with one man, and a call within a week
The Man Starting Over	Know His Name, then Ground Him in Christ	Show up, listen, pray with him, connect him to a pastor or counselor if needed
The Growing Man	Build Him Up	A small group, a study, an honest friend to meet with regularly
The Man Who Builds Others	Send Him Out	Walk with a younger man, lead a group, join the core team

Notice that the Man Starting Over shows up at more than one station. A hurting man may have been a Growing Man six months ago. Now he needs someone to sit with him before anyone asks him to do anything. We will give him a whole chapter (Chapter 9), because he deserves it.

This leads to a habit that runs all the way through this book. We call it the Next Step rule: **every event and every conversation offers one clear next step.** Not five options on a brochure. One clear step. At a breakfast, it might be, "We're doing a service day next month. Want to come with me?" Over coffee, it might be, "Would you be willing to read the Gospel of Mark with me over the next few weeks?" With a mature man, it might be, "There's a young dad in our church who needs someone like you. Would you take him to lunch?"

One step is easier to say yes to. And a man who takes one step is far more likely to take the next.

Let me show you how this might look. Picture a man named Dale. He is the Man Outside: his wife started coming to church last year, and he comes at Christmas and Easter. A man in the church named Tom lives on his street. Tom invites Dale to help with a service day, painting the dugouts at the town ballfield (Open the Door). Dale comes and has a good time. Tom texts him the next week and they grab breakfast (Know His Name). Over the next few months, Dale starts coming on Sundays. Somewhere in those months Tom tells Dale, simply, what Jesus has done for him. One night over a fire pit, Dale asks what it actually means to be a Christian, and Tom walks him through it (Ground Him in Christ). Dale trusts Christ, gets baptized, and joins a Saturday morning group (Build Him Up). Two years later, Dale is the one inviting his brother-in-law to a service day (Send Him Out). The circle closes, and opens again.

That story is tidy. Real life usually isn't. Dale might stall for a year at breakfast. He might trust Christ and then go through a hard season that sends him back to the edges. Tom will need patience. But the path gives Tom a way to see what Dale needs at each point, and a way to keep moving with him.

What the Path Is and Isn't

Let me finish by heading off a few misunderstandings.

The Workshop Path isn't a way to rank men. A man at the first station isn't worth less than a man at the fifth. Every man is made in God's image, and every man at every station is someone Jesus came to seek

and save. Sometimes the man at the first station is closer to the kingdom than the man who has been in church for forty years.

The Workshop Path isn't a scorecard for you. You aren't a failure if a man you are walking with stalls. You plant and water. God causes the growth.

The Workshop Path isn't a replacement for the church. It works inside the life of your local church, under your pastor and elders. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, preaching, and pastoral care belong to the whole church. A men's ministry helps men get connected to all of that. It doesn't build a separate church for men.

What the path is, at its best, is a shared language. When your core team talks about a man, they can say, "Pete is in the Back Row, and nobody knows him yet. Who's going to get coffee with him?" That one sentence tells everyone what is going on and what needs to happen next. In a busy church, that kind of clarity can be the difference between a man being reached and a man slipping out the side door for another ten years.

It is also a reminder of where this all goes. Paul told the Philippians he was sure of something.

> *being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete **it** until **the** day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6)

God finishes what He starts. Every man you walk with, at every station, is a work in progress in the hands of a Master who doesn't quit. That is why we can be patient. That is why we can keep showing up. And that is why it is worth it.

In the chapters that follow, we will walk through each station one at a time, starting with how to open the door to the men who aren't in the room yet.

When I look back, I can see the Workshop Path in my own life, even though nobody ever called it that. My friend of forty years went from a man I didn't like, to a man I respected, to the brother I finally told the truth about my drinking. Over those same years God put other men in my path. Some invited me into deeper conversations about faith. Some helped me face hard truths. Others pushed me to take what I had learned and use it to help someone else.

None of them had a checklist or a discipleship manual. What they had was time, honesty, faith, and a willingness to walk beside me. They helped me take my next step with God, whatever that step was in that season. And the path doesn't end when a man finds his own footing. It keeps going when he turns around and reaches back for the man behind him.

Talk It Over

1. Look at the five stations of the Workshop Path. Which station describes where you are right now? Which station were you at five years ago?
2. Why does it matter that Jesus is at the center of the circle rather than at the end of a line?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Think of a time someone gave you the wrong kind of help for where you were. What would have helped more?

4. Of the five kinds of men in “where a man stands,” which ones do you find easiest to connect with? Which are hardest for you, and why?
5. Think of two or three men you know. Without labeling them out loud, where do you think each one stands, and what might be one clear next step for him?
6. Philippians 1:6 says God finishes what He starts. How does that change the way you think about a man who seems stuck?

Try This Week

Write down the names of three men you know, and next to each one, jot where you think he stands and one next step you could offer him. Then pick one of those three and offer that step this week, whether it’s an invitation, a phone call, a coffee, or a question about how he is really doing.

Chapter 5: Open the Door

> *And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing be out of Nazareth?" Philip says to him, "Come and see."*
>
> John 1:46 (SLB)

Every church building has doors, and most of us think of them as the way in. That is true, but it is only half true. A door also swings out. The same door a man walks through on Sunday morning is the door he walks back through on Monday, into a neighborhood, a job site, an office, a gym, and a family full of men who have never set foot in a church or who stopped coming years ago.

This chapter is about the first station on the Workshop Path from Chapter 4: **Open the Door**. It is the station where a man who is outside, or barely inside, first hears a friendly voice say, "Come with me." Everything else on the path depends on this one. You can't know a man's name, ground him in Christ, build him up, or send him out if he never comes close enough to meet anyone.

You might ask, "Isn't this the pastor's job?" The pastor has a part in it, and a good sermon on a Sunday when a guest is present matters. But the plain fact is that most men won't walk into a church alone because a sign out front said "All Welcome." They come because another man asked them. That makes this station the work of ordinary men, and that means you.

Look at the first chapter of John's Gospel and watch how the circle around Jesus grew. It didn't grow by an announcement. It grew one man at a time, along the lines of family and friendship.

Andrew spent a day with Jesus. The very next thing he did was go looking for his brother.

> *He first finds his own brother Simon and says to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is, being translated, the Christ).* (John 1:41)

Notice the word "first." Before Andrew had sorted out everything Jesus meant, before he had heard a single parable or seen a single miracle, he thought of Simon. He didn't wait until he was an expert. He went to the man closest to him and told him what he had found. Then he brought him to Jesus.

A few verses later, Philip does the same thing with his friend Nathanael. Nathanael pushes back. He has heard where Jesus is from, and he isn't impressed. Philip doesn't argue with him. He doesn't try to win a debate about Nazareth. He just says, "Come and see." That one line is the heart of this chapter. Our job isn't to drag men into the kingdom by the collar. Our job is to say, with an honest face, "Come and see," and then walk alongside them while they look.

Two Men You Already Know

In Chapter 4 we named five kinds of men a leader will meet. Two of them matter most at this station.

The first is **the Man Outside**. He isn't connected to any church. He may be curious about God and not know where to start. He may be hostile because a church hurt him or someone he loves. Most often he is

simply busy. He works long hours, coaches his kid's team, mows the lawn on Saturday, and sleeps in on Sunday. Church isn't something he has rejected so much as something he has never had a reason to think about.

The second is **the Man in the Back Row**. He is inside the building, at least some of the time. He sits near the exit, sings a little, listens a little, and slips out during the last song. He may know two or three people by name. If he stopped coming next month, it could be a long while before anyone noticed. Some of these men used to be very involved and drifted. Some were never more than visitors who kept visiting.

Here is what these two men have in common: neither one will respond to a general invitation. The Man Outside doesn't read the church bulletin. The Man in the Back Row reads it, sees "Men's Breakfast, Saturday 7 a.m.," and thinks, "That's for the guys who already know each other." Both of them need the same thing, which is a man who knows them, or wants to, saying, "I'd like you to come with me."

There are men standing alone in your church, and men in your neighborhood whose wives and kids come without them. You don't need a survey to tell you there is work to do. You need open eyes.

Start With Names and a Prayer

Before Jesus sent His disciples out to the towns of Israel, He showed them how He looked at a crowd.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus didn't see a crowd as a problem to manage or a number to grow. He saw men and women who were weary and thrown down, and it moved Him. Then He turned to His disciples and told them what to do about it.

> *Then He says to His disciples, "The harvest indeed **is** plentiful, but the workers **are** few; therefore implore the Lord of the harvest that He may send out workers into His harvest."*
> (Matthew 9:37-38)

The first instruction wasn't "go." It was "pray": pray that God would send workers. Then, in the very next chapter, Jesus sent out the same disciples He had just told to pray (Matthew 10:1-5). So pray for workers, expect to be one, and pray by name for the men you'll go to. Opening the door to men begins on your knees.

Here is a simple practice. Take a card and write down the names of five men you know who are outside the church or sitting in its back row. Think about your street, your job, your extended family, the men you see at the hardware store or the ballfield. Keep the card in your wallet or tape it inside a cabinet door where you will see it every morning. Pray for those five men by name. Pray that God would soften their hearts. Pray that He would give you an opening. Pray that you would notice the opening when it comes.

Something changes in a man who prays for another man by name every day. He starts to care. He starts to notice when the neighbor's truck has been in the driveway all week, or when a coworker seems quieter than usual. Prayer doesn't replace the invitation, but it gets you ready to make one.

A core team can do this together. Picture a men's ministry where each man on the core team carries a card with five names, and once a month they pray through them out loud. In a year, those few men will have prayed hundreds of times for dozens of men who have no idea anyone is thinking about them. That's the kind of quiet faithfulness God loves to answer.

I can't point to one invitation to church or a Bible study that changed my life. In some seasons I wasn't searching for God so much as trying to find my way out of a mess I had made. I didn't need another program. I needed someone to notice I was struggling.

And God kept putting men in my path who did. They didn't come with an agenda or a prepared speech. They asked how I was doing, listened, and made themselves available, and those small things opened doors to conversations I never would have started on my own. I know how easy it is to hide pain behind a smile. That is why I believe in learning a man's name and praying for him before you ever ask him to come to anything. Before we invite a man into a church building, we need to invite him into a friendship where he feels seen.

The Personal Invitation

If there is one thing to take from this chapter, it is this: a personal invitation from a man who means it is worth more than any advertisement a church can buy.

Why? Because men trust men they know. A flyer asks a man to trust an institution. A friend asks him to trust a friend. When your neighbor has watched you help him haul brush to the curb, borrowed your ladder, and heard you laugh at his jokes over the fence, your invitation carries the weight of all that history. He may still say no. But he will hear you.

Think about the woman at the well in John 4. She wasn't a religious leader. Many think her own town looked down on her. But after she met Jesus, she went straight back into the city.

> *"Come, see a man who told me all things that I did. This is not the Christ,* ***is it****?"* (John 4:29)

She didn't have a polished speech. She told the truth about what had happened to her and asked a question she didn't have the full answer to. And the town came out to see. That is what an honest, personal invitation can do.

So who do you invite, and how? Start with the men already in your life.

Your neighbor. You don't need a reason to knock on a door and ask a man if he wants to grab breakfast on Saturday. If your church is having a men's breakfast, all the better. "Hey, a bunch of guys from my church get together for breakfast once a month. The food is good and nobody's going to put you on the spot. Want to ride with me?" That last phrase matters. Offer to drive. A man is far more likely to come if he doesn't have to walk in alone.

Your coworker. Work is where many men spend most of their waking hours, and it is where they are most guarded. Be careful here. Do your job well, treat people fairly, and don't preach on the clock. Over time, the men you work beside will notice how you handle pressure and how you talk about your family.

When the door cracks open, maybe over lunch or on a long drive to a job, you can say, "I've got a group of guys I meet with. You'd fit right in."

The guy at the gym, the ballfield, or the shop. Men gather around shared activity. The man you see every Tuesday at the gym, the dad standing next to you at Little League practice, the regular at the auto parts counter: these are relationships already in motion. You don't have to manufacture a connection. You only have to take the one that is there one step further.

The man in your own back row. Don't forget the man three rows behind you on Sunday. He may need an invitation as much as anyone outside. Walk over after the service, shake his hand, and ask his name. If you already know it, ask him to lunch. Sometimes the shortest distance to cover is the hardest one to cross.

Not every invitation is equal. Some practically ask to be declined. "You should come to church sometime" is one of them. It has no day, no time, no plan, and no person attached. A man can agree with it and never think about it again.

A good invitation has a few plain marks. It is specific: a day, a time, a place. It is personal: you will be there, and you would like him to be there with you. It is low pressure: he can say no and the friendship won't change. And when you can manage it, it comes with a ride.

Compare these two:

"We've got a men's thing coming up. You should check it out."

"I'm going to a cookout with some guys from church on Saturday the 14th, around noon at the park on Third Street. I'll swing by and get you at 11:45 if you want to come. If not, no big deal, we'll catch up another time."

The second one takes about ten more seconds to say. It is far more likely to get a yes.

What if he says no? Then you have still done something good. You have told him, without pushing, that you think about him and want him around. Keep being his friend. Ask again in a few months, about something different. Plenty of men say yes on a later invitation, not the first. A good woodworker doesn't force a joint that isn't ready to close, and you shouldn't force a man either.

Events a Man Can Bring a Friend To

Not every men's event is a good one to bring a friend to, and that is fine. A small group studying Romans isn't the place for a man who has never opened a Bible. But a men's ministry should plan some events that are built with the Man Outside and the Man in the Back Row in mind. These are the doors.

What makes an event easy to bring a friend to? Start by looking at it through the eyes of a man who has never been to your church.

- **It is on neutral or friendly ground.** A park, a backyard, a ballfield, or a fellowship hall that feels more like a lodge than a sanctuary.

- **It is built around something men already enjoy.** A cookout, a sporting event on a big screen, a clay shoot, a car show, a workday building a wheelchair ramp at a veterans' home.
- **Nobody is put on the spot.** No one asks a guest to pray out loud, read Scripture, or share his testimony with the group.
- **It is short and clear.** He knows when it starts and when it ends, and it ends on time.
- **There is one honest word about Jesus.** A short talk, a man's story of how God changed him, or a simple prayer. Not a sermon, and not nothing.
- **There is a clear next step.** This is the Next Step rule at work: every event offers one simple way to come closer, like a four-week group for new guys or a breakfast next month.

Service events deserve a special word. Many men who would never come to a Bible study will gladly show up to patch a leaky roof at the food pantry or clean up a park. They want to do something useful, and working side by side lowers the guard. A man who has spent a morning hauling shingles with you will be far more open to a conversation over lunch than he would ever be across a table in a classroom.

Planning the details of these events comes later, in Chapter 14. For now, the point is simple: a men's ministry needs regular, intentional doors, not just rooms for men who are already inside.

No Bait and Switch

There is a temptation, when we want men to come, to hide the ball. We advertise a barbecue and deliver a forty-minute altar call. We promise a fishing trip and spend most of it pressuring a man about his soul. Men see through this, and it does lasting harm. A man who feels tricked once won't trust your invitation a second time.

Paul gave the believers in Colossae a good word on how to treat people outside the faith.

> *Walk in wisdom toward those outside, redeeming the time. **Let** your word **be** always in grace, seasoned with salt, to know how you must answer each one.* (Colossians 4:5-6)

Wisdom and grace. Making the most of the time without abusing it. That is the balance. Be honest about who you are. If it is a church event, say so. If there will be a short talk about faith, say so. "It's a cookout. One of the guys will talk for about ten minutes about how he came to faith. Then we eat." Most men respect that kind of honesty. They are far more willing to come when they know what they are walking into.

The opposite mistake is just as real. Some men's events are so careful not to offend that Jesus never comes up at all. Men eat, laugh, and go home, and nothing points them any closer to Christ. That isn't an open door. That is a nice room with no exit. An event built to open the door should always include something, even something small, that points a man toward Jesus and toward a next step.

Remember that the goal isn't to get a man to an event. The goal is to help him take his next step toward Jesus. The event is a tool, like a clamp that holds two pieces together long enough for the glue to set. It matters, but it isn't the finished piece.

Carried by Friends

One of the best pictures of this station comes from Mark 2. Jesus is teaching in a house in Capernaum, and the place is packed so tight no one else can get in.

> *And they come to Him, bringing a paralytic being carried by four.* (Mark 2:3)

You know the rest of the story. They couldn't get through the crowd, so they climbed onto the roof, dug a hole in it, and lowered their friend down on his mat right in front of Jesus. And Mark tells us that Jesus saw their faith, and before He ever told the man to get up and walk, He told him his sins were forgiven.

Several things in this story speak to men's ministry.

The man couldn't get there on his own. Some men are like that. They aren't unwilling so much as unable. Shame, fear, old wounds, or plain awkwardness have them stuck on the mat. They need someone to pick up a corner.

It took four men, not one. Each man had a corner. No single friend could have carried that mat up to a roof. This is a good word for a men's ministry. When one man is praying for his neighbor, others can help. One man invites. Another offers to drive. A third makes sure the guest has someone to sit with. A fourth follows up the next week. Opening the door for a man is often a team lift.

They were willing to make a mess. Digging through a roof isn't tidy. Reaching men who are far from God will sometimes mean doing things that feel inconvenient or unusual. It might mean holding an event on a weeknight instead of Saturday morning so that men who work weekends can come. It might mean a men's group that meets at a diner at 5:30 a.m. It might mean welcoming a man who smells like last night's beer. The four friends cared more about getting their friend to Jesus than about keeping the roof neat.

And they brought him to Jesus, not just to a crowd. They didn't lay him down outside the house and hope someone would notice. They put him right in front of the Lord. Every door we open should lead there.

When the Door Stays Shut

Some of the men on your card won't come, no matter how kindly or how often you ask. Some will come once and never again. Some will be openly hostile. What then?

Picture a man named Rick. His neighbor prayed for him by name for six years. He helped Rick rebuild a deck, sat with him at his mother's funeral, and invited him to almost everything. Rick never came. They are still friends, and the neighbor still prays. That isn't failure. That is faithfulness, and the story isn't over.

First, remember whose work this is. You can open a door, but you can't open a heart. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. Paul asked the Colossians to pray that God would "open to us a door for the word" (Colossians 4:3). The door that matters most is the one God opens. Your part is to be faithful, kind, and ready.

Second, don't make the friendship conditional on the invitation. If a man senses that you only like him because you want him at church, he will pull away, and he will be right to. Love your neighbor whether he ever comes or not. Help him fix his fence. Bring him soup when he is sick. Go to his dad's funeral. Over time, that kind of steady friendship says more about Jesus than any event ever could.

Third, keep praying and keep watching. Men's lives change. The man who laughed off your invitation in the spring may lose his job in the fall, or bury a parent, or see his marriage start to come apart. When the ground shakes, men look for something solid. You want to be the man he already knows he can call. When that happens, he will likely move to a different place on the Workshop Path, perhaps as the Man Starting Over, which Chapter 9 covers in detail.

I remember a man in our church who, from the outside, looked like he was walking with God. Behind the Sunday handshakes, he was losing a battle with substance abuse. Some weeks he seemed open to talking. Other weeks he pulled away. I knew from my own struggles how hard it is to admit your life is heading the wrong way, and I knew no amount of advice would change him until he was ready.

So I stayed. I didn't lecture him, and I didn't give up on him. I prayed for him, listened when he wanted to talk, and kept reminding him that God's forgiveness was still there. There were times I wondered whether any of it mattered. Slowly he started opening up, admitted the hold it had on him, and began to rebuild his walk with God. I didn't rescue him. God did that. I just got to walk beside him on the way back. We can't force a man to change, but we can refuse to let him believe he has been forgotten. And sometimes the man who needs reaching is already sitting in the pew.

Fourth, check your own heart. Sometimes the door stays shut because of how we have knocked. Have we been pushy? Preachy? Have we talked more than we have listened? It is worth asking a trusted friend, "How do I come across when I invite people?" A little honesty here can save a lot of slammed doors.

What the Core Team Can Do This Season

For leaders who are thinking about the whole ministry, here are a few ways to make this station part of how your men's ministry works, not just a nice idea.

Build the habit of prayer for names into every core team meeting. Five minutes, every time, praying for men by name who are outside or on the edges. Over months, this shapes what the team cares about.

Plan at least two door events a year, spaced well apart, that are easy for a man to bring a friend to. Choose them with the Man Outside in mind. Make sure each one has a clear next step and a plan for follow-up.

Teach your men how to invite. It sounds simple, but many men have never done it and feel awkward about it. Take ten minutes at a breakfast to practice. Give them a few sample phrases. Let them laugh about it. Then challenge each man to invite one friend to the next event.

Watch the back row. Ask a few warm, steady men to make a point of greeting men they don't know on Sunday mornings. Not with a clipboard, just with a handshake and a name. Some of the men you most need to reach are already in the building.

And pay attention to who comes. When a guest shows up, the door has opened. What happens next, in the following week, will decide whether he takes another step or quietly disappears. That is the work of the next station, and the next chapter.

Talk It Over

1. Think of the man who first invited you toward Jesus or toward church. What did he do that made you willing to come?
2. Which of the two men described in this chapter, the Man Outside or the Man in the Back Row, do you find easier to approach? Why?
3. Write down five names of men you could pray for this month. What is keeping you from inviting one of them to something?
4. Look at the marks of a good invitation (specific, personal, low pressure, with a ride). Which one do you most often leave out?
5. What door events has your church held in the past? Which ones made it easy to bring a friend, and which ones didn't?
6. In the story of the four friends in Mark 2, which corner of the mat could you carry for someone right now?

Try This Week

Make your card of five names today and pray for each man by name every morning this week. Then pick one of the five and give him a specific invitation before Sunday: breakfast, a cookout, a workday, or a ride to church. Name the day and the time, offer to drive, and let him know it's fine to say no.

Chapter 6: Know His Name

> *To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*
>
> John 10:3 (SLB)

A man can go to church for years and never be known. He can shake the pastor's hand at the door, drop a check in the plate, and sit through hundreds of sermons, and still not have one other man in the building who knows what keeps him up at night. That isn't a rare thing. Every church has men like him.

Jesus doesn't treat His people that way. He calls His own sheep by name. He knows them one at a time. And if we are going to walk with men the way Jesus walked with His disciples, we have to start in the same place: one man, known by name, by another man who cares about him.

This is the second station on the Workshop Path from Chapter 4: **Know His Name**. In the last chapter, a door opened. A man came to a cookout, a breakfast, a service day, or a Sunday service. Now comes the part that most churches skip. What happens in the next seven days will often decide whether he takes another step or quietly fades back into the crowd.

The First Week Matters Most

Picture a man named Frank. His neighbor invited him to a men's breakfast, and to everyone's surprise, he came. He ate, listened to a short talk, and laughed at a couple of jokes. He even filled out a card with his phone number. Then nothing happened. No call. No text. No one asked how he liked it. Three weeks later, the neighbor mentioned another breakfast, and Frank said, "Nah, I think that's more for the regulars."

Frank wasn't wrong. Nobody gave him a reason to think otherwise.

Here is a rule worth writing on the wall of every men's ministry: **every new man hears from someone within a week.** Not a form letter. Not a mass email. A real man, calling or texting or stopping by, who says something like, "Hey, it was good to meet you Saturday. I'm glad you came. Would you want to grab a coffee sometime this week?"

Why a week? Because the memory is still warm. He still remembers your face. The good feeling from the event hasn't been buried under work and bills and yard chores. Wait a month and you are starting over with a stranger.

Who should make the contact? Ideally, the man who invited him, or a man he met and connected with at the event. If no one knows him yet, a core team member should take it on. What matters is that someone owns it by name. "Somebody should call that guy" is the same as "nobody will call that guy."

A phone call is usually better than a text, and a face-to-face visit is better still, but use what fits the man. Some men won't answer an unknown number but will reply to a friendly text. Keep it short, keep it warm, and always offer a simple next step.

Barnabas Took Hold of Him

There is a man in the book of Acts who understood this station better than almost anyone. His given name was Joses, a form of Joseph, but the apostles called him Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement."

When Saul of Tarsus came to faith in Jesus, he had a reputation problem. He had been dragging Christians off to prison. When he showed up in Jerusalem, the believers were terrified of him. They didn't trust that his conversion was real. Saul was a new believer standing outside the circle, and no one would let him in.

> *But Barnabas, having taken hold of him, brought **him** to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.* (Acts 9:27)

Look at what Barnabas did. He didn't wait for Saul to make his own way in. He took the risk of being associated with a man everyone else kept at a distance. He knew Saul's story well enough to tell it for him. And he brought him to the men who could help him grow.

That is what it means to know a man's name. It is more than remembering what to call him. It is taking hold of him, learning his story, and walking him into the circle.

Every men's ministry needs a few men like Barnabas. Some men have a gift for it. They notice the new guy standing alone with his coffee. They remember his kids' names the second time they meet him. They don't mind sitting with the man nobody else wants to sit with. If you have men like that, put them to work right here. If you are a man like that, this station is likely where God wants you most.

The First Coffee

Most real friendships between men start with something small: a cup of coffee, a lunch, a ride somewhere. The first coffee with a new man isn't an interview, a sales pitch, or a Bible study. It is a chance for him to be heard.

Many men haven't been asked a real question about themselves in a long time. They are asked about work, sports, the weather. They are rarely asked, "How are you, really?" and almost never given the time to answer.

Proverbs 20:5 compares the counsel in a man's heart to deep water that a man of understanding will draw out. Drawing it out takes patience. You let the bucket down slowly. You don't dump your own life story on him in the first ten minutes. Here are some questions that help a first coffee go deeper without feeling forced:

- Where did you grow up, and what was your family like?
- What do you do for work, and do you like it?
- What do you do when you have a free Saturday?
- What has your experience with church been like?
- What's the hardest thing you're dealing with right now?

You won't ask all of these, and you shouldn't read them off a card. They are just places to start. The last two are worth saving until he seems comfortable. Some men will answer them right away. Others will need three or four coffees before they say anything past the surface. That is fine.

The most important skill at this station isn't talking. It is listening.

> *So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*
> (James 1:19)

Swift to hear. Slow to speak. Most of us have that backward, especially when we are nervous. We fill the silence. We give advice no one asked for. We turn the conversation back to ourselves. Resist that. Ask a question, then wait. Let the pause sit there a moment. Men often say the important thing right after the pause you were tempted to fill.

A few things to keep in mind: Don't try to fix him in the first meeting. Don't correct his theology over the first cup of coffee. Don't be shocked by what he tells you. If he shares something heavy, thank him for trusting you. And before you leave, offer one simple next step: "Let's do this again in a couple of weeks," or "There's a group of guys who meet Tuesday mornings. Want to come with me?"

Some of the most important conversations of my life didn't happen in a sanctuary or a pastor's office. They happened across a table, with a cup of coffee in front of the other man and a hot chocolate in front of me. I remember one season when I was carrying things I didn't know how to handle. I had made mistakes, I was struggling with my faith, and like most men, I was keeping it all to myself behind a face that said everything was fine.

I didn't need someone to tell me what I had done wrong. I already knew most of the answers. I needed someone to sit across from me, look me in the eye, and listen, and that is exactly what one man did. No judgment, no lecture, no rush to fix everything I laid on the table. For the first time in a while, I didn't have to defend myself or pretend. That conversation didn't change my circumstances, but it reminded me I wasn't alone. Sometimes the best thing you can give a man isn't your advice. It's your attention.

Shoulder to Shoulder

In Chapter 3 we talked about how many men open up side by side rather than face to face. That truth matters a great deal at this station.

Sitting across a table and looking a man in the eye can feel like an interrogation to some men. But put the same man next to you in a truck, at a workbench, in a fishing boat, or on a ladder, and he may start talking without being asked. The shared task gives his hands something to do and takes the pressure off. The conversation happens in the gaps.

So think beyond coffee. Invite him to help you with a project. Ask him to come along when you pick up lumber. Go to a ball game together. Walk the dog. Shoot some baskets. Change the oil. Build something. The activity isn't a trick to get him talking. It is part of the friendship. Men bond by doing things together, and that is how God made many of us.

Picture a man named Ruben who has been to church three times with his wife and said maybe twenty words to anyone. A man from the core team, Ed, learns that Ruben restores old trucks. Ed has a 1970s pickup in his garage that hasn't run in two years. He asks Ruben if he would take a look at it some Saturday. Ruben shows up with his own tools. For three hours they talk about carburetors and rusted bolts. Somewhere in the fourth hour, with his head under the hood, Ruben mentions that his older brother died last spring and he still hasn't cleaned out his brother's shop. Ed doesn't pounce. He just says, "That's a heavy thing. If you ever want a hand with it, I'll come." Two months later, they spend a Saturday in that shop together. That is where Ruben asks Ed what he believes about heaven.

No sermon brought Ruben to that question. A friendship did, built one bolt at a time.

Think about Jonathan and David. Their friendship was forged in the middle of real life: battle, danger, loyalty under pressure. Jonathan didn't just tell David he cared about him. He went out to the field and warned him. He stood up to his own father for him. Their bond was built doing things, not just talking about things.

This kind of friendship takes time. There is no shortcut. You can't microwave trust between men any more than you can rush a glue-up. Clamp it, give it the time it needs, and don't take the clamps off too soon. A friendship that has set properly will hold under a lot of strain.

Rejoice and Weep With Him

Knowing a man's name means knowing his life. It means knowing when his daughter's wedding is, when his dad's surgery is scheduled, and when his annual review is coming. It means showing up for the good and the bad.

> *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15)

When his son makes the team, send a text. When he gets the promotion, buy him lunch. When his mother dies, go to the funeral, even if you never met her. Especially if you never met her. Few things tell a man he matters more than seeing you in the back of a funeral home when you didn't have to be there.

These are small things. They take a few minutes and a little attention. But they are the threads that tie a man to a church family. A man who has been known in his joy and his grief will be far less likely to drift away quietly. He has too many people who would notice.

The Name List in Practice

Everything so far has been about one man knowing another man. But a men's ministry also needs a way to make sure no one falls through the cracks. That is where the **Name List** comes in.

The Name List is simple. It is every man connected to your church, written down by name. Members, regular attenders, men who used to come, men who have visited, men whose wives or kids attend. Each name has one man assigned to check on him, usually a core team member or a group leader. And each name has a "next step" noted, the one thing that would help him move closer to Jesus right now.

Here is what a few lines might look like:

Name	Where he stands	Who checks on him	Next step
Frank T.	Man Outside (visited once)	Mike R.	Coffee this week; invite to Saturday workday
Carlos V.	Man in the Back Row	Jim P.	Lunch after church; ask about the new men's group
Jerry H.	Man Starting Over	Ben S.	Weekly check-in; connect with pastor
Greg A.	Growing Man	Steve K.	Encourage him to join a deeper study this fall

Where do the names come from? Start with what your church already has: the membership roll, the attendance cards, the sign-up sheet from the last men's breakfast. Ask the pastor and church staff. Ask the women's ministry leader and the children's ministry leader, who often know husbands and fathers the men's ministry has never met. When a name comes to you through a man's wife or kids, handle it gently. Ask his wife first whether a call would help or make things harder at home, and respect her answer. Never tell him, "Your wife said you might need this." Ask your group leaders who they know. In most churches, the first draft of the list will be longer than anyone expected, and that is a good thing to discover. It shows you the size of the work God has put in front of you.

Some rules for keeping a Name List that actually helps:

One man per name. Not two, not "the core team." One man who knows that this man is his to care for. When everyone is responsible, no one is.

Keep each leader's list small. A man can truly keep up with maybe eight to twelve other men, depending on his life. If one leader has forty names, the list is a phone book, not a care plan. Add leaders before you add names to one man's list.

Keep it private and handle it with respect. The Name List is a tool for care, not gossip. Don't write a man's struggles on the list at all. Write the next step, like "check in weekly," and keep the rest in person, in confidence, among those who need to know. Notice what isn't in the sample above: it doesn't say why Jerry is starting over. Ben knows, and that's enough. If a man ever saw his own entry, he should feel cared for, not cataloged.

Review it regularly. The core team should look over the list at least once a month. Who hasn't been contacted lately? Who has moved? Who needs a different next step? Who should be on the list who isn't?

You might ask, "Isn't this a little cold? Writing men down on a spreadsheet?" It would be, if the list were the point. It isn't. The list is a jig, a guide that helps your hands make the same careful cut every time so that nothing gets missed. The real work is still one man calling another, sitting with him, and caring about him. The list just makes sure every man gets that call.

Chapter 12 will show how the Name List fits into your overall plan, and Appendix A2 gives a layout you can copy. For now, the key is that every man has a name and a man assigned to him.

When a Man Disappears

It will happen. A man who came every week for six months stops showing up. A man who seemed to be growing goes silent. His seat is empty, his phone goes to voicemail, and no one knows why.

Jesus told a story about a shepherd with a hundred sheep who lost one. He didn't shrug and say, "Well, ninety-nine is still pretty good." He left the ninety-nine and went looking for the one until he found it. And when he found it, he didn't scold it. He put it on his shoulders and carried it home, rejoicing (Luke 15:3-7).

That is the posture we want when a man disappears. Not annoyance. Not guilt trips. Not "We missed you at group, where have you been?" in a tone that makes him feel like a truant. Instead, go looking for him with the heart of that shepherd.

Here is a simple way to respond when a man drops off:

1. Notice quickly. If a man misses two weeks in a row of something he usually attends, his assigned leader should reach out. Don't wait two months.
2. Reach out personally. Call or text, and make it about him, not about attendance. "Hey, haven't seen you in a bit. Just thinking about you. How are things?"
3. Listen for what is underneath. Men disappear for many reasons. Work got crazy. A kid is sick. His marriage is struggling. He fell into a sin and is ashamed. He got offended by something someone said. He is depressed. You won't know until you ask, and he may not tell you the first time.
4. Keep the door open. Let him know he is welcome back any time, with no explanation needed. Then keep in touch on a regular rhythm, even if he doesn't come back right away.
5. Know when to bring in help. If what you hear points to a crisis (a marriage falling apart, an addiction, thoughts of harming himself), bring in your pastor, and see Chapter 9 for how to walk with a man who is hurting.

Sometimes a man drifts away because of something we did. Someone embarrassed him, or he felt judged, or the group became a clique. If you find out that is the case, own it. Apologize. Don't get defensive. A sincere apology from a brother can heal more than you would expect.

And some men won't come back, no matter what you do. That is painful. Keep praying for him. Keep his name on the list. Stay his friend if he will let you. But if a man tells you plainly to stop calling, stop. Thank him, tell him the door is always open, and keep praying for him. Note it on the Name List so nobody else calls him either. Respecting his wishes is part of loving him. God isn't done with him, and the door you keep open now may be the one he walks through years from now.

> *A man of companions **is** to be shattered, and there is one who loves **who** clings more than a brother.* (Proverbs 18:24)

Be that friend. Not the one who disappears when a man stops showing up, but the one who clings more than a brother.

I have been the man who disappeared. It never happened all at once. One missed Sunday turned into another. I had fewer conversations with the men I was close to, until I was cut off from the very people

who could have helped me. During my years of drinking I got especially good at hiding. I didn't want anyone asking questions, because I wasn't ready to give honest answers.

I didn't pull away because I no longer needed God or those men. I pulled away because I felt unworthy of them. But God was faithful. He sent men who noticed something wasn't right and cared enough to call, ask questions, and remind me I wasn't forgotten. They didn't come looking for the Christian I was supposed to be. They came looking for the man they knew was hurting. When a man starts to disappear, it doesn't always mean he has lost interest in his faith. Sometimes it means he is fighting a battle he is too ashamed to talk about. I thank God for the men who refused to let my silence be the end of our friendship.

Friendship Is Not a Tactic

One last word for this station. It is possible to read a chapter like this and turn it into a technique. Call within a week. Ask five questions. Assign a name. Check the box.

Men can tell the difference between a friend and a recruiter. If you befriend a man only to get him into a group, he will feel it, and he will pull back. The goal isn't to process him. The goal is to love him the way Christ has loved you.

That kind of friendship has no expiration date and no condition attached. You are his friend whether he ever joins a group, whether he ever comes to faith, whether he ever becomes the kind of man you hoped he would be. That is grace, and it is what will make every other station on the Workshop Path possible.

Paul told the believers in Thessalonica that he and his companions shared with them "not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). That is the pattern. Share the good news, and share your life. A man who is truly known is ready to hear the gospel in a way that a stranger never will. And that is where the next chapter begins.

Talk It Over

1. Think about a time you felt truly known by another man. What did he do that made you feel that way?
2. Why do you think so many churches miss the first week after a man visits? What would it take for your church to change that?
3. Which of the first-coffee questions in this chapter would be hardest for you to ask? Which would be hardest for you to answer?
4. Where do you tend to open up more easily, face to face or side by side? What activity could you invite another man to share with you?
5. If your church doesn't have a Name List, what would it take to start one? If it does, how well is it working?
6. Is there a man who has disappeared from your church or your life? What is one thing you could do this week to go after him?

Try This Week

Choose one man you have met recently or one man who has drifted away, and reach out to him this week. Call or text him by Wednesday, and invite him to do something side by side, like a coffee, a project, or a ride somewhere. When you are together, ask him one real question about his life, then listen without giving advice.

Chapter 7: Ground Him in Christ

> *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up in Him and being established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*
>
> Colossians 2:6-7 (SLB)

Roots Before Fruit

If you have ever worked with wood, you know that how a board behaves depends on how the tree grew. A tree with deep roots, planted in good soil, grows straight and strong. A tree that struggled for water grows twisted, and the grain in its boards will fight you when you try to cut them. What happens underground, where no one can see, shapes everything that comes after.

A man's faith works the same way. He can come to a few breakfasts, make some friends, and even join a group, but if he isn't rooted in Christ himself, he won't hold up when life gets hard. He will be living on borrowed faith, the faith of his friends, his wife, or the church, and borrowed faith gives way under weight.

This is the third station on the Workshop Path from Chapter 4: **Ground Him in Christ**. At the first station, the door opened. At the second, he was known by name. Now we help him put down roots. That means making sure he understands the gospel and has truly trusted Jesus. It means helping him know where he stands with God. And it means helping him start a few simple habits that will feed his faith for the rest of his life: reading the Bible, praying, belonging to a church, and learning to give.

Paul's words to the Colossians in the verse above give us the picture. Rooted. Built up. Established. Abounding with thanksgiving. Roots come first. A man who is firmly rooted in Christ can be built up. A man who isn't will keep tipping over.

Telling the Good News Plainly

Many Christian men have never once explained the gospel to another man. They believe it. They have heard it preached a hundred times. But if a friend asked them across the table, "So what do you actually believe? How does a person get right with God?" they would freeze.

You don't need to be a theologian to answer that question. You need to understand the good news well enough to say it in plain words. Paul summed it up for the Corinthians this way:

> *For I delivered to you among **the** first **things** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

That is the center of it. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised. Everything else in the Christian faith grows out of those few sentences.

Here is one simple way to walk a man through it. You don't have to use these exact words. Put them in your own.

God made us and loves us. He made us to know Him and to live under His good rule. He is holy and just, so sin matters to Him. He isn't a distant force, and He isn't looking for an excuse to condemn anyone. Like the father in Jesus' story of the lost son, He wants us to come home.

We have all turned away from Him. The Bible calls this sin. It isn't just the bad things we do. It is the deeper choice to run our own lives without God. Every man knows, if he is honest, that he has fallen short. Sin breaks our relationship with God and leaves us guilty before Him. The Bible says the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and we can't fix it by trying harder.

Jesus came to bring us back. God the Son became a man. He lived the life we should have lived. He died on the cross, taking the penalty our sins deserved. Then He rose from the dead, proving that the price was paid in full and that death doesn't have the last word.

We receive Him by faith. Salvation is a gift. We can't earn it, and we don't deserve it. We receive it by turning from our sin and trusting Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

That last point is where many men get stuck, because men are used to earning things. They earn a paycheck. They earn respect. They earn their place on the team. The idea that God offers something they can't work for can be hard to swallow.

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Spend time here. A man who thinks he has to earn God's love will either become proud when he does well or crushed when he fails. A man who knows he has received grace can stand up straight on his best day and his worst.

When you share the gospel, let the man ask questions. Don't rush. If he pushes back, don't get defensive. Some men need to chew on it for weeks or months. Others are ready right away. Your job is to explain it clearly and honestly, to tell how Jesus changed your own life, and to trust the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do.

What if he isn't ready? Then don't push him to say words he doesn't mean. A man pressured into a decision will often walk away from it later and feel he was handled. Keep the friendship. Keep answering his questions. Offer to read one of the Gospels with him, so he can see Jesus for himself instead of just hearing about Him. Many men come to faith slowly, over months of honest conversation, and that is no less real than a man who believes the first time he hears. Some men already think they are Christians because they grew up in church or were baptized as boys, yet they can't say what Jesus did or why it matters. Be gentle with that man. Ask him questions rather than making pronouncements. Let him look at the gospel again with fresh eyes.

If a man tells you he wants to trust Christ, you can pray with him. There is no magic prayer, and the words themselves don't save him. What matters is the faith in his heart. But many men find it helpful to say out loud to God what they believe: that they are sinners, that Jesus died and rose for them, and that

they are putting their trust in Him. Then tell your pastor, and stay close to that man in the weeks ahead. The real work of grounding him is just beginning.

For years I considered myself a Christian. I went to church, sat in Bible studies, read Scripture, and heard more sermons on grace than I could count. I could tell you what it meant to follow Jesus. But there is a difference between knowing about grace and receiving it. I kept struggling with the same weaknesses and kept wandering, and I kept thinking that if I just tried harder and made fewer mistakes, I could earn my way back into God's favor. The harder I tried to fix myself, the more defeated I got.

Eventually my choices brought me to rock bottom. I had nothing left to offer, and that is when something I had heard preached for years finally became real. God had never stopped loving me. He wasn't waiting for me to clean up my life first. Jesus didn't die for me because I was worthy. He died because He loved me, knowing every failure I would ever have. I finally understood the father in Jesus' story of the lost son, running to his boy before the boy could make up for anything. That is the God I want every man to meet. If He could welcome me home, He can welcome any man who turns to Him.

Knowing Where He Stands

After a man trusts Christ, doubt often comes knocking. Usually it shows up on a bad day. He loses his temper with his kids, falls back into an old sin, or simply doesn't feel close to God, and a voice in his head says, "Who are you kidding? Nothing really changed."

That is why one of the most important things you can do for a new believer is to help him find his footing in God's promises rather than his feelings. The apostle John wrote a whole letter with that goal in mind.

> *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:13)

Notice the word "know." Not hope. Not guess. Not feel. God wants His children to know where they stand with Him. That confidence doesn't rest on how well a man is doing this week. It rests on what Jesus has done and what God has promised.

Jesus Himself put it plainly:

> *Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.* (John 5:24)

"Has eternal life." Present tense. "Has passed out of death into life." Done. Sit with a new believer and read these verses together. Ask him, "According to this, if you have trusted Jesus, what do you have right now?" Let him say it. Let him hear himself say it.

This doesn't mean a man will never struggle. Assurance isn't the same as never doubting. Plenty of faithful men have walked through seasons of doubt. But a man who knows where to go in Scripture when doubt hits has somewhere to stand. Teach him where those places are. Show him John 10:27-29, where Jesus says no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand. Show him Romans 8:38-39. Show him that his salvation rests on Christ's grip on him, not his grip on Christ.

And be honest with him. If a man's life shows no change at all over time, if he says he trusts Jesus but has no interest in Him, that is worth a gentle, honest conversation. Real faith is alive, and living things grow. But growth in a new believer is often slow and uneven. Don't look for a finished cabinet. Look for a few square cuts and a willingness to keep at it.

Opening the Book Together

Some men have read the Bible all their lives. Others have never opened one. For a man in that second group, the Bible can feel like a locked room. It is thick, old, and full of names he can't pronounce. He may be embarrassed to admit he doesn't know where to find Genesis, let alone Habakkuk.

There is a scene in Acts that shows what to do.

> *And having run up, Philip heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you indeed understand what you are reading?" And he said, "For how could I be able, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip, having come up, to sit with him.* (Acts 8:30-31)

The Ethiopian official was an educated, powerful man. He was reading the Scriptures on his own. But he didn't understand them, and he was honest about it. What he needed wasn't a lecture. He needed someone to sit beside him and guide him.

That is what you can do for a man who is new to the Bible. Sit beside him.

Think about a man like Wes. He is forty-four, runs a crew of electricians, and came to faith this spring. He bought a Bible, started on page one, made it through the flood, and quit somewhere in the middle of the long list of names. He didn't tell anyone, because he figured every other man at church already knew how to do this. When a friend finally asked him how his reading was going, Wes laughed and admitted he had not opened it in a month. That friend didn't scold him. He said, "Let's start in Mark. One chapter a day. I'll read the same one, and we'll text each other one thing we noticed." Six weeks later, Wes had finished Mark and was asking to start John.

Here are some practical ways to start.

Get him a Bible he can read. A readable translation with clear print is better than an heirloom with tiny type. Show him how the books are organized and how chapter and verse numbers work. It sounds basic, but no one may have ever shown him.

Start with one of the Gospels. Mark is short and full of action. John was written so that people would believe in Jesus. Either is a good place to begin. Don't start him in Leviticus.

Read a little at a time. A chapter a day, or even a paragraph, is plenty. The goal isn't speed. It is a habit that lasts.

Give him a few simple questions to ask of each passage. What does this show me about God? What does it show me about people? Is there something here to believe, to obey, or to stop doing? He doesn't need a seminary method. He needs a way in.

Read together. Meet once a week and talk about what you both read. Let him ask his questions. If you don't know the answer, say so, and find it together. You don't have to be an expert. You only have to be one step ahead and willing to keep walking. Appendix B lists passages for the questions men ask most.

> *A lamp to my foot **is** Your word, and a light to my pathway.* (Psalm 119:105)

A lamp doesn't show you the whole road. It shows you the next few steps. That is what Scripture does for a new believer. He won't understand everything right away, and that is fine. He will understand enough to take the next step, and then the next.

Learning to Talk With God

For many men, prayer is the hardest habit to start. Reading at least feels like doing something. Prayer can feel like talking into empty air. And if a man has only heard prayers in church, full of polished phrases, he may think he doesn't know how to do it.

Tell him the truth: prayer is talking to God. That is all. He doesn't need special words. He can talk to God the way he would talk to a father who loves him. He can say thank you. He can say he is sorry. He can ask for help. He can tell God he is angry or confused or afraid. The Psalms are full of men doing exactly that.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1), He gave them a simple pattern. The fuller form is in Matthew 6:9-13. Walk through it with him: honoring God's name, asking for His kingdom and His will, asking for daily needs, asking for forgiveness and for the grace to forgive, asking for protection from temptation. It is short enough to memorize and deep enough to pray for a lifetime.

One of the best ways to teach a man to pray is to pray with him. Pray out loud, in plain words, so he can hear that it doesn't have to be fancy. At first he may just listen. Later, invite him to pray a sentence or two. Don't push. Some men take months before they are ready to pray out loud in front of someone else.

Encourage him to start small. Five minutes in the morning before work. A short prayer in the truck before he walks into the job site. A prayer with his kids at bedtime. Small, steady habits do more than big, short-lived ones.

For years I thought prayer had to be done a certain way. I would listen to pastors and other men pray, and the words seemed to come so easily to them, full of Scripture and well put together. I wondered whether my own prayers were good enough. Praying out loud in front of other men made me downright uncomfortable.

It was in my hardest seasons that I learned God wasn't grading my words. He was looking at my heart. I could talk to Him the way I'd talk to someone who knew me, loved me, and cared what I was going through, whether I was alone in a quiet room, driving down the road, or sitting with a group of men. Some of my prayers were long. Some were only a few words. Sometimes all I could do was sit quietly. He heard them all. I wish I had understood that much earlier. There have been times when the only prayer I had was, "Lord, I'm struggling, I need You, and I don't know what to do next." And God was listening.

Belonging to a Church

A Christian man isn't meant to follow Jesus alone. From the very first days of the church, new believers were joined to a community.

Luke tells us those first believers kept devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). These weren't extras. They were the normal life of the church.

A men's ministry must never become a substitute for the church. It serves under the church and helps men take their place in it. So when a man comes to faith, help him connect to the whole body: Sunday worship, the teaching of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, the way his church practices them, and the people of God, women and children included.

Baptism is one of the first steps of obedience for a new believer. Churches differ in how they understand and practice baptism, and this book won't settle those questions. Follow your own church's teaching. What matters here is that a men's ministry leader should never leave a new believer to figure it out alone. Walk him to the pastor. Help him understand what his church teaches and why. If he decides to be baptized, be there. Bring other men. Make it a day he remembers.

The same is true of church membership. Different churches handle it in different ways, but most have some way for a man to say, "This is my church, and I am committed to these people." Help him take that step in the way your church asks. A man who belongs is far less likely to drift.

Another early habit is generosity. Talk with him about giving, not as a fee for belonging, but as a way of trusting God and joining in His work. Paul told the Corinthians that each one should give as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly, because God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). For a man who has always held tightly to his money, learning to give, even a little at first, can loosen something deep in his heart. Don't make it a pressure point. Make it an invitation to freedom.

A Plan for the First Eight Weeks

It helps to have a simple plan for walking with a new believer in his first couple of months. This isn't a class to pass. It is a guide for two men meeting once a week, over coffee or breakfast, to talk through the basics. Adjust it to fit the man.

Week	Topic	Read together
1	The good news: what Jesus did for you	1 Corinthians 15:1-8
2	Knowing where you stand with God	1 John 5:9-13; John 10:27-29
3	How to read the Bible	Psalm 1; Mark 1
4	How to pray	Matthew 6:5-13
5	Fighting temptation and getting back up	1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 1:9
6	Belonging to the church; baptism	Acts 2:36-47
7	Giving and serving	2 Corinthians 9:6-8; 1 Peter 4:10
8	Telling your story to someone else	Mark 5:18-20

Notice that the last week turns outward. In Mark 5, after Jesus freed a man from a terrible darkness, the man begged to go along with Him. Jesus told him instead to go home to his people and tell them what the Lord had done for him. Even a brand-new believer has a story to tell. That is a small preview of the last station on the Workshop Path, and a reminder that the path is a circle.

At the end of eight weeks, the man shouldn't feel like he has graduated. He should feel like he has a friend, a few good habits, and a clearer picture of who Jesus is. From here, the natural next step is usually a small group of men, which is where Chapter 8 picks up.

Patience With Slow Growth

A word to the man doing the walking: be patient.

New believers grow at different speeds. Some men take off running. They read the whole New Testament in a month and want to tell everyone they know. Others crawl. They miss your meetings, forget to read, slip back into old habits, and seem to take two steps back for every step forward. Both kinds of men are real.

Anyone who has finished a big project knows the punch list: the last small fixes that always take longer than you planned. Growth in a new believer often comes the same way, one small item at a time, and it can't be rushed. Men aren't projects, but the principle holds. God isn't in a hurry, and He is the One who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Your job is to plant and water: to keep showing up, keep opening the Book together, keep praying, and keep loving him.

Don't measure him by how quickly he becomes like you. Measure by whether he is moving, even a little, toward Jesus. Celebrate small things. The first time he prays out loud. The first time he asks you a real question about a passage. The first time he tells you about a temptation he resisted. These are the first signs of roots taking hold.

And remember that you were once where he is. Someone was patient with you. Someone answered your basic questions without making you feel foolish. Someone kept calling when you didn't call back. Pass that patience along.

Talk It Over

1. Who helped ground you in your faith when you were new to it, or what do you wish someone had done for you?
2. Could you explain the gospel to another man in plain words in about five minutes? Try it out loud with the group.
3. Why do you think many men struggle to accept that salvation is a gift and not something they earn?
4. What verses or truths help you most when you doubt where you stand with God?
5. What would you say to a man who has never read the Bible and doesn't know where to begin?
6. Look at the eight-week plan. Which week would be easiest for you to lead? Which would be hardest, and why?

Try This Week

Write out the gospel in your own words on one side of an index card, using no more than six or seven sentences, and include one line about what Jesus has done in your own life. Then read it out loud to another believer this week and ask him if it was clear. Keep the card in your Bible so you are ready the next time a man asks what you believe.

Chapter 8: Build Him Up

> *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "Today," so that no one of you may be hardened by **the** deceitfulness of sin.*
>
> Hebrews 3:13 (SLB)

Iron on Iron

There is a reason a woodworker keeps a sharpening stone on his bench. A chisel that is never sharpened doesn't stay the same. It gets duller every time it is used, until one day it tears the wood instead of cutting it. Sharpening isn't a one-time event. It is part of the work.

> *Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor.* (Proverbs 27:17)

Men are like that chisel. A man who has come through the door, been known by name, and been grounded in Christ isn't finished. He is just getting started. If he is left on his own, he will slowly go dull. Life will wear him down. Temptation will find the soft places. Sin is deceitful, as the verse at the top of this chapter says, and one of its favorite tricks is to convince a man he can handle it alone.

This is the fourth station on the Workshop Path from Chapter 4: **Build Him Up**. It is where a man joins a small group of other men who meet regularly, open the Scriptures, talk honestly, pray for one another, and help each other grow in the hard places of life. It is where the Growing Man is shaped.

You might ask, "Why does a man need a group? Isn't it enough to go to church and have a friend or two?" Church and friendship are both essential. But a small group of men gives something neither one can fully give on its own: a steady place, week after week, where a man is known well enough to be encouraged, challenged, and, when needed, picked up off the floor. The writer of Hebrews tells us to "exhort one another every day," to keep urging each other on. That kind of encouragement needs men who are close enough to see what is going on.

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works* (Hebrews 10:24)

"Consider one another" is worth slowing down on. It means thinking on purpose about what would help another man grow. Not just showing up, but paying attention. A good men's group is full of men who are considering one another.

I have worked about 40 years, and some of the most valuable people I worked beside were the ones who would tell me when I was off track. One direct conversation from a trusted friend can save months of wasted effort. Iron sharpens iron only when two men are honest enough to let the sparks fly.

What a Good Group Looks Like

Men's groups come in many shapes, and Chapter 15 covers the different kinds and how to lead them. For now, here is the basic picture of a group that builds men up.

It is small. Somewhere between four and ten men is a good range. Fewer than four and it is hard to keep going when someone misses. More than ten and the quieter men will hide. If a group grows past that, it is time to think about starting a second one. An accountability triad of three men, covered in Chapter 15, is a deliberate exception.

It meets regularly. Weekly is best for most groups. Every other week can work. Once a month is usually too far apart for men to stay connected to what is happening in each other's lives.

It is built on Scripture. The group may read a book of the Bible, work through a study guide, or follow a topic, but the Bible is the anchor. Opinions are fine. God's Word is final.

It is honest. Men can say what is really going on without being laughed at, lectured, or gossiped about.

It prays. Not just a quick prayer at the end to close things out, but real prayer for real needs.

A simple meeting might go something like this:

1. Check in. Each man shares briefly how his week went. Keep it short, but real.
2. Open the Bible. Read a passage and talk about it. What does it say? What does it mean? What does it ask of us?
3. Get personal. Ask one question that connects the passage to life. Where do you see this in your own week?
4. Pray. Pray for each other by name, about the things that came up.

That can fit in an hour, or an hour and a half if the group likes to talk. Some groups meet over breakfast before work. Some meet in a garage on a weeknight. The setting matters less than the steadiness.

Getting Past Sports and Weather

Every men's group faces the same temptation: to stay on the surface. It is comfortable there. Men can talk about the game, the weather, gas prices, and the latest thing that went wrong at work for a whole hour, pray a short prayer, and go home. Nothing bad happened. Nothing good happened either.

There is nothing wrong with talking about the game. Light talk is how men warm up. But a group that never goes deeper is a social club, not a place where men are built up. So how do you get past the surface?

The leader goes first. Men will only be as honest as the most honest man in the room. If the group leader shares something real (a struggle, a failure, a fear), it gives the other men permission to do the same. If the leader always has it together, everyone else will pretend to have it together too.

Ask better questions. "How was your week?" gets "Fine." Try instead: "What was the hardest moment of your week?" "Where did you see God at work this week?" "What is one thing you are worried about that you haven't told anyone?" "How are things at home, really?"

Give it time. Trust grows slowly. A new group may spend weeks on the surface before anyone risks going deeper. That is normal. Be patient, keep asking good questions, and keep going first.

Protect what is shared. The rule in most good men's groups is simple: what is said here stays here. Men won't open up if they think their struggles will become prayer-chain gossip or get passed along at

somebody's dinner table. Keeping a confidence is not the same as helping a man hide from his own wife. A good group protects what a man shares and still urges him toward honesty at home.

But there is an important limit to that rule, and every group should hear it on the first night. Confidentiality doesn't cover danger. If a man says he is thinking about ending his life, if someone is being abused or a child or vulnerable adult is at risk, or if a man plans to harm someone else, the leader must not keep that secret. When there is immediate danger, he calls 911. If a child is being harmed or is at risk, he makes sure a report goes to child protective services or the police that same day, as the law and the church's policy require, because telling the pastor may not be enough by itself (see Chapter 9). And he brings in the pastor. In the U.S., the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available by call or text at 988. Group leaders should never promise a man that everything he says will be kept secret no matter what. Say it plainly at the start, so no one is surprised later. And tell the men one more thing: if a man confesses something that has seriously harmed someone else, or that affects a leadership role he holds in the church, the leader will ask him to go to the pastor, and will go with him. Chapter 9 talks more about walking with men in crisis.

One of the biggest lessons of my recovery from alcohol came from the 12 steps. Like a lot of men, I could talk all day about sports, work, or family, but I kept what was really going on to myself. Recovery taught me that healing starts with honesty. One of the steps asks you to admit your wrongs to God, to yourself, and to another human being.

What got me there was hearing other men do it. They talked openly about their failures and regrets, and they weren't weak men. They were men who had found the courage to stop hiding, and their honesty gave me the courage to face my own. Scripture says the same thing: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). When a man tells me his deepest struggle now, I know what it cost him, because I have sat in his chair. My job isn't to judge him or to have all the answers. It's to listen, pray with him, and walk beside him, the way other men did for me.

Accountability Without a Police State

Accountability is one of those words that makes some men nervous, and for good reason. They have seen it done badly. A group of men checking up on each other like parole officers. A weekly grilling about whether you looked at anything you shouldn't have. A leader who seems to enjoy catching people. That kind of accountability usually produces one of two things: men who lie, or men who leave.

Biblical accountability looks very different. It is rooted in grace, aimed at healing, and offered by brothers who know they need the same help.

> *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous **man**, being at work, prevails much.* (James 5:16)

Notice the goal: "that you may be healed." Not punished. Not shamed. Healed. Confession in a men's group isn't a trial. It is bringing something into the light so that it loses its power, and so that brothers can pray for you with knowledge.

Paul tells us how to respond when a brother falls.

> *Brothers, if a man is even caught in some trespass, you who **are** spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, watching yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.* (Galatians 6:1-2)

Restore. Gently. Watching yourself. Bearing burdens. That is the shape of good accountability. It isn't one man standing over another. It is men standing beside each other, each one aware that he could be the next to fall.

Here is a simple way to tell the difference:

A police state	**A brotherhood**
Asks "Did you mess up?"	Asks "How are you really doing?"
Focuses on catching failure	Focuses on helping a man grow
Leaders stand above the group	Leaders confess their own struggles too
Shame is the motivator	Grace is the motivator
A man hides his sin to avoid the lecture	A man brings his sin into the light to get help
Ends when a man fails badly	Moves toward a man when he fails badly

Good accountability often works best in very small numbers. Some men meet with one or two other men, apart from the larger group, for this kind of close, honest check-in. That is a healthy pattern. The key is that a man chooses it, that it is built on trust, and that it always points him back to Christ rather than to his own willpower.

Where Men Get Tested

Every man has hard places in his life where his character is tested. A group that builds men up will spend time in those places, not just in safe topics. Here are some of the most common.

Temptation and sexual purity. Few things weigh on men's consciences more than this, and few things are talked about less. Pornography, lust, emotional affairs, and unfaithfulness wreck marriages and drain the life out of men's walks with God. A good group makes it safe to talk about. It reminds men that temptation itself isn't sin (Jesus was tempted in all things, yet without sin, Hebrews 4:15), but that dwelling on it is (Matthew 5:28). It reminds them they aren't alone, and that God gives real help. The battle is usually won or lost in what a man does with the first look.

> *No temptation has taken you except what is human; and God **is** faithful, who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way out, so that you may be able to endure **it**.* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Help men find the way out God provides, in practical terms. That may mean filters and passwords on devices. It may mean a brother he can text in the moment. It may mean changing routines that set him up to fall, like being alone late at night with a screen. And when a man's struggle has become a deep, repeated pattern he can't break, it may be an addiction. That calls for more help than a weekly group can give, such as a recovery group or a licensed Christian counselor. Chapter 9 covers that ground.

One line has to be drawn plainly. If a man tells you he has looked at sexual images of anyone under eighteen, that isn't a purity struggle for the group to carry. It is a crime, and real children were harmed to make those images. Don't promise secrecy. Go to your pastor that same day and follow the law where you live, which may require a report. Don't look at, copy, or forward anything, and don't tell him to destroy anything. A man who wants help with sexual thoughts about children can call the Stop It Now helpline at 1-888-773-8368.

Anger. Many men carry anger they don't know what to do with. It leaks out at their wives, their kids, their coworkers, other drivers. Some men were raised in homes where anger was the only emotion a man was allowed to show.

> *for the anger of a man does not produce the righteousness of God.* (James 1:20)

A group can help a man notice the patterns: what sets him off, what is underneath it (often hurt, fear, or shame), and what it costs the people he loves. It can also give him a place to practice confessing anger and asking forgiveness. And if a man's anger has ever turned into threats or violence toward his family, the leader must take it seriously, make sure the family is safe (call 911 if anyone is in danger), and bring in the pastor and professional help right away.

Money. Money touches nearly every part of a man's life: his sense of worth, his marriage, his fears, his generosity. Some men are buried in debt and too ashamed to say it. Others are doing well and quietly trusting their bank balance more than God. A group can talk honestly about budgets, debt, giving, and contentment, and remind men that money is a tool to steward, not a master to serve (Matthew 6:24).

At Work and at Home

Two more places deserve their own attention, because they are where most men spend most of their lives.

Work. A man's job can be a place of deep meaning or a grinding weight, and often it is both. Men wrestle with ambition, overwork, dishonest bosses, unfair treatment, boredom, and the fear of losing their jobs. A group can help a man see his work as something he does for the Lord, not just for a paycheck. Paul told the believers in Colossae to do their work heartily, "as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). That changes how a man treats a difficult boss, handles a mistake, and draws the line between work and home. Chapter 10 comes back to this when we talk about sending men out.

Marriage. For married men, few things matter more than how they love their wives. The Bible's call to husbands is high and clear.

> *Husbands, love your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25)

The standard is Christ, and Christ led by laying down His life. That rules out control, harshness, and selfishness. It calls a man to listen to his wife, serve her, protect her, pray for her, and put her good ahead of his own comfort. A men's group can encourage husbands to grow in this, and it can gently call a man out when he is treating his wife poorly. It should never be a place where men complain about their wives

or excuse bad behavior. A good men's ministry makes marriages stronger, and wives are among the first to notice.

Fatherhood. Many men didn't have a good example of a father. Some had fathers who were absent, harsh, or distant. They are trying to be dads with no blueprint.

> *And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in **the** discipline and admonition of **the** Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4)

Notice that Paul speaks to fathers about both what not to do and what to do. Do not provoke your children. Do bring them up in the Lord. A group can help men think through both. How do you discipline without crushing? How do you talk to your kids about faith? How do you repair things with a teenager after a blowup? How do you stay present when work demands so much? Older fathers in the group can share what they have learned, including their regrets. Younger fathers can be honest about what they are facing. Men who never had a good dad can see one in action.

The pastor who helped me through my darkest season taught me a lot in his office, but some of the biggest lessons came from watching how he treated his family. He had a church full of people depending on him and endless demands on his time. Still, his calling didn't stop at the church doors, and his wife and kids came first, not last. He didn't have a perfect family, and he didn't pretend to. But he understood that being a man of God meant being present, patient, and committed to the people closest to him. For him, leading at home wasn't about having the final word. It was about humility, sacrifice, and being quick to forgive.

I have made my share of mistakes as a husband and father, and there are things I would do differently if I could. But here is what I would pass on to younger men, and I learned it from him. Your biggest testimony isn't what you say about God on Sunday. It's how you love your family the rest of the week. A man can be respected at work and admired at church, but if he neglects his own home, something important is missing.

Confession and Restoration

Sooner or later, a man in your group will fall. Not just stumble, but fall hard. He will be caught in an affair, or admit to a hidden addiction, or confess that he has been lying to his wife about money for years. How the group responds in that moment will shape not only his future but the culture of the whole ministry.

The Bible gives us two pictures worth keeping in mind.

The first is Nathan and David. After David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him (2 Samuel 12). Nathan didn't ignore the sin. He named it clearly and bravely. But he did it in a way that reached David's heart, and when David confessed, Nathan told him that the Lord had taken away his sin. There were still consequences, and they were painful. But there was also forgiveness.

The second is Jesus and Peter. Peter denied Jesus three times on the worst night of Jesus' life. After the resurrection, Jesus met him by the Sea of Galilee, cooked him breakfast, and asked him three times, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15-17). Then He gave Peter work to do. Jesus didn't pretend the denial never happened. But He didn't leave Peter in his shame either. He restored him.

So what does that look like in a men's group? Here is a path a group can follow:

1. Thank him for telling the truth. Bringing sin into the light takes courage. Don't punish honesty, or no one will be honest again.
2. Remind him of the gospel. Point him to God's promise that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). His standing with God rests on Christ, not on his record.
3. Take the sin seriously. Grace doesn't mean shrugging. Help him see the harm done and the people affected. True repentance turns away from the sin, not just away from the consequences.
4. Bring in the right help. Some situations need the pastor. Some need a licensed Christian counselor. Some, like abuse or danger to others, need the authorities. A men's group isn't equipped to handle everything alone, and shouldn't try.
5. Help him make things right where he can. That may mean confessing to his wife, paying back money, or apologizing to someone he hurt. Walk with him through it. Don't make him do it alone.
6. Stay with him. Restoration isn't a single conversation. It may take months or years. Keep calling. Keep meeting. Keep praying. The men who stay through the hard season are the ones he will never forget.

There is one thing a men's ministry must not do, and that is cover things up to protect a man's reputation or the church's image. Grace isn't secrecy. When someone else has been harmed, or a law has been broken, or a man holds a position of trust in the church, the pastor and elders need to know, and the church's own process needs to be followed. Restoration to God and to the brothers can begin right away. Restoration to leadership is a separate question for the church's leaders to weigh carefully over time.

The Shape of a Built-Up Man

What does all this produce? Not perfect men. There are none. What it produces is men who are growing more like Jesus in the places where it counts. Men who are honest about their struggles. Men who get back up faster when they fall. Men who love their wives and kids better this year than last year. Men who handle money, work, anger, and temptation with more wisdom than they used to. Men who know they aren't alone.

And something else begins to happen. A man who has been built up by other men starts to notice the men around him who need the same thing. He sees the new guy at the back of the room. He remembers what it was like to be lost. He starts to think, "Maybe I could do for someone else what these men have done for me."

That is the sign that he is getting ready for the last station on the Workshop Path. A man who is being built up is being built for something. Chapter 10 will show what that looks like when he is sent out.

Talk It Over

1. Think of a time another man “sharpened” you. What did he do or say, and how did it change you?
2. What keeps men’s groups stuck on sports and weather? What would help your group go deeper?
3. Have you ever experienced accountability that felt like a police state? How was it different from the kind of brotherhood this chapter describes?
4. Which of the hard places in this chapter (temptation, anger, money, work, marriage, fatherhood) is the one you most need help with right now?
5. Why is it so important for a group leader to explain the limits of confidentiality on the first night?
6. Think about Jesus restoring Peter. What would it look like for your group to respond that way to a man who has fallen?

Try This Week

If you aren’t in a small group of men, ask your pastor or point leader this week which group you could join, and go to the next meeting. If you are already in one, pick one of the deeper questions from this chapter and ask it at your next meeting, then answer it honestly yourself first.

Chapter 9: When a Man Is Hurting

*The LORD **is** near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves.*

Psalm 34:18 (SLB)

Sooner or later every man you walk with will hit something hard. Some men walk into your ministry already broken. Others are doing fine for two years and then the floor gives way under them. A wife moves out. A company "restructures" and his badge stops working on a Tuesday morning. A doctor uses a word he has to look up. A son stops answering the phone. Whatever it is, the man you thought you knew suddenly looks smaller, quieter, and a lot more tired.

In the last few chapters we have talked about the Workshop Path as a circle a man moves around. This chapter is about what happens when a man gets knocked off the path entirely. He is now the Man Starting Over. Something broke, and he is open in a way he may never have been before, but he is also hurting in a way that makes him easy to lose.

This is the chapter where men's ministry either becomes real or shows itself to be a breakfast club. Anybody can show up for pancakes. The question is who shows up when the house is quiet and the man is sitting alone at the kitchen table at eleven at night.

In my lowest season, I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. Shame made me want to hide. What helped was a pastor who sat with me, listened without judging, and pointed me back to God. When a man is broken, being there matters more than a speech.

The Man Starting Over

Think about the kinds of things that knock a man down. Divorce or separation. The death of a wife, a child, a parent, or a close friend. Losing a job, or a business, or the career he spent twenty years building. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, or pornography. Depression and anxiety that he can't explain and is ashamed to admit. Prison, or a son in prison. A prodigal child who has walked away from the family and from God. A health scare that reminds him he won't live forever.

Some of these are things done to a man. Some are things a man did. Most are a mix of both. Here is what I have come to believe: when you are sitting with a hurting man, you don't have to sort that out on the first night. Grace and truth both belong in the room, but grace usually walks in first.

Jesus didn't wait for people to get their lives in order before He drew near. Look at how the prophet Isaiah describes the Servant who was coming, and how Matthew later applies it to Jesus.

> *A crushed reed He will not break, and a dim wick He will not extinguish; He will bring forth justice in truth.* (Isaiah 42:3)

A crushed reed is a stalk that is bent and cracked, not quite broken off. A dim wick is a lamp that is almost out, just a little smoke and a faint glow. That is a good picture of the Man Starting Over. He is bent

but not snapped. There is still a little light. Our job isn't to finish him off with lectures. Our job is to protect that small flame until it catches again.

I spend a lot of time in a shop, and there is a lesson in a cracked board. When you find a split in a good piece of wood, you don't throw it on the burn pile right away. You look at it. Sometimes you can work glue deep into the crack, clamp it, and let it sit overnight. Sometimes you need to add a thin strip of wood or a bow-tie shaped key across the break so it never opens again. Often the repaired board ends up stronger at that spot than it was before. But it takes patience, the right clamps, and a willingness to wait for the glue to cure.

Show Up First, Talk Later

When a man is hurting, the first thing he needs isn't the right words. He needs you to come. Most of us stay away from hurting people because we are afraid we will say the wrong thing. So we say nothing, and we do nothing, and the man concludes that nobody cares.

Job's three friends get a bad reputation, and they earned some of it later in the book. But look at what they did right at the beginning.

> *And they sat with him on the earth seven days and seven nights, and* ***there was*** *none speaking a word to him, for they saw that the pain was very great.* (Job 2:13)

For a whole week they just sat with him. No advice, no theology, no explanations. Their trouble started when they opened their mouths and tried to explain why all this had happened to him. There is a lesson there for every men's ministry leader. Your presence will often do more than your speeches.

Paul put it in one short line: rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Notice he didn't say "fix those who weep" or "explain things to those who weep." He said weep with them. Get down on the ground beside the man.

What does showing up look like in practice? It can be very simple. Picture a man named Brent whose wife of twenty-two years told him she was leaving. A man from his group heard about it on a Thursday. He didn't call to ask how he could help. He texted, "I'm bringing dinner tonight at six. You don't have to talk." He showed up with two burgers and a bag of fries, sat on the back porch with Brent, and stayed for an hour. They barely talked about the divorce. On the way out he said, "I'll be back Saturday morning to mow your yard." That was it. Six months later, Brent would tell you that the burgers on the porch were the moment he knew God had not forgotten him.

One caution. When a man's marriage is coming apart, you are hearing one side of the story. Love him, but don't take sides against his wife, don't run her down in front of him, and don't carry messages between them. Pray for the marriage, and support reconciliation where it is safe and possible. Sometimes a wife leaves because she or the children aren't safe. If anything you hear points that way, read the section on abuse below and talk to your pastor before you do anything else. Your job is to care for him, not to win his case.

Men often receive care best side by side. Help him move his things into the apartment. Drive him to the court date. Take him fishing and leave the phone in the truck. Fix the gutter he has been meaning to get to and can't bring himself to touch now. Show up, and keep showing up.

I told you at the start of this book about the pastor who helped me when I was at my lowest. Here is what I remember most about him. It wasn't a sermon or a verse or even his advice. It was that he was there. My choices, my mistakes, and my shame had me completely beaten, and I didn't need someone to explain where I had gone wrong. I already knew. I needed someone to sit with me in it.

He made time for me. He let me talk about my failures and my fears without rushing to correct me. He didn't remove the consequences of my choices, and he couldn't make the changes only I could make. But he kept showing up, and he kept reminding me that God's grace was still there. He didn't pull me out of the pit. He just refused to leave me alone in it while God gave me the strength to climb out. That is what every hurting man needs: not someone with all the answers, but someone who will show up, listen, and keep walking with him.

What to Say, and What Not to Say

Eventually you will have to say something. Here is some plain guidance.

Some things help. "I'm so sorry." "I don't know what to say, but I'm not going anywhere." "Do you want to talk about it, or do you want to just sit here?" "I'm praying for you, and I'll call you Tuesday." Then call him Tuesday. "What's the hardest part right now?" And sometimes just his wife's name or his son's name, said out loud, because people stop saying the names of the dead and the lost, and it hurts.

Other things don't help, even when they are true. "Everything happens for a reason." "God needed another angel." "At least you still have your health." "I know exactly how you feel." (You don't.) "You just need to pray more." "Have you thought about what you did to cause this?" Don't try to explain the suffering. Don't rush to Romans 8:28 when a man is still in the ambulance. It really is true that all things work together for good to those who love God, but that verse is a pillow, not a club. A man has to be ready to rest his head on it.

You might ask, "But what if the man brought this on himself? Don't I need to tell him the truth?" Yes, at the right time, and in the right way. Galatians 6:1 tells us that when a brother is caught in sin, those who are spiritual should "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness," and watch themselves while they do it. Truth matters. But "restore" is the goal, gentleness is the method, and humility is the posture. A man who is already drowning in shame doesn't need you to push his head under one more time. He needs a hand.

> *Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.* (Galatians 6:2)

Picture a man named Calvin who lost his job after his boss found pornography on his work computer. He is ashamed, scared, and his wife is furious. He needs truth: he did something wrong, and it matters. But he already knows that. What he doesn't know is whether anyone will stand with him while he rebuilds. The man who helps Calvin most will be the one who says, "That was sin, and I'm not going to pretend it wasn't. And I'm also not going anywhere. Let's figure out the next step together." That is grace and truth in the same breath.

Know Your Limits: Bring in a Pastor and Professionals

Here is something every point leader and group leader needs to hear: you aren't the hero of every man's story, and you aren't trained for every kind of hurt. Knowing that is part of doing this well.

Some situations are beyond what a lay leader should carry alone. When you run into them, your job is to stay close as a brother and to help the man get to people who are trained for the problem. Bring in your pastor early. He needs to know when one of the men in the church is in serious trouble, and he may know things or have resources you don't.

If a man is dealing with abuse (whether he is the one causing it or the one suffering it), thoughts of suicide, a serious addiction, or a mental illness such as major depression, he needs professional help. Encourage him to see his doctor and a licensed counselor, ideally a Christian. If you can't find a Christian counselor nearby, don't let that hold him back. A good licensed counselor who respects his faith is far better than none. Help him make the call if he is stuck. Offer to drive him to the first appointment and sit in the waiting room.

Some Christians worry that going to a counselor or taking medicine for depression means a man doesn't trust God. I don't see it that way. We don't tell a man with a broken leg to skip the cast and pray harder. God can heal in a moment, and He also works through doctors, medicine, and wise counsel. A man can take an antidepressant and read the Psalms in the same morning. Prayer and professional care aren't rivals. They are both gifts.

Situation	Your role as a brother	Who else needs to be involved
Grief and loss	Show up, listen, help with practical needs, remember the hard dates	Pastor; a grief group or counselor if grief stays heavy for a long time
Divorce or separation	Stay close, help with practical things, keep him connected to church, and pray for reconciliation where it is safe	Pastor; a licensed Christian counselor
Job loss	Encourage, pray, open your network, help with his resume	Pastor if money gets desperate; the church's fund for helping people in need
Addiction or pornography	Walk with him, keep showing up, point him to a recovery group	Pastor; counselor; doctor if there is physical dependence
Depression or anxiety	Check in often, don't lecture, encourage care	Doctor and licensed counselor
Thoughts of suicide	Stay with him, ask directly, don't leave him alone if he is in danger	988 (call or text) or 911; pastor; counselor
Abuse in the home	Take it seriously, don't promise secrecy	911 if anyone is in danger; report harm to a child to child protective services or police; pastor; church policy

Keep this in mind. A man going through a separation or divorce, a lost job, or a public shame or legal trouble is at higher risk of suicide than he was before, even if he seems to be holding up. Don't wait for him to bring it up. At some point, ask him plainly, "Has it gotten so bad you've thought about ending your life?" Then follow the steps below.

Safety Comes First

If a man tells you he is thinking about ending his life, take him at his word. Ask him directly: “Are you thinking about killing yourself? Do you have a plan?” Asking doesn’t put the idea in his head. It tells him you are willing to hear the truth. If he is in immediate danger, call 911. In the United States you can also call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline any time of day or night. Veterans and service members can call 988 and press 1, and a man who won’t talk out loud can chat at 988lifeline.org. Do this with him if you can. Stay with him until help arrives or until he is connected to someone who can help. If he has a gun or a stockpile of pills, ask whether a family member or friend can hold them for now. Do it in a way that follows your state’s law, because some states require a background check even for a short transfer. A local gun shop or the police can often hold firearms for a while. Then tell your pastor. If you live outside the United States, look up your country’s emergency and crisis numbers today and write them in the front of this book.

If a man tells you about abuse, whether he is hurting his wife or children or someone is hurting him, you can’t treat that as a private matter between two friends. If anyone is in danger right now, call 911. If a child is being harmed or is at risk, report it. Every state in the U.S. has a child abuse reporting law. In some states every adult has to report, and in many states clergy do. Learn your state’s rule before you ever need it. Telling your pastor is right, but in many places it doesn’t take the place of your own report to child protective services or the police. The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453) can tell you how to report where you live. It doesn’t take the report itself. The same is true when an elderly or disabled adult is being abused, neglected, or taken advantage of with money. Call your state’s Adult Protective Services. The Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 can connect you to it. Your church should also have a written policy, so follow it. If your church doesn’t have one, ask your pastor to put one in place before your groups launch. Your church’s insurance carrier can often supply a sample. Until then, the rules in this chapter are your floor. Don’t confront the man yourself, and don’t try to sit the couple down together to work it out. Confronting an abuser before his wife and children are safe can put them in more danger. Make sure they’re safe first, and let the pastor and trained professionals decide what happens next. His wife can get confidential help from the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233, or by texting START to 88788. A man who was sexually abused, as a boy or as an adult, can call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673.

That brings up confidentiality. Men’s groups rightly value trust. What is said in the group should stay in the group, and a man should be able to confess sin without it becoming the talk of the church. But no leader should ever promise total secrecy. Here is a simple line a group leader can say at the first meeting: “What’s said here stays here, with a few exceptions. If someone is in danger of hurting himself or someone else, or if a child or a vulnerable adult is at risk, I will get help. And if a man confesses something that has seriously harmed someone else, or something that affects a leadership role he holds in this church, I’ll ask him to go with me to the pastor. That’s how much I care about you.” Say it up front so nobody feels betrayed later. Appendix A9 puts the numbers and steps from this chapter on one page. Copy it for every leader.

Every point leader should make sure the core team and group leaders know this. Put the church's policy and the 988 number in front of every leader. Talk about it at a training night. You hope you will never need it. If you ever do, you will be glad you prepared.

Carrying Him to Jesus

We met the four friends of Mark 2 back in Chapter 5, carrying a man who couldn't get to Jesus on his own. Their story belongs in this chapter too, because it is what a men's group does for a hurting man. They carried the mat, dug through the roof, and lowered their friend down right in front of Jesus.

> *Now Jesus, having seen their faith, says to the paralytic, "Child, your sins have been forgiven you."* (Mark 2:5)

Look closely at that. Jesus saw their faith. The man on the mat couldn't walk, and maybe he could barely hope. But his friends had enough faith to carry him, and Jesus honored it.

That is a picture of what a men's group does for the Man Starting Over. There will be seasons when a man can't pray for himself. He can't read his Bible. He can't get himself to church. In those seasons, his brothers carry the mat. They pray for him when he can't. They pick him up for church. They text him a verse in the morning. They keep his name on the Name List and make sure someone checks on him every week.

Notice too that it took four men. One man carrying a mat doesn't get very far. Spread the load. If you are the one closest to a hurting man, recruit two or three others to help you carry him. That protects you from burning out, and it gives him more than one brother to lean on. The Name List assigns one leader to each man, but when a man is hurting, that leader shouldn't carry him alone.

> *At every time the friend loves, and a brother is born for adversity.* (Proverbs 17:17)

A brother is born for adversity. In other words, this is the very moment brotherhood was made for. If our men's ministry is only for good times, it was never brotherhood at all.

Long Roads: Recovery, Grief, Prison, and Prodigals

Some hurts heal in a few weeks. Others take years. Addiction in particular is a long road, and most men won't walk out of it by themselves or by a single act of will. They need a group of people who understand, who will tell the truth, and who won't quit on them when they slip.

Many churches host a recovery group based on Scripture and the twelve steps, or they partner with a nearby church that does. If your church has one, make sure every leader in the men's ministry knows when and where it meets, and who to call to connect a man. If your church doesn't have one, find out where the closest good one is. A recovery group isn't a replacement for the men's ministry, and the men's ministry isn't a replacement for a recovery group. They work together. A man can be in a recovery group on Tuesday night and in his men's group on Thursday morning.

My own battle with alcohol, and later writing a Scripture-based 12-step course called *New Beginnings*, taught me that real recovery doesn't start until a man is completely honest with himself, with God, and

with another person. For years I thought I could handle it on my own. I knew Scripture and I went to church, but I kept making choices that took me further from God. Eventually I couldn't deny it anymore. My efforts to control my drinking had failed.

Admitting I had a problem wasn't enough. I had to confess it, with no excuses and no blaming anyone else. Then I had to surrender: stop believing I could fix myself with willpower and put my life in God's hands. Surrender wasn't giving up on life. It was giving up the idea that I was in control. And none of it happens once and is done. Recovery has good days, bad days, and days when old temptations come back. That is why no man should walk this road alone. Confession opens the door, surrender lets God start His work, and walking with other men keeps you on the path, one day and one next right step at a time.

When a man relapses, and many will, don't treat it as the end. Treat it as information. Something in the plan wasn't strong enough. Talk honestly about what happened, adjust, and keep going. Relapse is serious, and it can be dangerous, but a man who gets back up and tells the truth is a man who is still in the fight. Celebrate that. Two cautions. A man who has been drinking heavily shouldn't quit all at once without a doctor, because alcohol withdrawal can cause seizures and can kill. And a man who goes back to opioids after a stretch of being clean is at high risk of an overdose, because his body has lost its tolerance. Push him toward medical care. The SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) National Helpline, 1-800-662-4357, can point him to treatment near him. If a man you walk with has used opioids, encourage him and his family to keep naloxone (Narcan) at home. It is sold over the counter and can reverse an overdose.

Long roads apply to grief too. Many churches surround a widower for the first two weeks and then disappear. But the hardest days are often months later: the first Christmas, the anniversary, the day he finally cleans out her closet. Write those dates down. Put them on the Name List next to his name. Call him on those days. A man will forget a lot of things in grief, but he will never forget the brother who remembered his wife's birthday.

Two kinds of hurt deserve a little extra attention because churches so often miss them.

The first is prison. Some of the men you meet will have served time. Others will have a son or a brother behind bars right now. A man coming out of prison faces a mountain: finding work, finding housing, rebuilding trust, and fighting the old friends and old habits that are waiting for him. He also carries a heavy weight of shame into every church door. If your men's ministry can offer him a friend, a ride to job interviews, help with a resume, and a place at the table, you may be the difference between a new life and a return trip. One caution: if a man's offense involved a child, talk with your pastor right away, before he serves or takes part in anything aimed at children. Many churches use a simple written agreement that welcomes him to worship and to a men's group while keeping him away from children's areas and events. Make sure it covers men's ministry events where children will be present too, like family days and service projects. If he is on a registry or under supervision, check with your pastor and, with his permission, his parole or probation officer about what the law allows. Jesus said that when we visited those in prison, we visited Him (Matthew 25:36). Some churches have men who go into jails and prisons to lead Bible studies. Ask whether your church does, and how a man from your group could get involved.

The second is the prodigal child. Few things hurt a father more than watching a son or daughter walk away, from the family, from God, sometimes into real danger. Many of these fathers suffer in silence because they feel like failures. They sit in church and wonder whether everyone is judging them.

Jesus told a story for these men.

> *And having risen up, he went to his own father. But while he was still far distant, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him.* (Luke 15:20)

That father saw his son while he was still far distant. He must have been watching the road. A men's group can help a hurting father keep watching the road with hope instead of bitterness. They can pray for his child by name every week. They can remind him that a child's choices aren't the final word on a father's faithfulness, and that God Himself is a Father whose children wander. And they can help him be ready to run when the day comes.

Pointing Him Back to Rest

In the end, the most important thing you can do for the Man Starting Over is point him back to Jesus. Not with a quick verse thrown over your shoulder as you walk away, but with your life alongside his.

> *Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.* (Matthew 11:28)

A hurting man labors and is burdened almost by definition. Jesus doesn't tell him to clean up first. He says come. That is the gospel in a sentence. The same Jesus who died for our sins and rose again offers rest to the man who has nothing left. You can't give a man that rest yourself. But you can walk with him to the One who can.

Remember that the Workshop Path is a circle, not a ladder. A man who was a Growing Man or even a Man Who Builds Others can find himself starting over after a divorce or a fall. When that happens, don't treat him as a failure who has lost his place. Meet him where he stands. He may need to go back to Know His Name for a while, just being cared for. He may need to be grounded in Christ all over again, hearing the gospel as if for the first time. That is all right. God is patient, and our ministries should be too.

And here is the hopeful part. Men who have walked through deep hurt and found Jesus faithful often become the most compassionate leaders in the church. Paul called God "the Father of compassions and God of all comfort," the One who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort others in theirs (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). The man you carry on the mat this year may be the man carrying someone else's mat five years from now. The crack in the board, glued and clamped and given time to cure, becomes part of the strength of the piece.

Talk It Over

1. Think of a time you were hurting. What did someone do or say that helped, and what did someone do or say that made it worse?
2. Why do you think men often stay away from other men who are going through something hard?

3. Which of the situations in this chapter (divorce, grief, job loss, addiction, depression, prison, prodigal children) is your church least prepared to handle? What is one step that would help?
4. How would you explain to a man that seeing a counselor or taking medicine isn't a lack of faith?
5. Does your church have a written policy for reporting abuse and responding to someone in danger? Do your men's leaders know what it says?
6. The four friends in Mark 2 carried their friend to Jesus. Who is a man you could help carry right now, and who could carry the mat with you?

Try This Week

Pick one man you know who is going through something hard, and do one practical thing for him this week without asking first: bring a meal, mow his yard, or take him to breakfast. Then, before the week is over, find out your church's policy for responding to abuse and danger, save 988 in your phone, and make sure every leader in your men's ministry has both.

Chapter 10: Send Him Out

> *For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.*
>
> Ephesians 2:10 (SLB)

There is a moment in woodworking that every builder looks forward to. The glue has cured, the clamps come off, the last coat of finish is dry, and you carry the piece out of the shop and into the house. A table isn't built to sit in the shop. It is built to have a family eat at it. A chair is built to be sat in. A cabinet is built to hold things. Until it leaves the shop, it hasn't done what it was made to do.

A man who follows Jesus is built for the same thing. We have walked through four stations of the Workshop Path so far. We opened the door to a man, learned his name, grounded him in Christ, and built him up with other men. Now comes the station that too many churches skip: Send Him Out.

A lot of men's ministries are good at gathering men and not so good at sending them. Men come to the breakfast, join a group, maybe go on a retreat, and grow in real ways. But somewhere along the line the ministry becomes a place men go to receive, and never a place they are launched from. That is like a shop full of finished furniture that never leaves the building. It looks impressive, but nobody is eating at those tables.

This chapter is about helping a man find the work God has for him and step into it, at his job, in his home, in his church and community, and with another man. And it is about how the circle closes, because a man who is sent out becomes the one who opens the door for the next man.

Every Man Has Work to Do

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul has just finished saying that we are saved by grace through faith, not by our own works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then, right after that, he says we were created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Get the order right. Good works don't save a man. Jesus saves a man. But the man Jesus saves is made for something. The word "workmanship" carries the idea of something crafted with intention, a made thing. God didn't save you so you could sit on a shelf. He prepared good works beforehand, and He means for you to walk in them.

That changes how a man sees himself. Many men in our churches think ministry is something the pastor does, and their part is to show up, give, and maybe help park cars. They don't think of themselves as having a calling. If you asked them, "What has God given you to do?" they would shrug.

Part of Send Him Out is helping a man see that he isn't a spectator. God has work for him. It may not be on a stage. It may never have a title. But it is real, and it matters.

His Job Is a Calling

Start with where a man spends most of his waking hours: his work.

If the church only talks about faith in terms of Sunday morning, we are telling men that the biggest part of their week has nothing to do with God. That isn't what the Bible teaches.

> *And everything, whatever you do, work from **the** soul, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from **the** Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* (Colossians 3:23-24)

Paul originally wrote those words to slaves, people with almost no choice about their work. If they could serve Christ in that situation, then the man who drives a delivery route, runs a crew, sells insurance, or sits in a cubicle can serve Him too. "You serve the Lord Christ." That is true for the plumber and the banker alike.

Picture a man named Victor who is an electrician. For years he thought of his job as just a paycheck. Church was where the spiritual stuff happened. Then one day in his men's group they talked through this passage, and something clicked. He started praying in his truck before each job. He started doing the work as if Jesus were the customer: running the wires neatly even inside the walls where nobody would see, telling the truth about what a repair would cost, treating the apprentice on his crew with patience instead of yelling at him. Nothing about his job changed. Everything about how he did it changed.

That is what it looks like to see work as a calling. A man works with excellence and honesty. He treats coworkers and customers with respect. He refuses to cut corners that would cheat someone. He uses his position, whatever it is, to do good. And over time, people notice.

> *Thus let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and may glorify your Father who **is** in the heavens.* (Matthew 5:16)

A man's coworkers may never set foot in a church. But they will watch how he handles a bad boss, a missed deadline, a dirty joke in the break room, or a coworker whose marriage is falling apart. His workplace is his mission field, and often the first door he will ever open for another man is at work.

Men's groups can help with this. Ask men regularly, "How is God at work in your work?" Have a man share what he does for a living and how he tries to honor Christ there. Pray for each other's jobs by name. You may be surprised how much it means to a man to hear that his brothers are praying for his Monday meeting.

In my career as a project and program manager, I have seen my share of projects fall behind, budgets stretched thin, and people who didn't see eye to eye. I remember one project that was going sideways. The pressure was on, the team was frustrated, and it would have been easy to start pointing fingers. I had a choice. I could let the frustration decide how I treated people, or I could remember the kind of leader I wanted to be. I brought the team together, listened to their concerns, owned my part of the problem, and worked it out with them. It didn't make the problems disappear, but it was the right way to treat people.

My coworkers might never sit in church with me, but they would remember how I treated them when things went bad. I have never been a perfect Christian, and there were seasons in my personal life when I

struggled badly. But I tried to remember that I represented God at work. I wanted to be known as honest, fair, and dependable, someone who helped others succeed. You don't have to preach at work to represent Christ. Serving God doesn't start when you walk into church on Sunday. It keeps going Monday morning when you show up for work.

Leading at Home as a Servant

For many men, the home is the hardest place to live out their faith. It is easier to be patient with a customer than with a teenager. It is easier to be kind to a coworker than to a wife at the end of a long day.

Scripture gives husbands one clear picture of how to love. Paul tells husbands to love their own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25).

That is the standard: Christ, who gave Himself up. Whatever else a man believes about leadership in the home, it has to look like Jesus. Jesus washed feet. Jesus laid down His life. He never used His strength to control or bully anyone. A man who uses Scripture to demand his own way at home has missed the point completely. Christlike leadership goes first in serving, first in apologizing, first in praying, and first in sacrifice.

I want to be gentle here, because many men feel like failures at home. Maybe the marriage is strained. Maybe a man never had a good father and has no idea what a good one looks like. Maybe he is divorced and only sees his kids every other weekend. Send Him Out doesn't mean "now go be perfect at home." It means take the next faithful step.

For one man, that might be praying with his wife for the first time, even if it is awkward and lasts thirty seconds. For another, it might be putting the phone away at dinner. For a dad, it might be taking his son to breakfast once a month and asking real questions. For a divorced father, it might be speaking well of his children's mother in front of them, even when it is hard. For a single man, his home may be an apartment and his family may be nephews, neighbors, and the men in his group. He is no less a man and no less called.

Men learn this best from other men. A young husband needs to see an older husband serve his wife. A new father needs to hear from a man whose kids are grown what he would do differently. Your men's ministry can make that happen simply by putting men of different ages in the same room and the same groups.

Serving in the Church and Community

God has given every believer gifts to be used for others.

> *each one, as he has received a gift, serving it among yourselves, as good stewards of* ***the*** *manifold grace of God.* (1 Peter 4:10)

"Each one." Not the gifted few. Each one. Every man in your church has something to give: strong hands, a quick mind for numbers, a gift for teaching kids, a truck, a knack for making new people feel welcome, a heart for the elderly, skill with a spreadsheet or a socket set.

Part of a men's ministry's job is to help men find their place to serve and then actually connect them. Don't just announce, "The church needs volunteers." That rarely works. Ask a specific man for a specific thing. "Jake, you're good with kids. Would you be willing to go through the church's screening for children's workers and then help with the middle school boys one Sunday a month?" "Phil, you know engines. The church mower has been making a noise for a month. Can you take a look Saturday?" When the ask involves kids, the screening comes first and the youth leader makes the final call. That protects the kids, and it protects him.

Service also reaches beyond the church walls. Service days are a great thing for a men's ministry to do together: helping a refugee family move into their first apartment, serving at a food pantry, building a wheelchair ramp, cleaning up a park. Men who might never come to a Bible study will often show up to swing a hammer. And while they are working side by side, real conversations happen.

There is a story in Mark 5 about a man Jesus delivered from terrible bondage. Afterward the man begged to go along with Jesus. Jesus said no.

> *But Jesus did not permit him, but says to him, "Go to your house, to your own **people**, and report to them how much the Lord did for you, and **how** He had mercy on you."* (Mark 5:19)

Jesus sent him back to his own town, his own people. Sometimes the place God sends a man isn't far away. It is his neighborhood, his family, his workplace, his softball team. A man doesn't need to wait to be sent overseas. He can start on his own street.

Walking With Another Man

Here is where the circle starts to close. The highest step in Send Him Out is that a man begins to walk with another man, just as someone walked with him.

Paul wrote these words to Timothy, his son in the faith.

> *and the things which you heard from me through many witnesses, commit these to faithful men, who will be sufficient to teach others also.* (2 Timothy 2:2)

Count the generations in that verse. Paul taught Timothy. Timothy will teach faithful men. Those men will teach others also. That is four generations in one sentence. This is how the church has been built for two thousand years: one man passing on to another man what was passed on to him.

The Bible is full of these pairs. Moses poured himself into Joshua for forty years, and Joshua led Israel into the land. Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha, and Elisha followed him until the day Elijah was taken up. Barnabas took hold of Saul when everyone else in Jerusalem was afraid of him, and brought him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). Later Barnabas did the same for John Mark when Paul had given up on him, and years later Paul himself asked for Mark because he was useful (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul took young Timothy with him, and later sent Timothy out to lead on his own.

Walking with another man isn't as complicated as some men fear. You don't need a seminary degree. You don't need to have all the answers. You need to be a few steps ahead, be honest about your own struggles, and be willing to share your life.

> *So, longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you have become beloved to us.* (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Not only the gospel, but our own souls. That is what makes the difference. A man learns to follow Jesus by being near a man who follows Jesus. He watches how you treat your wife, how you handle money, how you respond when you are wronged, how you pray. He hears you admit when you blew it.

Practically, it might look like this. A man meets with another man every week or two for coffee or breakfast. They read a book of the Bible together, a chapter at a time, and talk about what it says and what to do about it. They pray for each other. They text during the week. Now and then they work on something together, a project at the house or a service day. After a season, maybe a year, maybe two, the younger man is ready to do the same with someone else.

How to Help a Man Take His First Step Out

Many men won't send themselves. They need someone to see something in them and say it out loud. Here are some practical ways leaders can help.

Watch for readiness, not perfection. No man is ever fully ready. If you wait until a man has no struggles, you will never send anyone. Look for a man who is faithful, teachable, and growing, and who has a heart for others. That is enough to start.

Name what you see. Men often don't know their own gifts. "Bill, I noticed how you made that new guy feel welcome. You've got a gift for that." "Mike, every time you share in group, guys lean in. Have you ever thought about leading a group?" A few words of honest encouragement can change a man's direction.

Start small. Don't ask a man who has never led anything to take over the men's ministry. Ask him to open the group in prayer. Ask him to lead one discussion. Ask him to follow up with one new guy. Small wins build confidence.

Go with him the first time. Jesus kept the Twelve with Him for a long time before He sent them, and when they came back they reported to Him all that they had done (Mark 6:30). Do the same. Let a man shadow you before he leads on his own. Then debrief afterward: what went well, what was hard, what he learned.

Keep him connected. A man who is sent out still needs his own group and his own brothers. Don't let leaders become lone rangers. The man pouring into others needs someone pouring into him.

Picture a man named Nate who came to a men's breakfast three years ago because a neighbor invited him. He had not been to church in fifteen years. A man from the core team took him to lunch the next week, and they kept meeting. Nate came to faith, got baptized, and joined a Tuesday evening group. Over time he grew. Last spring his group leader asked him to start meeting with a new guy at work who had been asking him questions. Now Nate is the one buying the coffee. That is the Workshop Path doing exactly what it was meant to do.

For years I served at a church where I was happy to work behind the scenes. I didn't need the spotlight, and I let others lead. Then a pastor there started taking a personal interest in me. He saw something in me I didn't see in myself and kept pushing me to think beyond just showing up and helping when asked.

He told me that what I had lived through, even my struggles, could be used to help other men. I had spent my whole career leading people and managing projects, yet I never thought of those abilities as gifts I could use in ministry. And I knew my own failures too well to think I was qualified.

He didn't focus on where I had failed. He focused on what God could still do through me. Sometimes all a man needs is someone who believes in him enough to say, "I see something in you, and I believe God can use it." There are men sitting in our churches every Sunday with gifts and a desire to serve, waiting for someone to notice and ask. Someone did that for me. Now it's my turn to do it for the next man.

Sending Is Not Dumping

There is a wrong way to do all of this, and churches fall into it all the time. A man shows a little interest, and suddenly he is running the parking team, teaching a class, and serving on two committees. Six months later he is worn out, a little bitter, and quietly looking for a different church. That isn't sending a man out. That is dumping work on him.

When you build a cabinet, you don't hang the doors on a cabinet box whose glue is still wet. You give the joints time to set. Men need that too. A brand-new believer who is still learning to pray may not be ready to lead a group, even if he is a natural leader at work. Let him serve in ways that fit his season, and let the roots go down before you ask the branches to carry weight.

You might ask, "How do I know whether a man is ready or just willing?" Watch for a little while. Is he faithful in small things? Does he show up when he said he would? Is his home life steady enough that taking on more won't cost his wife and kids? Is he still being fed himself? If the answers are mostly yes, give him something real to do. If not, keep walking with him, and give him something small.

Sending also happens under the church, not around it. A man who wants to start a new group or a new outreach should do it in step with the point leader and the pastor, not as a freelancer. That isn't about control. It protects the man, it protects the people he will serve, and it keeps the whole church pulling in the same direction.

One more thing. Not every man will be sent in the same way. Some men will lead groups. Some will never lead anything with a title, but they will faithfully bring one coworker to church every year for thirty years. Some will spend themselves caring for an aging parent or a disabled child, and that is their good work for this season. Don't measure a man by how visible his service is. God sees what is done in secret, and He prepared those good works too.

The Circle Closes

Remember why the Workshop Path is a circle and not a ladder. A ladder has a top. You climb it and you are done. A circle keeps turning.

When a man is sent out, he goes back to the first station, but this time from the other side. He is the one opening the door. He invites his neighbor to the outreach breakfast. He notices the guy in the back row and introduces himself. He becomes the one who learns a new man's name and follows up within the

week. He shares the gospel with his coworker. He brings a hurting friend to his group. The man who was reached becomes a man who reaches.

And Jesus stays at the center of the circle the whole time. We don't send men out to build their own reputations or to grow our ministry numbers. We send them out because Jesus sends them. He is the One who told His disciples, "Even as the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). Every station on the path, and every turn of the circle, is about Him.

Somewhere in your church is a man who is ready to be sent, though he doesn't know it yet. Somewhere else is a man who hasn't been reached, and the first one may be the person God uses to reach him. A men's ministry that sends men out multiplies. One becomes two, two become four, and the church is built together, one man at a time.

That brings us to the end of Part Two. We have looked at how to walk with one man around the whole circle. In Part Three, we turn to the practical work of running a men's ministry that can help many men do this at once: starting with the pastor and a few good men, making a plan, setting a rhythm for the year, holding events and groups that lead somewhere, and keeping it going for the long haul.

Talk It Over

1. Before reading this chapter, did you think of yourself as having work to do in God's kingdom? Why or why not?
2. How could you treat your job this week as a place to serve Christ? What would change in how you do it?
3. Ephesians 5:25 calls husbands to love like Christ, who gave Himself up. What is one specific way a man could serve his family like that this month?
4. Where do you see gifts in the men around you that they may not see in themselves? How could you tell them?
5. Who walked with you in your faith, even informally? What did they do that you could pass on to someone else?
6. Who is one man God might be putting in your path to walk with? What would a first step with him look like?

Try This Week

Write down the name of one man who is a few steps behind you in following Jesus. Before the week is over, ask him to get coffee or breakfast with you. Don't make it a formal program. Just ask him how he is doing, share a little of your own story, and ask if he would like to read through a short book of the Bible together, like Philippians or James, meeting every other week.

Part Three: Running a Men's Ministry

Chapter 11: Start With the Pastor and a Few Good Men

> *You will surely wear out, both you and this people that **is** with you; for the thing **is too** heavy for you; you are not able to do it by yourself alone.*
>
> Exodus 18:18 (SLB)

Up to this point we have been talking about one man at a time. That is where everything starts, and it is where everything has to stay rooted. But if you want to help every man your church can reach, sooner or later you will need more than good intentions. You will need some structure.

I have spent many years running projects and programs, and one lesson shows up again and again. Good ideas die when nobody owns them, and ordinary teams do remarkable things when they are clear about who is doing what. Ministry isn't a business, and men aren't projects. But the same God who called Nehemiah to rebuild a wall also gave him a plan and a crew. Order isn't unspiritual. Paul told the Corinthians that things in the church should be done properly and in an orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:40).

So welcome to Part Three. In these chapters we will look at the practical side of running a men's ministry: who leads it, how you plan it, what a year looks like, how to hold events and groups that lead somewhere, and how to keep it going. We will start where every lasting men's ministry starts: with the pastor and a few good men.

Before any of that, though, one verse to keep in front of us.

> *If the LORD does not build a house, in vain its builders have toiled on it; if the LORD does not keep a city, in vain the watchman has stayed awake.* (Psalm 127:1)

You can have a perfect org chart and a beautiful plan and still build nothing that lasts. Structure is the scaffolding. God is the builder. Keep that straight and the rest of this chapter will serve you well.

Start With the Pastor

A men's ministry isn't a club on the side of the church. It is part of the church, and it serves under the church's leadership. That means the first conversation isn't with the guys at the hardware store. It is with your pastor (or, depending on how your church is set up, the pastor and the elders).

Why does this matter so much? First, because Scripture gives the pastors and elders of a church the job of watching over the flock (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). The men in your church are part of that flock. A men's ministry that runs on its own, apart from the church's shepherds, is working around the very people God put in place to care for those men.

Second, because men follow what their pastor values. If the pastor mentions the men's ministry from the pulpit, shows up at the breakfast now and then, and prays for it publicly, men notice. If he never mentions it, men assume it is optional.

There is one more reason. A men's ministry should strengthen the whole church, not compete with it. When the pastor is involved, the men's calendar fits with the church calendar. The men's groups teach what the church teaches. And the ministry helps men become better husbands, fathers, members, and servants in the whole body, not just better attenders of men's events.

So what do you ask the pastor for? Here is a short list to bring to that first conversation.

- His blessing: a clear "yes, go ahead, and I'm behind you."
- His input on who should lead, since he often knows the men better than you do.
- A few minutes of his time now and then: to speak at a kickoff, to pray over the core team, to check in a couple of times a year.
- Clarity on boundaries: what the men's ministry should handle, and what should come to him (doctrine, discipline, serious pastoral situations).
- Room on the church calendar and in the budget, even if it is small at first.

Don't ask him to run it. Most pastors are already carrying more than they can hold. What you want is for him to be the shepherd over it, not the man doing all the work. That is exactly the point of the rest of this chapter.

Remember the men's ministry launch I told you about in Chapter 2, the one that stalled on egos and competing ideas? There was another lesson in it, and it was about how we went to our pastor. We had plenty of enthusiasm and plenty of ideas. What we didn't have was a shared vision, and we never had steady support and direction from the pastoral staff. We had permission to start a men's group. We didn't have a shepherd.

As a project and program manager, I knew no project succeeds without leadership support, clear objectives, and people pulling toward the same goal. Ministry needs all of that and something more: humility, prayer, and a willingness to put our own plans under God's purpose. If I could do it again, I would spend far less time showing the pastor our ideas for meetings, activities, and structure, and far more time asking him what he believed the men of our church needed most. I would want his vision and his guidance before we moved. That doesn't mean he runs the ministry. It means he keeps it pointed at the right target.

You might ask, "What if my pastor isn't interested?" Be patient and honest. Ask him what he would want to see in the men of the church. Offer to start small, with one group of men meeting for prayer and Bible study, and report back to him what God is doing. Pray for him. Many pastors have seen men's ministries come and go and are wary of one more program. Show him faithfulness over time. Don't go around him, and don't start a ministry he hasn't blessed. If you serve under him well in small things, you will usually find the door opens in time.

If You're Taking Over a Men's Ministry

Many of you aren't starting from nothing. You've been handed a monthly breakfast that has run the same way for twenty years, or a group that's been shrinking, or a ministry the pastor hasn't thought about in a while. Don't bulldoze it. Honor what's there and the men who kept it alive when nobody else would. Spend your first season listening, praying, and building the Name List before you change anything. Then

add one new thing at a time, and keep the best of the old. Those faithful men will be your best allies if they feel respected, and your hardest critics if they feel replaced.

Character Before Talent

Once you have the pastor's blessing, the next question is who will lead. This is where many men's ministries make their first big mistake. They pick the man who is the most outgoing, the most successful in business, or the most available. Sometimes that works out. Often it doesn't.

Scripture gives us a better place to start. When Paul told Timothy and Titus what kind of men should lead in the church, he didn't start with skills. He started with character.

> *Faithful **is** the word: if anyone aspires to **the** office of overseer, he desires a good work.*
> (1 Timothy 3:1)

Then he lists what such a man should look like (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). He should be above reproach. "The husband of one wife." Self-controlled, sensible, respectable. Hospitable. Able to teach. Not addicted to wine, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. A man who manages his household well. Not a brand-new believer, so he isn't puffed up. Someone with a good reputation with outsiders. Loving what is good. Just and devout. Holding firmly to the true message he was taught.

Those passages describe the overseers and elders of the church, and a men's ministry point leader or core team member isn't the same thing as an elder. I am not saying every man on your core team has to meet the qualifications for that office. But those lists are the best picture Scripture gives us of the kind of men who should be trusted with influence over other men. Use them as your standard for the kind of men you are looking for. One word of care here. Many single men, widowers, and divorced men are among the most faithful men in a church, and a core team or group is not the office of elder. How your church applies a line like "the husband of one wife" is a question for your pastor and elders, not for the men's ministry to settle on its own. Don't pass over a godly man because his life doesn't look like a picture-perfect family.

Here is what that means in plain terms. Look for men who are honest, faithful at home, steady under pressure, and humble enough to be taught. Look for men whose families, or the people who know them best, would say, "Yes, he really is like that at home." Look for men who have been around long enough that the church knows their character. And look for men who actually care about other men, not just about running things.

Skills can be learned. A man can learn to lead a meeting, follow a plan, or speak in front of a group. Character takes much longer to build. Wood that hasn't been allowed to season will move and crack after you build with it. Men are similar. A man whose character hasn't had time to settle can look fine in the shop and then split once he is under load. Pick seasoned men.

The Point Leader

Every men's ministry needs one man who is responsible for it. I call him the point leader. He isn't the boss of the men. He is the man who makes sure things happen, who keeps the team praying and moving, and who is the first contact for the pastor.

What makes a good point leader? Besides the character we just talked about, look for a man who has some time to give (not unlimited time, but some), who follows through, and who is more interested in other men growing than in being up front. He doesn't have to be the best speaker or teacher in the church. In fact, the best point leaders often put other men in front and work behind the scenes.

The point leader's main jobs are fairly simple. He keeps in touch with the pastor. He leads the core team and makes sure every man on it knows his job. He keeps the Plan on a Page current (we will build that in the next chapter). He watches over the Name List so that no man connected to the church is forgotten. And he prays for the men by name.

In a normal month that looks like this: one core team meeting, one check-in with the pastor, one gathering with group leaders, a look at the Name List for men who have gone quiet, and a few calls of your own. For most men that is a few hours a week, more in the weeks around a big event. If it is taking much more than that, you are probably doing someone else's job.

Notice what isn't on that list: doing everything himself. A point leader who tries to run every event, lead every group, and call every man will burn out within a year. He will also keep other men from growing into leaders. That brings us to one of the best pieces of leadership advice in the whole Bible.

Jethro's Advice

In Exodus 18, Moses was doing it all himself. From morning until evening, people lined up to bring their disputes to him. He sat and judged every case. His father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit and watched this for a day. Then he spoke up.

> *And the father-in-law of Moses said to him, "The thing that you are doing **is** not good."*
> (Exodus 18:17)

That is a remarkable thing to say to Moses. Moses was doing good work. He was serving God's people. But the way he was doing it wasn't good, because it would wear him out and wear the people out too. The task was too heavy. He couldn't do it alone.

Jethro's solution was simple. Moses should teach the people God's ways, and then look out "men of ability," men "fearing God, men of truth, hating unjust gain." Those men would lead groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They would handle the ordinary matters, and only the hardest cases would come to Moses. Jethro summed up the result: "they shall bear it with you" (Exodus 18:21-22).

That is the pattern for a men's ministry. The pastor is over the whole church. The point leader leads the men's ministry. The core team shares the work with him. Group leaders each care for a small group of men. And every man has someone who knows his name.

Moses had needed help in the chapter just before that one, too. When Israel fought the Amalekites, Moses stood on a hill holding up the staff of God. As long as his hands were raised, Israel won. When his arms got tired and dropped, they started losing.

> *And the hands of Moses **were** heavy; and they took a stone and put **it** under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on this **side** and one on that **side**; and his hands were steady until the sun went **down**.* (Exodus 17:12)

Every point leader needs an Aaron and a Hur. He needs men who will hold up his arms when he is tired. That is what a core team is for.

How the Team Fits Together

Here is the simple structure I recommend. Your church may adjust it, and that is fine. The point is that every man is cared for and no leader carries the load alone.

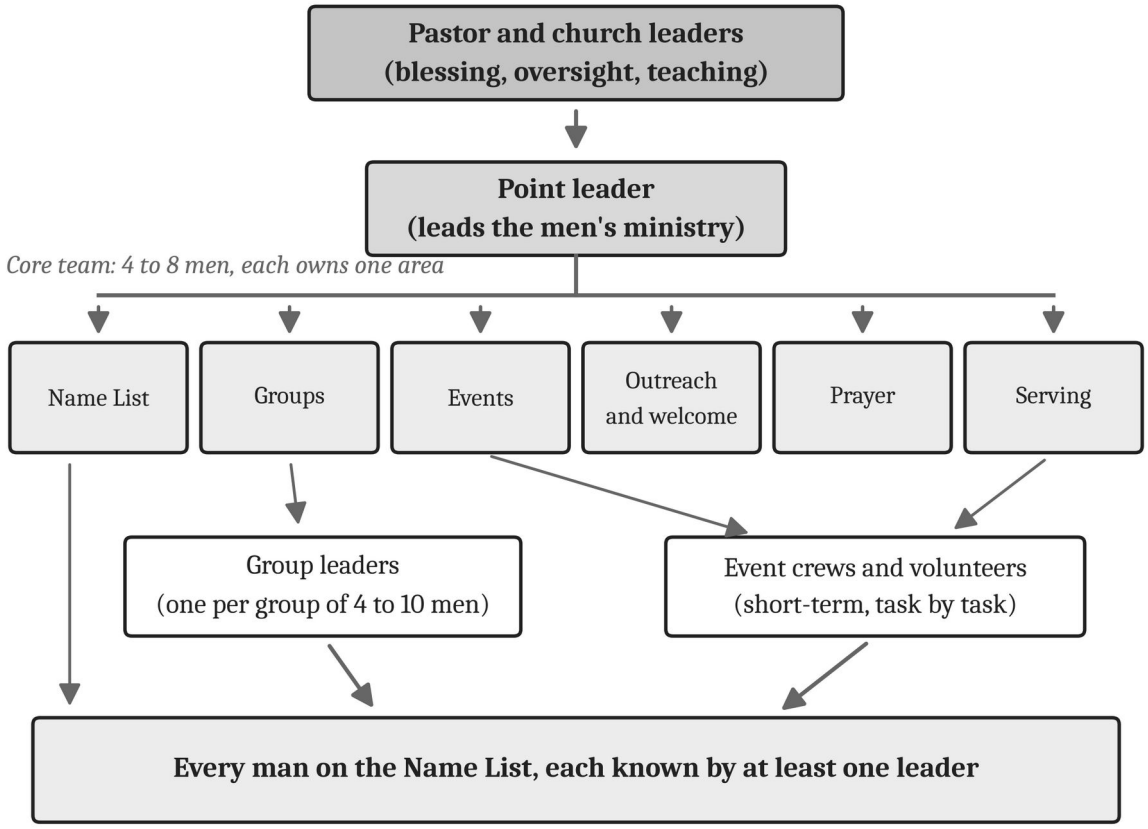


Figure 3. How a Men's Ministry Is Organized

At the top is the pastor. He shepherds the whole church, including the men's ministry, and the point leader answers to him. In a larger church that may be a staff pastor the senior pastor has put over men's ministry.

Next is the point leader, who leads the ministry and the core team.

Then the core team: four to eight men who share the work. Each core team member owns one area. Smaller churches might have four men; larger churches might have eight. A church with only a dozen men can start with two or three (see Chapter 13). Much more than eight and the team becomes a committee that meets about meetings.

Then the group leaders. Each one leads a small group of men, usually around four to ten, and cares for the men in it.

And then the men themselves, every man connected to the church, each one on the Name List with a leader who checks on him.

What areas might core team members own? It depends on your church, but here is a sample.

Area	What he owns
Name List	Keeps the list current, makes sure every man has a leader, flags men who have gone quiet
Groups	Recruits and supports group leaders, helps new men find a group
Events	Plans breakfasts, outreach events, retreats, and service days
Outreach and welcome	Helps men invite friends, greets new men, makes sure first-timers get a call within a week
Prayer	Organizes prayer for the men and the ministry, keeps the prayer list (same privacy rules as the Name List)
Serving	Connects men to service in the church and community, plans service days

In a small church, one man might own two of these areas. In a larger church, an area might grow its own small team. That is fine. What matters is that every area has a name next to it. When everything belongs to everybody, nothing gets done.

Notice how the Name List ties into all this. The core team and group leaders share the men between them. Every man on the list has one leader whose job is to know him, check on him, and help him take his next step. That is how a church of two hundred men can still make sure no man slips through the cracks. Nobody can personally know two hundred men well. But twenty leaders can each know ten.

Choosing Your Core Team

How do you find these men? Start by praying. Before Jesus chose the Twelve, He spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). If Jesus prayed all night before choosing His team, we can spend a few weeks.

Then ask the pastor for names. Ask a few trusted men for names. Look at who is already serving faithfully without being asked. Look at who other men naturally go to. Write down more names than you need.

Aim for a mix. Younger and older men. Men from different walks of life. A blue-collar man and a white-collar man. A man who has walked through a hard season and come out the other side. A newer believer who is growing fast alongside a man who has followed Jesus for forty years. If your core team all looks alike, your ministry will only reach men like them. A mix of men also gives you more than one point of view when a decision is hard.

> *Plans go wrong when **there is** no counsel, and in a multitude of counselors it is established.* (Proverbs 15:22)

Then ask each man personally. Don't put a notice in the bulletin asking for volunteers. Sit down with a man over breakfast and say something like: "We're starting to build a men's ministry that helps every man here take his next step with Jesus. I've watched how you live, and I think you'd be a great part of the core team. Here's what it would involve. Would you pray about it for a week and let me know?"

Be honest about the commitment. Tell him how often the team meets, what area he would own, and how long you are asking for. I suggest asking for one year at a time. That gives a man a clear finish line, and it gives you a natural point each year to thank men, adjust roles, and invite new men in.

Some men will say no. That is all right. Thank them and keep praying. Better to start with four of the right men than eight of the wrong ones.

Leading Like Shepherds, Not Bosses

A word about the spirit of the team. A core team isn't a board of directors. It is a group of brothers serving other men. Peter wrote to the elders of the churches, and his words fit anyone who leads in the church.

> *nor as exercising lordship over the portions **allotted to you**, but becoming examples to the flock.* (1 Peter 5:3)

Examples, not lords. The core team leads first by how its members live. If the core team isn't praying, the men won't pray. If the core team isn't in groups, the men won't join groups. If the core team isn't inviting friends, the men won't invite friends. You can't take a man further than you are willing to go yourself.

That also means the core team needs to care for each other. Make sure every man on the team is in a group or has a brother he meets with. Check on each other's marriages and families. Watch for burnout. If a man on the team is going through a hard season, give him room to step back without guilt.

Your First Meetings: Pray Together First

So you have your pastor's blessing, a point leader, and a handful of good men. What now?

Resist the urge to start planning events right away. Start by praying together. After Jesus ascended, before the church launched at Pentecost, the disciples did one thing together.

> *These all were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, with **the** women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.* (Acts 1:14)

Before they did anything, they prayed. And notice they prayed "with one accord." A team that prays together grows of one heart and mind in a way that no planning session can create. Notice too that the women were right there with them. A men's ministry is never against or apart from the women of the church. It exists to strengthen homes and the whole body.

Here is a simple way to use your first few meetings.

1. First meeting: Share your stories. Let each man tell how he came to Christ and who walked with him along the way. Then spend most of the time praying for the men of your church, by name if you can. (Appendix A7 lays out this first meeting in ninety minutes.)
2. Second meeting: Read Exodus 18 and Nehemiah 2 together. Talk about what kind of ministry you want to build. Start a rough list of every man connected to the church (this becomes the Name List). Pray over the names.
3. Third meeting: Talk through the Workshop Path and where a man stands. Ask: where are most of our men right now? What is missing? Assign each core team man an area.
4. Fourth meeting: Begin drafting your Plan on a Page (the next chapter walks through it). Set a date to share it with the pastor.
5. Every meeting after that: Start with prayer, not with the agenda. Keep meetings short and regular. Once or twice a month is usually enough.

A word on meetings, from a man who has sat through a lot of them. Keep them short. Start on time and end on time. Have a simple agenda and send it out ahead of time. Pray first. Review the Name List and talk about men, not just events. End by making sure every action has an owner and a date. Men will keep coming to meetings that respect their time and actually get things done.

In my career I have led and sat through more meetings than I can count. Some got the job done. Others went in circles while everybody shared an opinion, and people walked out not knowing what was expected of them. The fastest way to lose a team is to waste its time. A good meeting doesn't happen by accident. It needs a clear purpose, the right people, and someone who keeps it on track. Every action needs an owner, a date, and follow-through, and people need to leave feeling respected and heard.

Most of that carries straight over to men's ministry, with one big difference. At work we start with the schedule and the budget. In ministry we start with prayer, and we don't rush through it to get to business. I have watched good men let opinions and egos take over a ministry because no one was seeking God first. You can have the best plan and the most capable men and still end up building your own thing instead of His. Good planning gives a ministry structure. Accountability keeps it moving. Prayer keeps it pointed at God.

Don't wait until you have a perfect team to start. If all you have right now is your pastor's blessing and two other men who want to pray for the men of your church, start there. Meet weekly. Pray. Keep a list of names. Invite a third man and a fourth. Jesus started with a handful of fishermen and a tax collector, and the church He built has never stopped growing.

Every good piece of furniture starts with a few boards and a plan. Build carefully. Pick seasoned wood. Clamp it well. Let it cure. And keep the Builder at the center.

Talk It Over

1. Why does it matter that a men's ministry serves under the pastor and the church, rather than running on its own?
2. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Which qualities on those lists do you think matter most for someone leading men? Why?

3. Have you ever seen a leader try to do everything himself, like Moses before Jethro's advice? What happened?
4. Who are the Aaron and Hur in your life, the men who hold up your arms when you are tired?
5. If you were building a core team at your church today, what kinds of men would you want on it? Who might be missing from the picture?
6. Why do you think it matters for a core team to start by praying together before planning anything?

Try This Week

Make an appointment with your pastor this week, or if you are the pastor, with two or three men you trust. Ask one simple question: "What would it look like for every man in our church to take his next step with Jesus this year?" Listen more than you talk. Then pray together before you leave, and write down any names that came up.

Chapter 12: A Plan on a Page

> *And the LORD answered me and said: Write a vision, and make **it** plain on the tablets, so that the one who reads it may run.*
>
> Habakkuk 2:2 (SLB)

A good builder draws a project before he cuts a single board. Nothing fancy. Often it is a sketch on graph paper with the overall size, the parts, the joinery, and a cut list. That one page saves a lot of wasted wood. It forces him to think the whole thing through before the saw starts. It also gives him something to check against halfway through, when he has forgotten what he meant to do.

A men's ministry needs the same thing. Not a forty-page strategy binder that nobody reads. Not a vague hope that "God will lead us." A single page that says what you are trying to do, who you are trying to reach, what you will focus on this year, who owns what, and how you will know whether it is working. I call it the Plan on a Page.

You might ask, "Isn't planning a little unspiritual? Shouldn't we just pray and follow the Spirit?" Pray first, absolutely. But prayer and planning aren't enemies. Scripture says plainly that planning well is wise.

> *The plans of a diligent **one are** only to advantage, and everyone who hastens, only to poverty.* (Proverbs 21:5)

Jesus Himself used a builder to make the point.

> *For which of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first, having sat down, count the cost, whether he has the **means** for completion?* (Luke 14:28)

Jesus was talking about the cost of following Him, but the picture He used assumes that any sensible builder plans before he builds. A men's ministry without a plan usually ends up as a string of events, each one put together at the last minute, with no clear idea where any of it is going. Men can feel that. They can tell the difference between a ministry that is going somewhere and one that is just keeping busy.

In my project management work, I have seen teams spin their wheels when nobody wrote down who owned what. Men's groups do the same thing when good intentions replace a simple plan. Clarity frees men to serve without guessing.

Nehemiah Made a Plan

If you want a picture of godly planning, read the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates burned. He wept, fasted, and prayed for days (Nehemiah 1). Then, when God opened the door through the king, he went.

But notice what he did when he got there. He didn't call a big meeting the first day. He rose in the night with a few men and rode out to look at the walls for himself (Nehemiah 2:12-15). He inspected the

damage. He saw where the gaps were. He got the facts before he made the pitch. Only then did he gather the leaders.

> *And I said to them, "You see the evil which we **are** in, that Jerusalem **is** desolate and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be a reproach."* (Nehemiah 2:17)

He named the problem honestly. He gave them a clear goal. And then he told them what God had done.

> *And I told them of the hand of my God, that it **was** good on me, and also the words of the king which he had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us arise and build." And they strengthened their hands for the good.* (Nehemiah 2:18)

Then comes chapter 3, which most people skip because it is a long list of hard names. Don't skip it. It is one of the best pictures of a well-run project in the whole Bible. Section by section, gate by gate, Nehemiah lists who built what. Eliashib the high priest and the priests took the Sheep Gate. The men of Jericho took the next section. The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. On and on it goes, every part of the wall with a name beside it.

And look at how many of them were assigned.

> *Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each opposite his house.* (Nehemiah 3:28)

Each opposite his house. Nehemiah gave men the part of the wall closest to them, the part they cared about most. That is wise leadership. Men work hardest on what is closest to home.

The result was remarkable.

> *And we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together up to its half; and **there** was a heart in the people to work.* (Nehemiah 4:6)

A clear purpose, an honest look at the need, specific owners for every part, and people who had a heart to work. That is what a Plan on a Page is made of. When opposition came, and it did, they prayed and set a guard day and night (Nehemiah 4:9). Prayer and practical action went together the whole way.

What Goes on the Page

Here are the parts of a Plan on a Page. Each one gets only a few lines. If you can't say it briefly, you probably haven't thought it through yet.

Purpose. One or two sentences that say why your men's ministry exists. Keep it simple enough that every man on the core team can say it from memory. For example: "We help every man connected to our church take his next step with Jesus, and we walk with each other along the way." Your purpose should line up with your church's purpose. It is a part of the church's mission, not a separate one.

Who we are trying to reach. Be specific. Use the five kinds of men from "Where a Man Stands" in Chapter 4: the Man Outside, the Man in the Back Row, the Man Starting Over, the Growing Man, and the Man Who Builds Others. Which of these does your church have the most of? Which are you reaching well,

and which are you missing? You might write, “Most of our men are in the Back Row. Our biggest need this year is getting them known by name and into a group.”

The Name List. A line or two saying how many men are on it, how many have a leader assigned, and who keeps it. The list itself doesn’t go on the page (it holds private information), but the plan should say that it exists and who owns it.

This year’s goals. Three or four, no more. We will talk about how to write good ones in a moment.

The calendar. The main rhythm of your year in a few lines: when groups launch, when the big events are, when you rest. The Year at a Glance in the next chapter fills this in.

Who owns what. Each core team area with a name next to it, just like Nehemiah’s wall.

Budget. What you expect to spend and where the money comes from.

How we’ll know it’s working. A few simple measures you will look at during the year.

That is it. One page, front side only if you can manage it. If it spills onto the back, start cutting.

Who writes the plan? Not the point leader alone in his study. Write it with the core team, around a table, with the Name List in front of you and prayer at the start. The men who help shape the plan are the men who will own it. Nehemiah didn’t hand out wall assignments by mail. He stood in front of the leaders, told them what God had done, and invited them to build with him. When the draft is done, take it to your pastor before you share it with anyone else. Ask him what he would change. He may see something you missed, and his fingerprints on the plan will matter when you need his support later.

Then share it. Put a short version in front of the men of the church. Tell them in plain words what the men’s ministry is trying to do this year and how they can be part of it. Men are far more willing to join something when they can see where it is headed.

Picture a core team that skips this step. They write a good plan, file it away, and spend the year planning breakfasts. In the fall the point leader pulls the plan out of a folder and realizes that not one of the four goals got any attention. Nobody was lazy. They were just busy, and busy always fills the space a plan leaves empty. A plan that nobody sees isn’t much better than no plan at all.

Building the Name List

Of all the parts of the plan, the Name List is the one that changes a men’s ministry the most. It moves you from thinking about crowds to thinking about men.

The idea is simple. Write down, by name, every man connected to your church. Members and regular attenders, of course. But also the husbands of women who attend without them. The dads who drop their kids off at youth group and drive away. The men who used to come and haven’t been seen in a year. The man who visited twice last fall. If he has any connection to your church, he goes on the list. For a man whose wife comes without him, talk with her before anyone reaches out to him. Ask what he enjoys, whether a call from a man at church would be welcome, and whether there is anything you should know. If she says not now, honor it and keep praying. If she tells you she is afraid of him, stop and take it to your

pastor that day. One exception: men in a recovery group that meets in your building belong to that group first. Respect the group's privacy, and don't add them unless a man asks to be connected or you get to know him another way.

Work with your pastor and church office on this. Ask whether your church already has a way of caring for people, like elders with a list, deacons with families, or small group leaders. If a man already has someone checking on him, don't give him a second man. Write down who it is and work with him. They likely already have much of the information, and they will know what privacy guidelines to follow. Keep the list somewhere secure that the church approves, and share it only with the leaders who need it. These are real men, and some of what you learn about them will be personal. Treat it with care.

Then, beside each name, add two things. First, the leader who checks on him, a core team member or group leader who will know his name, reach out to him, and pray for him. Second, his next step, as best you can tell. For one man, the next step is "get him to a breakfast." For another, it is "invite him to the Thursday group." For another, "call him weekly." For another, "ready to lead a group; talk to him about it."

Spread the names out. No leader should have more men than he can actually care for. If you have eighty men on the list and four leaders, that is twenty men each, which is too many. That tells you something important: you need more men checking on men. Some of them will be group leaders. Many won't. A steady man like Hector can carry three or four names without leading anything. Ask him, give him only his own names, and have the man who keeps the Name List check in with him once a month. The Name List doesn't just track men. It shows you where you need to grow.

I like having a plan. Years of project work will do that to a man. A while back I sat down and wrote out everything I was responsible for at home: the house, the bills, the appointments, the projects that never seem to end. What surprised me wasn't how long the list was. It was what wasn't on it. Every chore was accounted for, but was I making time for my family? I had been busy taking care of a home without always being present for the people in it.

A Name List works the same way. Writing every man down by name shows you who has quietly slipped through the cracks. I think about the seasons when I pulled away and someone noticed. Every name on that list is a man with a story, a family, and struggles you may know nothing about. The list isn't worth anything just because the names are on paper. It's worth something when those names turn into a phone call, a prayer, or a cup of coffee.

Goals That Fit on a Page

Here is where many ministries go wrong. Either they set no goals at all, or they set so many that none of them get done. Choose three or four goals for the year, and make each one clear enough that you could tell at the June Health Check whether you did it.

A vague goal sounds spiritual but can't be checked: "Help men grow closer to God." Everyone agrees with it, and nobody knows what to do on Monday morning. A clear goal tells you what you are doing and how

you will know: “By the end of the year, every man on the Name List has a leader who has talked with him at least once.”

Look at a few more examples of clear goals.

- Launch two new men’s groups this fall, each with a trained leader and an apprentice.
- Hold one outreach event this spring designed for men to bring a friend, with every first-timer receiving a call within a week.
- Recruit and train four new group leaders by summer.
- Hold two service days this year, at least one serving a family in the community outside our church.

Each of those has something you can see and something you can count. More important, each of them is connected to the Workshop Path. The outreach event is about Open the Door. The call within a week is Know His Name. The new groups are Build Him Up. The service days and new leaders are Send Him Out.

When you choose your goals, look back at who you are trying to reach. If most of your men are in the Back Row, your goals should help them be known and connected, not just give the Growing Men more to do. Let the need shape the goals.

Every goal also needs an owner. Not “the core team.” One man. He may recruit help, but he is the one who makes sure it happens. Write his name next to the goal.

Money and the Budget

Men’s ministries often run on very little money, and that is fine. Many of the best things you will do cost nothing: a phone call, a cup of coffee, a man’s time. But you will have some costs, and it is wise to plan for them.

A simple budget lists what you expect to spend money on (breakfasts, retreat costs, study materials, service day supplies, perhaps scholarships for men who can’t afford a retreat) and where the money will come from (the church budget, event fees, gifts). Keep it to a few lines on the page. Show it to your pastor or whoever handles finances at your church.

Handle money with care and in the open. Follow your church’s process for money. Don’t keep ministry money in a personal account. Have two people count any cash. Give a short report of what was spent. Men watch how leaders handle money, and nothing damages trust faster than carelessness here.

And make sure money is never what keeps a man away. If a man can’t afford the retreat, find a way. Quietly cover his cost, set up a scholarship fund, or ask the men to give toward it. A man who is starting over after losing his job may need the retreat more than anyone.

How You’ll Know It’s Working

The easiest thing to measure in ministry is attendance. How many men came to the breakfast? It isn’t a bad question, but it is the wrong place to stop. Crowds come and go. A big breakfast can happen in a ministry where not a single man is growing.

Measure what matters. A few questions are enough.

- How many men on the Name List have a leader who actually knows them?
- How many men took a next step this year (joined a group, came to faith, were baptized, started serving, started walking with another man)?
- How many men are in a group?
- How many new leaders did we raise up?
- What stories are we hearing?

That last one matters more than any number. Ask your group leaders regularly: “Where have you seen God at work in your men?” Write the stories down. Share them with the pastor and the core team. Stories remind everyone why you are doing this, and they show you things numbers never will.

Proverbs 27:23 tells a herdsman to know the face of his flock. That proverb was written about livestock, but the principle carries over to shepherding men. Know the condition of the men God has given you. Not just how many there are, but how they are doing.

A Sample Plan on a Page

Here is what a Plan on a Page might look like for a church of a few hundred people that has been at this for a couple of years and has six men on its core team. If you are just getting started, cut it in half: one or two groups, two gatherings, and one service day. Don’t copy it word for word. Use it as a starting sketch, and build your own.

Part	What we wrote
Purpose	Help every man connected to our church take his next step with Jesus, and walk with each other along the way.
Who we are trying to reach	Most of our men are in the Back Row: they attend, but few are known or in a group. We also have a number of husbands who don’t come at all.
Name List	85 men so far. 40 have a leader assigned. Owned by Joe.
Goals this year	1. Every man on the Name List has a leader by June. 2. Launch three new groups in September. 3. Hold an April outreach event with follow-up within a week. 4. Train five new group leaders.
Calendar	Kickoff and fall group launch in September; service day in October; men’s breakfast in November and March; Christmas outreach; winter study January to March; retreat in February; outreach event in April; family event in May; service days in June and July; Health Checks in January and June.
Who owns what	Name List: Joe. Groups: Manny. Events: Will. Outreach and welcome: Andre. Prayer: Hank. Serving: Sam.
Budget	Breakfasts, retreat scholarships, study books, service day supplies. Paid from the church budget line, event fees, and a scholarship fund.
How we’ll know	Men with a leader; men in groups; next steps taken; new leaders; stories from group leaders.

That fits on one page. Every man on the core team can read it in two minutes. The pastor can glance at it and know exactly what the men’s ministry is doing and why. And at the June Health Check, the team can sit down and see honestly what got done.

Keep It Simple and Keep It Close

A plan only helps if you use it. Too many plans get written in a burst of energy at the start of the year and never looked at again. Don't let that happen to yours.

Bring the Plan on a Page to every core team meeting. Look at the goals. Ask the owners how things are going. Look at the Name List and talk about men by name. Pray over the plan and over the men.

Review it more carefully every few months. What is working? What isn't? What needs to change? Twice a year, in January and June, do a fuller review called the Health Check (Chapter 16 and Appendix A3). Once a year, at the August planning day (Chapter 13), write a new plan for the next year, starting from what you learned.

And hold the plan loosely. It is a tool, not a law.

> *The heart of a man plans his way, and the LORD directs his step.* (Proverbs 16:9)

We plan because God calls us to be wise. But God is the One who directs our steps. Sometimes He will take you somewhere your plan never imagined. A man you had not even put on the list will walk in the door, broken and ready. A group you expected to fail will catch fire. A big event you poured yourself into will fall flat, and a simple service day will change three men's lives. When that happens, thank God, adjust the plan, and keep going.

A good sketch on graph paper doesn't build the cabinet. Your hands still have to do the work, and sometimes you change the design halfway through because the wood tells you something you didn't know. But without the sketch, you are just cutting boards and hoping. Write the plan. Keep it to a page. Put names beside every part of the wall. Then put your hands to the good work.

Talk It Over

1. Have you ever been part of a ministry or team that had no clear plan? What was that like?
2. What stands out to you about how Nehemiah planned and organized the rebuilding of the wall?
3. If you wrote one or two sentences describing the purpose of your church's men's ministry, what would they say?
4. Think about the men connected to your church. Which kind of man (Outside, Back Row, Starting Over, Growing, Builds Others) do you think is most common? What does that suggest your goals should be?
5. Why do you think the Name List changes how a ministry thinks about men? What would be hard about building one?
6. Besides attendance, what are some ways your men's ministry could tell whether God is really at work?

Try This Week

Take a single sheet of paper and sketch a first draft of a Plan on a Page for your men's ministry, even if you aren't the point leader. Write a purpose in one or two sentences, name the kind of man you most need to reach, and list three goals you would set for this year. Then show it to one other man (or your pastor) and ask what he would change.

Chapter 13: The Year at a Glance

> *For everything **there is** an appointed time, and a time for every matter under the heavens*
>
> Ecclesiastes 3:1 (SLB)

Most men's ministries don't die from one bad decision. They wear out from a hundred small ones made in a hurry. Someone says, "We should do a breakfast," and three weeks later there is a breakfast. Someone else says, "What about a retreat?" and suddenly the core team is booking a camp in a month when half the men coach Little League. Nobody planned to be scattered. It just happened one good idea at a time.

In the last chapter you built a Plan on a Page. You wrote down why your ministry exists, which men you are trying to reach, and the three or four goals you want to see this year. You also started your Name List. That plan answers the question "What are we trying to do?" This chapter answers the next question, the one every busy man in your church will ask before he says yes to anything: "When?"

The answer is a simple tool I call the Year at a Glance. It is one sheet that shows the whole year of your men's ministry, month by month, so everyone can see the shape of it. It isn't complicated. But I am convinced it is one of the most freeing things a point leader can hand his core team and his pastor.

Why a Year Needs a Shape

God made a world with rhythm in it. Days and nights. Work and rest. Planting and harvest. He didn't build creation as one long, flat stretch of the same thing. After the flood, He gave Noah a promise that still holds every time you look at a calendar.

> *All the days of the earth yet **to come**, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.* (Genesis 8:22)

Men live inside those seasons whether they think about it or not. Fall feels like a fresh start because school starts and work picks back up after summer. January brings resolutions and long, gray evenings. Spring pulls men outdoors. Summer scatters everyone to ballfields, lake trips, and family reunions. A ministry that ignores those seasons will spend the year swimming upstream. A ministry that works with them will find men more ready to say yes.

There is another reason a year needs a shape. Men trust what they can see coming. If a man knows the fall kickoff is the second Saturday of September, he can put it on his calendar in July and tell his wife and his boss. If he hears about it from the pulpit four days before, he already has plans. Most men aren't saying no to Jesus when they skip a men's event. They are saying no to short notice.

We settled in the last chapter that prayer and planning aren't enemies. A calendar is just a plan with dates on it.

A good craftsman dry fits a piece before the glue comes out. He clamps the parts together without glue, looks for gaps, and fixes what doesn't fit while it is still easy. A ministry calendar needs the same kind of

dry fit before it goes public. Plan early, pray over it, let it sit, then fix what doesn't fit. You will build something that holds its shape.

I remember helping at a church event as one of the volunteers, not one of the planners. I was there to set up, move equipment, and do whatever needed doing. When someone had thought ahead, told us what was needed, and lined up the right people, things ran smoothly. When plans changed at the last minute, nobody knew who was doing what, and no one told us, good people got frustrated fast.

I had spent my career on the planning side. This time I was one of the people depending on the plan, and it looked different from there. Volunteers have families, jobs, and plenty of other demands on their time. Most men want to help, but they need to know what is expected and have enough notice to arrange their lives around it. Planning ahead and communicating clearly is one of the best ways to thank the men who serve. Good planning doesn't take the Spirit out of ministry. It clears away the distractions so men can serve with a glad heart instead of a frustrated one.

The Year at a Glance

Here is the basic rhythm I recommend. Your church may shift it by a month or two, and that is fine. This is a full year for a ministry that has been running a while. In your first year, keep the groups, the kickoff, one outreach event, and one service day. Add the rest only when you have men to carry it. What matters is that the year has a few clear seasons, each with its own purpose, and that every season points men toward a next step on the Workshop Path.

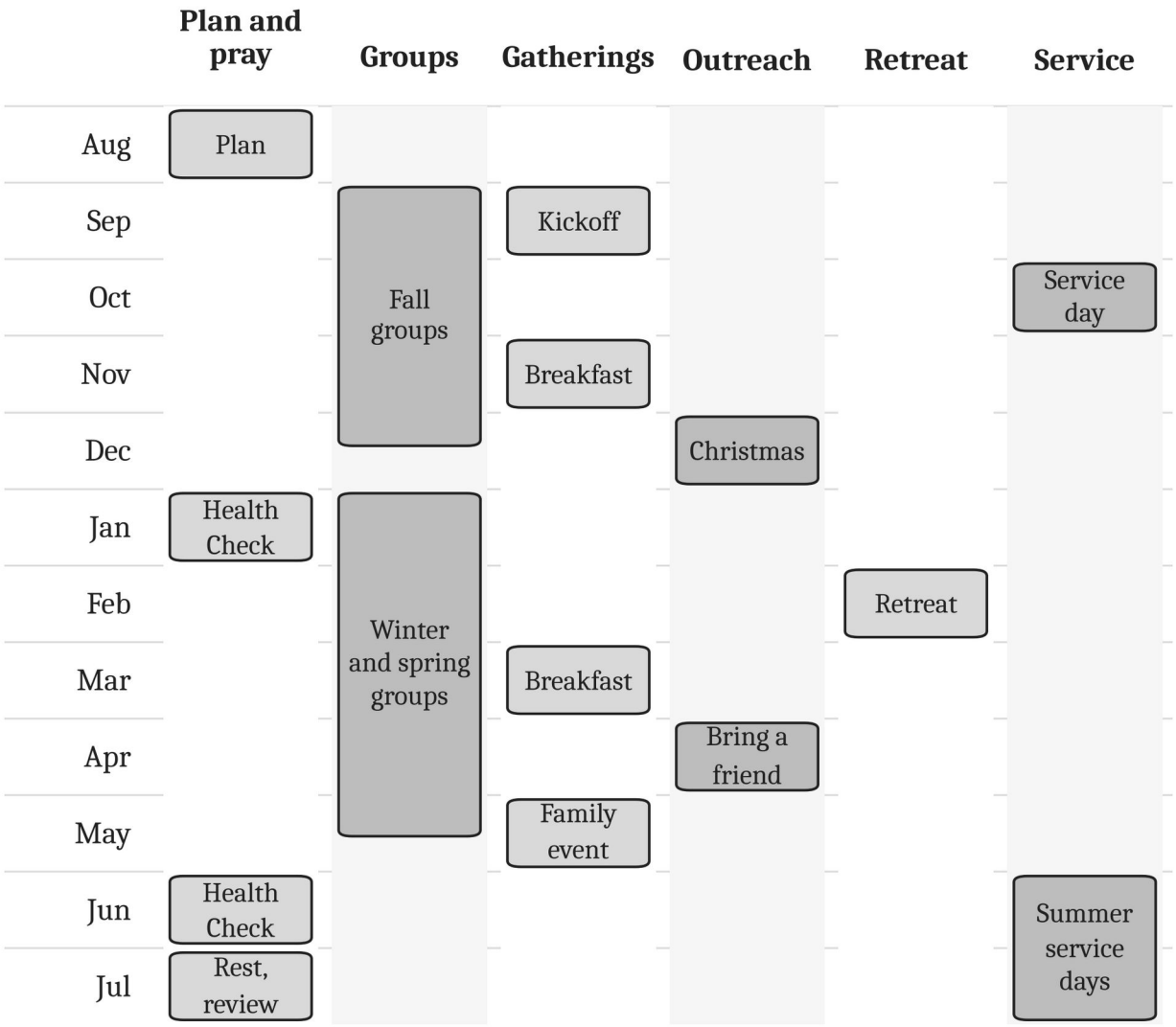


Figure 4. A Sample Year at a Glance

Think of the year as a few overlapping lanes. There is the planning lane, where the core team plans, prays, and checks how things are going. There is the groups lane, which runs most of the year and is the steady heartbeat of the ministry. There are a handful of gatherings where all the men come together. There are a couple of outreach events built for bringing a friend. There is one retreat. And there are service days, when men work side by side for someone else's good.

The figure shows the lanes. The table below walks through the same year one month at a time, with the station of the Workshop Path each month leans toward most.

Month	What happens	Leans toward
August	Core team planning day; finalize the Year at a Glance; recruit group leaders; book the retreat site; group leader training night	All stations (planning)
September	Fall kickoff gathering; fall groups begin	Open the Door, Know His Name
October	Groups meet; first service day	Build Him Up, Send Him Out
November	Groups meet; men's breakfast	Know His Name
December	Christmas outreach; groups pause mid-month; winter leader training	Open the Door
January	Health Check; winter study and groups begin	Ground Him in Christ
February	Winter study continues; men's retreat	Build Him Up
March	Groups meet; men's breakfast	Know His Name
April	Spring outreach event for bringing a friend	Open the Door
May	Family event; groups wrap up the season	Send Him Out
June	Health Check; summer service days begin; lighter schedule	Send Him Out
July	Summer service days; rest and review; light schedule	Rest

Notice a few things about this year. It doesn't have an event every week. It has groups that do the steady work and a modest number of big moments that give the groups something to invite men into. It has two Health Checks, one in January and one in June, so the core team stops twice a year and asks honest questions. (Chapter 16 walks through the Health Check in detail.) And it has light months on purpose.

Notice too that the Next Step rule runs through the whole calendar. Every gathering on that table should hand a man one clear next thing to do. The September kickoff points men into fall groups. The April outreach event points a guest toward coffee with the man who invited him. The family event in May points men toward the summer service days. If you look at your calendar and can't say what the next step is from a given event, that event needs rethinking. Chapter 14 covers this in more depth.

Fall: Launching the Year

For most churches, the ministry year really begins in the fall. Families come home from summer. Schedules settle into a routine. Men are often more willing to try something new in September than at any other time of year.

That is why August belongs to the core team. Before the fall kickoff, get your point leader and core team together for a planning day. Pray first, and not just a quick opening prayer. Spend real time asking God for the men on your Name List by name. Then take out last year's Year at a Glance, your Plan on a Page, and your notes from the June Health Check. Set the dates for the whole year. Confirm your group leaders. Decide who owns each event.

The September kickoff is one of the most important gatherings of the year. It should be easy for a man in the back row to walk into, and it should make the next step obvious. A good kickoff has food, a short and clear word from Scripture, and a simple way to join a group. Put sign-up sheets or cards on the tables. Better yet, have each group leader stand up, say what his group is studying, when and where it meets,

and then sit at a table where men can talk to him afterward. A man is far more likely to join a group led by a man whose face he has seen and whose handshake he has felt.

Fall groups run from September into the middle of December. Most groups keep the same men from season to season. The September and January starts are on-ramps, a clear time for new men to join and for a group to pick its next study, not a reshuffle. A group that wants to keep meeting through the summer can. In October, plan your first service day. Service early in the year does something special. It gets men working side by side before they know each other well, and as we talked about in earlier chapters, many men open up more easily with a shovel in their hands than across a table.

November brings a men's breakfast. Keep it simple: good food, a short testimony from one of your own men, a brief word, and a next step. December brings a Christmas outreach, which is often the easiest time of year to invite a man who would never come to anything else. A Christmas breakfast, a family service project, or a dinner with a short, warm gospel message can be a door for the Man Outside. Then pause the groups for the holidays. Men need to be home.

Winter and Spring: Going Deeper, Then Opening the Door

January is a gift to men's ministry. The holidays are over. The days are short. Many men are taking stock of their lives, even if they would never use that phrase. This is a good season to call men to go deeper.

Start the winter with a Health Check. Before you launch anything new, the core team should sit down and ask how the fall went. Which men on the Name List took a step? Which men disappeared? Which groups are strong, and which are struggling? You will use what you learn to adjust the rest of the year.

Then launch the winter study. This is a season for Ground Him in Christ and Build Him Up. It might be eight to ten weeks in one book of the Bible, studied in every group at the same time, or a focused study on a topic men need, such as prayer, how to read Scripture, or what it means to be a husband and father who serves like Christ. Using the same study across all groups for this season has two benefits. It gives the whole ministry a shared language, and it makes it easy for a new man to join any group without feeling behind.

February is a good month for the men's retreat. A retreat in the middle of winter does something that a summer retreat often can't. It catches men when they are tired of being cooped up and hungry for something real. It also sits in the middle of the winter study, so the retreat can build on what men are already learning in their groups. More on retreats in Chapter 14.

By March, the weather is turning and men's energy is rising. Hold another breakfast, and use it to get men into a group, with the group leaders right there at the door. Mention the April outreach event too, so men can start thinking about whom to bring.

The spring outreach event is the second big "bring a friend" moment of the year. Your groups have been meeting since fall. Men have been praying for names. Now give them something easy to invite those names to. It might be a cookout with a short talk from a man whose life was changed by Jesus, a sporting event, a car show, a skeet shoot, or a trade day where men teach each other skills. The point isn't the activity. The point is that a Growing Man can look at a coworker or a neighbor and say, "You'd like this.

Come with me." Chapter 5 talks about how to invite a man well, and Chapter 14 talks about how to plan an event that actually leads somewhere.

May is a good month for a family event. A family picnic, a father-and-child outing, or a service project where men bring their kids lets the whole household see that men's ministry isn't a club that takes Dad away. It strengthens homes. It also lets wives and children see their husbands and fathers serving and laughing with other godly men, and that is no small thing.

By the end of May, groups usually wrap up their season. Don't just let them fade. Close the season on purpose. Ask each group to spend its last meeting looking back at what God did and praying for each other's summer. Then point every man to a summer next step, usually a service day.

Summer: Service and Lighter Months

Summer isn't a season to cram with programs. Families travel. Kids are home. Many men work longer hours outside in the heat. If you try to run the same schedule in July that you run in February, you will wear out your leaders and you will feel discouraged by empty chairs.

So plan a lighter summer on purpose. Keep a few groups going if men want them, especially early morning groups that meet before work. But make service days the main thing. A Saturday morning might mean repairing the fence at a school ballfield, building a wheelchair ramp, cleaning up classrooms before the school year begins, or clearing brush at a church camp. These days are short, practical, and easy to invite a friend to. They are also a picture of Send Him Out, men taking what they have received and giving it away.

June is also the second Health Check. The core team looks back at the whole year. What went well? What should we stop doing? Which men are ready to lead next year? Then July is for rest and review. The point leader and core team should take real time off. In late July or early August, they come back together to plan the next year, and the circle begins again.

I want to say something about rest, because men in ministry are often bad at it. Jesus Himself built rest into the rhythm of His disciples' work. After He sent the Twelve out and they came back full of reports about everything they had done, He didn't hand them a new assignment. He took them aside.

> *And He said to them, "Come, you yourselves, privately into a deserted place and rest a little."*
> (Mark 6:31)

If the Son of God thought His men needed rest after a season of hard ministry, so do yours.

Working With the Church Calendar

A men's ministry isn't a separate organization that happens to meet in the church building. It serves under the pastor and elders, and it is part of the whole life of the church. That means your Year at a Glance must fit inside the church's calendar, not compete with it.

Before you set a single date, sit down with your pastor or the church staff member who manages the calendar. Get the big church dates first: Easter, Christmas, vacation Bible school, the women's retreat, the

youth mission trip, special services, missions emphasis, building projects. Put those on your sheet before anything else. Then build around them.

A few simple rules help here. Don't schedule the men's retreat on the same weekend as the youth retreat, because many of your men are dads and some are youth volunteers. Don't plan a big men's event the week before Easter, when the pastor and staff are stretched thin. Look for places where the men's ministry can serve the church calendar instead of adding to it. If the church has a fall festival, the men can run the grills and the parking. If there is a building cleanup, the men can own it. That kind of service builds trust with the pastor and with the rest of the church.

Talk with the women's ministry leader too. Men's and women's ministries aren't rivals. They are both trying to build up the same families and the same church. Coordinating calendars avoids silly conflicts, like both retreats on the same weekend, which leaves kids with no one at home. It also opens the door for things you can do together, such as a marriage night or a family service day.

One of my favorite memories of serving at church is Easter Sunday. Our day started before dawn with the sunrise service, and right after it we turned the building around for an Easter brunch that served more than 500 people: tables, chairs, serving lines, and room for hundreds of families and guests. I wasn't one of the leaders. I was one of the many volunteers who rolled up their sleeves.

What stuck with me was how many groups had to work together: the worship team, the kitchen crew, the setup crew, the greeters. With that many moving parts and that little time, it could easily have turned into chaos and turf battles over rooms and volunteers. It didn't, because everybody knew the schedule, said what they needed, and worked toward the same goal. Nobody cared who got the credit. That is what a church calendar is for. It isn't just a list of dates. It helps ministries work together instead of competing. Some of the best pictures of Christian unity I have seen weren't in a sermon. They were ordinary people showing up before sunrise and working side by side.

Once your calendar is set, give it to the pastor before you announce it to the men. Ask for his input and his blessing. A pastor who has seen the whole year in advance is far more likely to mention the kickoff from the pulpit, encourage men to join groups, and show up at the retreat. A pastor who learns about the men's events from the church bulletin isn't likely to feel like a partner.

Guarding Men From Burnout

Here is a hard truth: some of the most faithful men in your church are also the most tired. The same handful of men run the sound booth, teach Sunday school, coach the church softball team, serve as deacons, and now you want them on the men's ministry core team too. If you aren't careful, your men's ministry will become one more weight on the men who are already carrying the most.

A good Year at a Glance protects men from that. Here are a few principles to keep in mind as you build it.

- Fewer things, done well. It is better to have a handful of strong gatherings a year that men look forward to than twelve tired ones that men attend out of guilt. Every event on the calendar should earn its place.
- Groups are the main thing. If you only have energy for one thing, put it into groups. Big events are helpful. Groups are where men actually grow.

- Build in empty space. Leave some months intentionally light. December and July are the obvious choices. A blank space on the calendar isn't a failure. It is a gift.
- Spread the load. Every event on the calendar should have one owner, and no one man should own more than one or two big things a year. That is how Jethro counseled Moses, and it still works.
- Watch for signs of weariness. When a faithful man starts missing meetings, gets short with people, or stops returning calls, don't just find a replacement. Check on him. He may need rest, not a new assignment.

God built Sabbath rest into the law for His people, and He made a point of saying it applies even in the busiest seasons. That is a word for every point leader who feels like there is no time to stop.

> *Six days you shall work, and on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.* (Exodus 34:21)

Plowing time and harvest were the busiest seasons of an ancient farmer's year. If there was ever a time to skip a day of rest, it was then. God said no. Rest anyway. Trust Me with the harvest.

There is one more thing to say about burnout. Sometimes the problem isn't the number of events. It is that men are being asked to do things they don't care about and were never asked about. When you plan the year, ask your men what they want and need. Ask your group leaders what their men are struggling with. Ask the men on the edges what would make it easier for them to come. A calendar built with men rather than for them will feel lighter, even if it has the same number of dates on it.

If Your Church Is Small

If your church has a dozen men, you don't need six areas, a retreat, and two outreach events. You need a smaller core team: one point leader and two or three men who pray. One man keeps the Name List and makes the calls. One leads a group. Together you plan two gatherings a year, maybe a fall kickoff and a spring service day, and you skip everything else. Keep the Health Check, keep the Name List, keep the Next Step rule. A small church can do the most important part of this book better than a big one, because every man can actually be known.

Planning the Year One Step at a Time

If you have never built a Year at a Glance, here is a simple way to do it. Set aside one evening or a Saturday morning with your core team.

1. Pray together for the men on your Name List and for wisdom about the year ahead. Don't rush this part.
2. Put the church's big dates on a blank twelve-month sheet first. Ask the pastor or church office for them ahead of time.
3. Mark the light months. Decide now which months will be quiet so they stay that way.
4. Set group seasons: when fall groups start and stop, when winter groups start and stop, and what the winter study will be.
5. Add the big gatherings: kickoff, breakfasts, the retreat, the outreach events, and the family event. Write the next step for each one beside it.
6. Add service days. Talk with the pastor about needs in the church and community that men could meet.

7. Put the two Health Checks on the calendar, usually in January and June.
8. Put a group leader training night before each group season, and cover the safety rules from Chapter 9 every time. If you plan a retreat, book the site now.
9. Assign one owner to each item. Check that no one man owns too much.
10. Take the draft to the pastor for input and blessing. Then publish it.

That is it. When you are done, you should have one page that any man in your church can look at and understand. Put it on the church website. Hand it out at the kickoff. Post it on the bulletin board by the coffee pot. The Plan on a Page in Appendix A1 has a line for these key dates.

Remember that the plan serves the men, not the other way around. Things will change. A hurricane will cancel a service day. The retreat center will double-book you. A man in your church will die suddenly and the whole ministry will rally around his family instead of holding a breakfast. When that happens, adjust and keep going. Hold the plan loosely, the way we talked about in the last chapter (Proverbs 16:9), and keep going.

There is a deeper reason for all this planning. The writer of Hebrews, right after telling believers to think hard about how to stir each other up, told them not to give up meeting together.

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Notice the word "consider." That is a planning word. It means to think carefully, to give real attention to how we can help each other grow. A Year at a Glance is simply one way of considering how to stir up the men in your church to love and good works. It is the difference between hoping men will grow and making room for them to grow.

A rhythm also helps men build habits. When a man knows that groups start every September and January, that a breakfast happens every November and March, and that a retreat comes every February, he begins to plan his life around those things. Over time, the rhythm of the ministry becomes part of the rhythm of his life. That isn't legalism. It is the same thing that happens when a family eats dinner together every night or a man goes to the gym every morning. The rhythm carries him on the days his own motivation doesn't.

Finally, a good rhythm reminds us that our time is short. Every year that goes by is a year when men in your church either grew closer to Jesus or drifted further away. Moses prayed about this.

> *So teach **us** to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom.* (Psalm 90:12)

Counting our days means remembering that we only get so many of them. Your men only have so many Septembers left, so many winters, so many chances to bring a friend to something that might change his life. A Year at a Glance is one way of counting those days together and asking God to make them count.

Talk It Over

1. Look at your church's calendar for the past year. Did the men's ministry have a clear rhythm, or did events happen one at a time as people thought of them?
2. Which season of the year (fall, winter, spring, or summer) do you think the men in your church are most open to something new? Why?
3. What church-wide dates and other ministry events would your men's ministry need to work around when planning the year?
4. Where do you see signs of burnout among the faithful men in your church? What could the men's ministry stop doing to help?
5. Read Mark 6:31 and Exodus 34:21. How do you personally practice rest, and how could your core team build rest into its year?
6. For each big event you hold (or plan to hold), what would the one clear next step be?

Try This Week

Get a blank twelve-month calendar and fill in just three things: the church's big dates, the two months you will keep light, and the start date for your fall groups. Then take that rough sheet to your pastor this week, ask what you missed, and ask him to pray with you about the year.

Chapter 14: Events That Lead Somewhere

> *And Levi made a great banquet for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining with them.*
>
> Luke 5:29 (SLB)

Picture a men's breakfast on a Saturday in March. Sixty men show up. The eggs are hot, the coffee is strong, and the speaker is funny and honest. Men laugh. A few wipe their eyes. Everyone agrees it was a great morning. Then they push in their chairs, shake a few hands, and drive home. On Monday, nothing has changed. Nobody joined a group. Nobody called the visitor who sat alone at table six. By April, the breakfast is a pleasant memory and nothing more.

I have nothing against a good breakfast. I am in favor of eggs. But an event that leads nowhere is like a door that opens onto a wall. Men walk through, look around, and walk back out the way they came.

This chapter is about events that lead somewhere. In the last chapter we laid out the Year at a Glance, with its kickoff, breakfasts, retreat, outreach events, family event, and service days. Now we will talk about how to plan each of those so that men don't just attend, but take a step.

Why Events Still Matter

Some people in church work have soured on events. They have seen too many big gatherings that cost a lot, wore out the volunteers, and changed little. They say, "Just do groups. That's where men grow." They are half right. Groups are where most of the steady growth happens, and Chapter 15 is about groups. But events still matter, and Jesus Himself went to plenty of them.

Think about Levi, the tax collector. When Jesus called him, the first thing Levi did was throw a party.

As the verse at the top of this chapter says, a great crowd of tax collectors and others were reclining at the table with them. Levi didn't know much theology yet. But he knew a lot of men who needed to meet Jesus, and he knew how to get them in one room. That dinner was an event, and it led somewhere. It put men who were far from God at a table with the Son of God.

Events do a few things that groups can't easily do. They give the Man Outside and the Man in the Back Row a low-risk way to show up. A man who would never sit in a circle of six and talk about his marriage might come to a cookout where he can stand by the grill with a plate in his hand. Events also let men see the size of the ministry. A man in a group of five may not realize there are fifty other men in his church trying to follow Jesus. Seeing them all in one room encourages him. And events give your Growing Men something easy to invite a friend to, which is often the hardest part of reaching men.

So keep your events. Just make sure every one of them leads somewhere.

The Next Step Rule

The heart of this chapter is the Next Step rule from Chapter 4: every event and every conversation offers one clear next step.

Not five next steps. Not a table full of brochures for every ministry in the church. One clear step that fits the men who are in the room. When a man leaves, he should know exactly what he could do next, and it should be easy to do.

Philip understood this when he gave Nathanael one simple next step: come and see (John 1:46).

How do you choose the right next step? Start by asking where most of the men at this event stand. Then ask which station of the Workshop Path comes next for them. Here are some examples.

Event	Most men there	One clear next step
Fall kickoff	Men in the Back Row and Growing Men	Join a fall group (sign up at the table)
Christmas or spring outreach	The Man Outside, brought by a friend	Coffee with the man who invited him
Men's breakfast	A mix	Join a group (the leaders are at the door)
Retreat	Growing Men and some men from the Back Row	Start meeting with one other man
Service day	A mix, often newer men	Come serve again next month, with the same crew
Family event	Dads, kids, and wives	A summer service day as a family

Once you know the next step, build the whole event toward it. Mention it at the start. Mention it at the end. Have a person, not a sign, standing ready to help men take it. If the step is joining a group, have group leaders sitting at tables. If the step is coffee with another man, have core team members ready to exchange phone numbers with first-timers before they leave.

The best next steps are personal. A sign-up card on a table is fine. A man looking another man in the eye and saying, "I'd love to have you in my group on Tuesday mornings. Can I text you the details?" is much better. Men respond to men.

Kinds of Events

Most men's ministries will use five or six kinds of events over a year. Each one has its own purpose and its own way of leading somewhere.

Breakfasts. The men's breakfast is the old faithful of men's ministry, and for good reason. It is early enough that it doesn't wreck a Saturday, and food makes almost anything better. Keep breakfasts simple and on time. Start with food and conversation, then a short testimony from one of your own men, then a brief, clear word from Scripture. Finish by the time you said you would. A man who knows the breakfast always ends at 9:00 is much more likely to come back than a man who got home at 10:30 and missed his son's game.

Outreach events. These are built for the Man Outside. The activity matters less than whether a Christian man would feel comfortable inviting his neighbor to it. Think about what the men in your area already enjoy. A wild game dinner. A cookout and a ball game on a big screen. A car show. A trade night where a mechanic, a carpenter, and a financial planner each teach a short skill. Keep the gospel part honest and short. A man who hears a clear, five-minute story of how Jesus changed another man's life will remember it. A man who feels trapped in a forty-minute sermon he didn't expect won't come back. Chapter 5 talked about this: no bait-and-switch. Tell men up front that there will be a short talk about faith. They can handle it.

Retreats. A retreat takes men out of their normal lives for a night or two. That alone does something. Away from the phone, the lawn, and the to-do list, men often open up in ways they never do at home. A good retreat has plenty of free time, good food, a few strong sessions from Scripture, and time for small groups of men to talk honestly. Don't pack every minute. Some of the best conversations happen on a walk or around a fire late at night. And plan the follow-up before you leave for the retreat, because men come home with a fire that fades fast.

Service days. A Saturday morning painting the halls of a veterans' home or cleaning a local school is one of the best events a men's ministry can hold. It is practical. It helps people. And it puts men side by side with a common task, which is where many men are most comfortable. Service days are also some of the easiest events to invite a non-Christian friend to. A man who would never come to a Bible study will often come help build a wheelchair ramp. Before any event with firearms, water, ladders or roofs, power tools, or an overnight stay, check with the church office about insurance and releases. Put a man who knows the work in charge of safety, keep untrained men off roofs, and keep kids away from the tools.

Father-and-child events, and family events. A fishing trip, a campout, a woodworking day where dads and kids build something together, or a family picnic. These events strengthen homes, which is one of the main reasons a men's ministry exists. But be thoughtful. Some men in your church have no children. Some have lost children. Some boys and girls in your church have no father at home. Make these events open to grandfathers, uncles, mentors, and stepdads, and quietly make sure that a child without a dad has a godly man looking out for them for the day. That's ministry too. Just do it inside your church's child safety policy. Any man who will be with children should be screened the way your church screens children's workers, no man should be alone with a child who isn't his own, and a parent or guardian should know who is with their child and say yes ahead of time.

Some of my best memories of serving come from volunteering at a church camp. I wasn't a pastor or a leader there. I was a volunteer helping wherever I was needed. What struck me was how different it felt from a Sunday service. Away from everyday distractions, the kids relaxed. Some of the quiet ones, the kids who never said a word in a Bible lesson, opened right up while we worked on a task together, ate a meal, or just talked during a break. There was no classroom pressure and no right answer to give. They were spending time with people who cared about them.

It taught me that people often open their hearts through relationships long before they open their minds to teaching. The scheduled activities mattered, but the real impact happened in between them. Men are

no different. A retreat, a service day, or a fishing trip brings men together for a day or a weekend. The event opens the door. The friendships that come out of it give a man a reason to keep walking through it.

Planning an Event Without Losing Your Mind

Most event problems aren't spiritual problems. They are planning problems. The coffee ran out. The speaker went long. Nobody had name tags. Nobody knew who was supposed to lock the building. These are small things, but they add up, and they distract from what God wants to do.

Jesus once pointed out that no sensible builder starts a tower without first sitting down to count the cost (Luke 14:28). Sit down first. Count the cost in money, in people, and in time. Then build.

Here is a simple planning sequence. You will find a fuller checklist in Appendix A5.

1. Eight to twelve weeks out: Pray about the event and decide its purpose. Who is it for? Where do most of those men stand? What is the one clear next step?
2. Choose one owner. One man is responsible for the event. He can recruit help, but he owns it.
3. Set the date, the place, and the budget. Check the church calendar and get the pastor's blessing.
4. Six to eight weeks out: Line up the speaker or testimony and give him a time limit in writing. If he is from outside your church, get the pastor's okay first. Arrange food, setup, and cleanup.
5. Four weeks out: Start promoting. Ask group leaders to talk it up in their groups and to pray for names of men to invite.
6. Two weeks out: Recruit greeters, the people who will help men take the next step, and the people who will collect contact information.
7. The week of: Confirm every volunteer by phone or text. Walk through the event from the parking lot to the closing prayer.
8. The day of: Arrive early. Pray together before the doors open. Start and end on time.
9. Within a week: Follow up on every first-timer and debrief with the core team.

That last step is the one most ministries skip, and it is the most important one on the list. We will come back to it in a moment.

Paul told the Corinthian church something that applies well to events. They were having trouble with chaotic worship gatherings, and he wanted them to remember that God isn't a God of confusion.

> *Let all things be done properly and in order.* (1 Corinthians 14:40)

A well-run event clears the way for men to hear, connect, and respond. It works like a good jig in the shop: set it up carefully once, and every piece that runs through it comes out right.

Welcoming First-Timers

Think about what it feels like for a man to walk into a church building for a men's event when he doesn't know anyone. He parks his truck and sits in it for a minute. He wonders if he is dressed right. He walks in and sees a room full of men who all seem to know each other, laughing and shaking hands. He gets a cup

of coffee and stands by the wall, checking his phone. If nobody talks to him in the first five minutes, there is a good chance he will slip out before the program starts, and he won't come back.

That man is why you need greeters. Not just a guy at the door saying "Welcome," but men whose job is to notice the man standing alone and go talk to him. Train them to do a few simple things. Learn his name and use it. Introduce him to two or three other men. Sit with him. Help him find the food and the restroom. And at the end, make sure he knows the next step and that someone will follow up with him.

Scripture calls us to this kind of welcome again and again.

> ***be*** *hospitable to one another without grumbling* (1 Peter 4:9)

Hospitality in the Bible isn't about fancy tablecloths. It is about making a stranger feel at home. For a men's ministry, it often looks like a man with a coffee pot in one hand and the other hand out, saying, "I don't think we've met. I'm Carl."

Get contact information from first-timers, but do it in a way that doesn't feel like a sales pitch. A simple card on each table that asks for a name, a phone number, and how he heard about the event works fine. Better yet, have the man who greeted him ask, "Mind if I text you sometime?" and put the number straight into his phone.

And think about who you are inviting. Jesus had some strong words for people who only invite those who can repay them.

> *But when you make a reception, call* ***the*** *poor,* ***the*** *crippled,* ***the*** *lame,* ***the*** *blind* (Luke 14:13)

Some of the men who most need what your ministry offers are the men nobody else invites. The man who just got out of prison. The man who lost his job and is embarrassed to show his face. The man in a wheelchair who hasn't been to a men's event in years because the last one was at a camp with no ramp. Make room for them. Plan your events so that these men can come and feel welcome.

Follow-Up Within a Week

Here is where most events fail. They do everything right on the day and then nothing afterward. The visitor who filled out a card never hears from anyone. The man who came forward at the retreat goes home and slides back into his old patterns because nobody called.

Make this a firm rule: every first-timer gets a personal contact within a week. Not a mass email. A phone call, a text from a real person, or better yet, an invitation to coffee or lunch. Assign this before the event, not after. Every core team member or group leader should know which first-timers he is responsible for following up with. Then add those men to the Name List, which we covered in Chapters 6 and 12, with a name beside each one.

What should the follow-up say? Keep it simple. Thank him for coming. Ask what he thought. Ask if he has any questions. Then offer the next step again, personally. "We have a group that meets Wednesday mornings at the diner on Main Street. I'd love for you to come with me." There is a short guide for these calls in Appendix A4.

Then debrief as a core team. Within a week, sit down for thirty minutes and ask a few questions. Who came? Who came for the first time? Did men take the next step? What should we do differently next time? Write the answers down and keep them with your event notes. Next year, when you plan the same event, you will be glad you did.

The early church lived this kind of follow-up every day. They didn't just gather for big meetings. They kept going from house to house.

> *And every day, steadfastly continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were partaking of food with gladness and simplicity of heart* (Acts 2:46)

The big gathering in the temple and the small meals in homes went together. One fed the other. That is what you want: events that send men into smaller, personal relationships where real growth happens.

Over the years I have attended and served at several churches, and I have learned there is a big difference between making a man feel welcome when he walks in and making him feel he matters after he leaves. I have been to plenty of church gatherings where people were friendly, shook my hand, and thanked me for coming, and then that was the end of it. I don't think anyone meant to overlook me. But it's easy for a man to enjoy an event and still walk away feeling like one more face in the crowd.

The pastor who helped me in my hardest season didn't treat me like a one-time visit. He kept investing, kept listening, and stayed in my life. That is follow-up, and it doesn't have to be complicated. A phone call, a text, or "Want to grab coffee sometime?" can mean more than the event itself. The men who shaped me most weren't the ones with the best message or the best-run event. They were the ones who remembered me and stayed connected. Don't just count how many men showed up. Count how many friendships started after everyone went home.

Money: Costs, Scholarships, and Clean Books

Events cost money, and money in ministry needs to be handled with care. Good ministries get hurt by sloppy money handling more often than you might think. Usually it isn't theft. It is confusion, missing receipts, and the appearance that someone wasn't being careful.

Paul was careful about this. When he collected an offering from the churches for the poor believers in Jerusalem, he made sure several trusted men were involved in handling it, and he explained why.

> *avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this bounty which is being ministered by us, providing good **things** not only before **the** Lord but also before men.* (2 Corinthians 8:20-21)

Notice that Paul cared about doing what is good "not only before the Lord but also before men." It isn't enough to be honest. A ministry should also be clearly, visibly above reproach. Here are some simple rules that will protect your ministry and the men who serve in it.

- Work through the church's finance process. Your budget should be approved by the pastor or the church's leaders, and money should flow through the church's books, not a leader's personal account.
- Two men count cash, always. Never let one man handle event money alone. Two men count it, both sign the count sheet, and it goes to the church office the same day or the next business day.

- Keep every receipt. Turn them in promptly with a short note about what they were for.
- Set prices honestly. Charge what the event really costs, and tell men up front.

Then there is the question of cost for the men. A retreat that costs $250 is nothing to some men and impossible for others. Don't let money be the reason a man can't come. Set aside scholarship money in your budget, and make it easy to ask for. Put a line on the registration form that says, "If cost is a barrier, check here and we will take care of it. No questions asked." Then honor that promise and keep it private. Some of your more blessed men will be glad to give to the scholarship fund. Give them the chance. Gifts go to the fund, not to a named man. The point leader or pastor handles the requests quietly, and every man who checks the box gets help.

For smaller events, think about keeping them free or nearly free. A breakfast that is paid for by the ministry budget or by a few men who give for that purpose is much easier to invite a friend to than one that costs $15 at the door. When a man says to his neighbor, "Come with me Saturday, breakfast is on us," the neighbor hears generosity. That says something about Jesus before anyone opens a Bible.

Scripture also reminds us that generosity and hospitality go together.

> *sharing in the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.* (Romans 12:13)

A well-run event, with clean books and an open door for men who can't pay, shows both.

Talk It Over

1. Think about the last men's event you attended. What was the next step offered, if any? Did you take it?
2. Read John 1:46. Why do you think "Come and see" was such a powerful invitation for Nathanael? What would "Come and see" look like in your church?
3. Which kind of event (breakfast, outreach, retreat, service day, or family event) do you think would most help the men in your church right now? Why?
4. Picture a man walking into your next men's event alone. What would he experience in the first five minutes? What would you want him to experience?
5. Who in your church or community might be left out of your events because of cost, physical access, family situation, or reputation? How could you make room for them?
6. What keeps follow-up from happening after events? What would it take to make it happen within a week every time?

Try This Week

Pick the next men's event on your calendar and write down, in one sentence, the one clear next step it will offer. Then ask two core team members to be ready on the day to help first-timers take that step, and decide now who will call each first-timer within a week.

Chapter 15: Groups That Last

> *And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.*
>
> Acts 2:42 (SLB)

If events are the front door of a men's ministry, groups are the living room. Events are where men come in. Groups are where they stay, where they are known, and where they grow. A man can go to breakfasts for ten years and never have another man ask him a real question about his soul. Put that same man in a group of five or six men who meet every week, and within a few months they will know his kids' names, his struggles at work, and the sin he has been fighting since he was fifteen.

That is why I believe groups are the heart of a men's ministry. If you only have the energy to do one thing well, do groups. The Year at a Glance in Chapter 13 is built around them. The events in Chapter 14 point men toward them. Most of what this book has said about the Workshop Path, especially Know His Name, Ground Him in Christ, and Build Him Up, happens best in a small group of men who meet week after week.

This chapter is about how to start groups, lead them, and keep them healthy over the long haul.

Going through a 12-step program and leading Bible study groups taught me what makes a group last. When men drop the Sunday morning mask and tell the truth about their lives, trust builds fast. Groups survive when honesty is expected and grace is practiced.

Why Groups Are the Heart of It

Look at the early church in the verse at the top of this chapter. They were steadfastly continuing in four things: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. The words "steadfastly continuing" matter. This wasn't a weekend conference. It was a way of life. Week after week, day after day, believers gathered to learn God's Word, share their lives, eat together, and pray.

A small group of men is one of the best places for that kind of life to take root. In a big room, a man can hide. In a group of six, he can't. Not because anyone is forcing him to talk, but because over time, men who meet together week after week start to trust each other. And when trust grows, honesty follows.

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes saw the value of this long ago.

> *The two **are** better than the one, in that they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, the one will raise up his companion; and woe to him, the one who falls and there is no second to raise him up.* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Every man will fall at some point. He will lose a job, face a hard diagnosis, give in to temptation, or watch his marriage strain under pressure. The question isn't whether he will fall. It is whether anyone will be there to help him up. A man in a group has brothers who will notice when he goes quiet, call him when he misses a week, and sit with him when life comes apart.

Groups also sharpen men. They aren't just support groups where everyone nods along. Men in a healthy group push each other toward Christ. Proverbs 27:17 says iron grows sharp by iron.

Sharpening involves friction. Sometimes a brother will ask a question you would rather not answer. Sometimes he will point out something in your life you have been avoiding. That isn't a problem with the group. That is the group working.

Kinds of Groups

There is no single right kind of men's group. Different men need different things at different times, and a healthy ministry usually has more than one kind. Here are the most common types and what each one does well.

Type of group	Who it serves	What it looks like
Bible study group	Growing Men; Men in the Back Row ready to try	Four to ten men reading through a book of the Bible together, usually weekly
Book study group	Growing Men	A Christian book read alongside Scripture, discussed chapter by chapter
Accountability triad	Growing Men and Men Who Build Others	Three men meeting weekly for honest confession, prayer, and encouragement
New believers group	Men who just came to faith or came back	Six to eight weeks on the basics: the gospel, assurance, prayer, the Bible, church
Recovery group	The Man Starting Over	A Christ-centered group for men fighting addiction or other habits that have a grip on them, led by trained leaders. Usually best joined, not started (see below)
Early morning work group	Men with full schedules	Meets before work near a job site or office; short, focused, and on time

A few notes on each.

Bible study groups are the backbone of most men's ministries. They are simple to start and they keep the Word of God at the center. A group might spend ten weeks in the Gospel of Mark, eight weeks in James, or a full season in the book of Nehemiah.

Book study groups can be helpful, especially when men want to dig into a specific topic like prayer, marriage, or money. But choose books carefully and always pair them with Scripture. Run any book or video study past your pastor before a group starts it. A book about the Bible should never replace the Bible.

Accountability triads are small on purpose. Three men can go deeper than eight. They are best for men who are already growing and who want to be honest about their struggles with sin, their prayer lives, and their families. Chapter 8 talked about accountability that is filled with grace and not run like a police state. Triads are where that happens most naturally.

New believers groups give men who just came to faith, or who came back after a long time away, a place to learn the basics without feeling lost. Chapter 7 covered what those basics are. The eight-week plan there works for a group as well as for two men, so use it for both.

Recovery groups are for the Man Starting Over who is fighting addiction, pornography, or another habit that has a grip on him. Most men's ministries should not start their own. Connect men to a good one that already exists, in your church or nearby. If your church does start one, it needs leaders with training and experience, and they should work closely with the pastor and with professional counselors. A recovery group isn't a substitute for medical care or licensed counseling when a man needs it. Chapter 9 talked about when to bring in a pastor or professional, and that guidance applies here too.

Some of the most meaningful meetings of my life were men's meetings at Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered recovery program many churches host. Having fought alcohol myself, I knew how hard it is for a man to walk into a room and start talking about things he has spent years hiding. What made those meetings different was the material. We weren't just sitting around talking about our problems or taking advice. We were working through God's Word on denial, surrender, confession, forgiveness, and making amends, and asking how it applied to our own lives. Again and again a passage or a question would hit something deep in a man, and suddenly he was talking. Men who had barely said a word started telling the truth.

That taught me what to look for in study material. Men don't always need more information. They need a study that makes them look honestly at their own lives in the light of Scripture. It is part of why I later wrote my own Scripture-based 12-step course. It also taught me that one man's honesty gives the next man courage. A group isn't measured by how much material it covers. It's measured by whether men are growing closer to God and getting honest with each other.

Early morning work groups meet men where they are. A group that meets at 6:00 a.m. at a diner near the industrial park, or in a conference room before the office opens, may reach men who would never come to the church building on a weeknight. Keep them short and start on time. These men have places to be.

Video groups can reach men whose shifts never line up with a church night: nurses, firefighters, linemen, men on rotating schedules. Four or five men on a video call at 6:30 in the morning or 10:00 at night can open the Bible and pray together as well as men around a table. Keep the group small, use video rather than just voices, and get together in person when you can, even once a season. Follow the same safety and privacy rules as any other group, and never record the call.

Some men are gone all week: drivers, linemen, men who work out of town. Don't count them as drifting, and don't drop them from the Name List. Give each one a man who calls him on the same day every week, and a group he can join when he is home.

Choosing and Training Group Leaders

Groups rise and fall on their leaders. A good leader can make an average study come alive. A poor leader can make the best study in the world feel like a chore.

What makes a good group leader? It isn't mainly about being a gifted teacher. The best group leaders are usually not the men who talk the most. They are men who love Jesus, love other men, and show up. Look for a man who is faithful in his own walk with God, who listens more than he talks, who is reliable, and

who is humble enough to keep learning. The standards in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that we looked at in Chapter 11 are a good guide here too. Character matters more than talent.

Think about a man like Stan. He is a quiet man who runs a small plumbing outfit. He would never volunteer to teach anything. But every Sunday he is the one who notices the new guy and walks over to shake his hand. He prays for people and actually remembers to ask how things turned out. When a man in his Sunday school class lost his job, Stan was the one who showed up with groceries and a list of contractors who were hiring. Stan may not think of himself as a leader. But men already trust him, and that is most of what a group leader needs. Ask him. Give him a simple study and an experienced co-leader. You may be surprised.

Don't wait for perfect leaders. You won't find any. Look for faithful men. Paul told Timothy to entrust what he had learned to faithful men who would be able to teach others. Faithfulness comes first. The ability to teach can be developed.

Once you have leaders, train them. Training doesn't have to be fancy. Here is a simple approach.

- Hold a training session before each season starts. Cover the basics: how to lead a discussion, how to ask good questions, how to handle a man who talks too much or one who never talks, and what to do when someone shares something serious.
- Walk through the hard moments that come up in almost every group. The man who talks too much: thank him, then say, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't talked yet," and if it keeps happening, ask him privately to help you draw the quieter men out. The man who never talks: ask him easy questions first and let him pass. The man who wants to argue doctrine or politics: say, "That's worth a coffee. Let's get back to the passage," and follow up later. The man who drops something heavy at the end: don't rush past it. Let the group pray for him right then, and stay afterward.
- Give every leader a simple guide. There is a group leader checklist in Appendix A6.
- Meet with group leaders regularly during the season. Once a month is enough. Ask how their groups are going, pray for their men by name, and help them solve problems.
- Pair new leaders with experienced ones. A new leader learns far more from co-leading for a season than from any training session.

Make sure every group leader knows the safety rules. When a man shares that he is thinking about suicide, or that someone is being abused, or that a child is at risk, the leader must not promise to keep it secret. He needs to tell the pastor right away and get the man connected with professional help. If a child is being harmed or is at risk, he must also make sure a report goes to child protective services or the police that same day, as your state's law and your church's policy require. Telling the pastor may not be enough by itself (see Chapter 9). If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911. In the U.S., the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available by call or text at 988. Leaders should know these things before the first meeting, not learn them in the middle of a crisis.

I have been in a lot of church groups, Bible studies, and recovery meetings, and the leader makes all the difference in whether a man comes back. I remember one group where what struck me most about the leader wasn't his knowledge of Scripture or how well he ran the meeting. It was that he cared. He got to know me, listened when I talked, and asked about my life outside the group. With my history, opening up

didn't come easy. He never made me feel my struggles disqualified me from being there, and I never felt I had to pretend. Because of that, I kept coming back.

I have known men who could explain Scripture beautifully but couldn't connect with people. I have known others who would never call themselves teachers, yet their sincerity changed lives. When you train group leaders, teach them how to run a discussion, but also teach them how to listen, keep a confidence, notice when a man is struggling, and follow up when he starts to pull away. The leaders who shaped me most weren't the ones who knew the most. They were the ones who cared the most.

What to Study

My conviction is simple: Scripture first. Not because other books are bad, but because God's Word is what changes men. Every other resource is a helper. The Bible is the main thing.

> *Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Notice the phrase "the man of God." Paul wrote that to a young man, Timothy, who needed to be equipped to lead. Scripture does that. It teaches us what is true, shows us where we are wrong, puts us back on the right path, and trains us to live rightly. If your men are going to be equipped for every good work, they need to be in God's Word.

Here are some good places to start with men:

- The Gospel of Mark. It is short, fast-moving, and full of action. Men like it.
- The book of James. Practical and direct. It talks about trials, the tongue, money, and faith that works.
- Nehemiah. A story about a man who saw a broken wall, prayed, made a plan, and rallied a crew to rebuild it. It fits men well.
- The life of David in 1 and 2 Samuel. A man after God's own heart who also failed badly and was restored.
- Ephesians. Who we are in Christ, how we live together as the church, and how we live at home and at work.

You don't need a fancy curriculum. A simple way to study is to read a passage together and ask three questions: What does it say? What does it mean? What will I do about it? Men can learn this pattern quickly, and it works for almost any passage.

Teach men to check what they hear against Scripture. The Bereans are a good example.

> *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, who received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures every day **to see** if these things might be so.* (Acts 17:11)

The Bereans were eager and careful. They didn't just accept what Paul said because he was Paul. They checked it against God's Word. That is a good habit for every man in every group. It keeps groups grounded and protects them from drifting into one man's opinions.

The First Meeting

The first meeting of a new group sets the tone for everything that follows. Do it well.

Arrive early. Have coffee ready, and food if you can. A man who walks into a room where someone is already there to greet him by name feels welcome. A man who walks into an empty room with the lights off wonders if he got the wrong night.

Start with introductions, but keep them light. Ask each man to share his name, a bit about his family and work, and one simple question like "What's something you've built, fixed, or made that you're proud of?" Men open up more easily when they start with something concrete.

Then set expectations. Tell the men what the group is for, how long it will meet, and what will be asked of them. Talk about a few simple ground rules. What is shared in the group stays in the group, with a few exceptions: if someone is in danger, or a child or vulnerable adult is at risk, the leader will get help, and if a man confesses something that has seriously harmed someone else or affects a leadership role he holds, the leader will ask him to go to the pastor and will go with him. Show up when you can, and let someone know if you can't. Nobody has to share more than he is ready to share. Everyone gets a chance to talk.

Do a short study. Don't try to cover too much. A first meeting that ends on time with men wanting more is far better than one that drags on.

Close by praying together. Some men have never prayed out loud in front of other men. Don't force it. Let them know they can pray silently or just say "Amen." Over time, many will find their voice.

Then follow up. Text or call each man during the week. Thank him for coming. Tell him you are glad he is in the group. That one small thing can make the difference between a man coming back and a man drifting away.

Multiplying Groups

A healthy group grows. And when a group grows, it eventually gets too big to stay healthy. Somewhere around ten men, the quieter men stop talking and the group starts to feel more like a class than a brotherhood.

That is a good problem to have, but it is still a problem. The answer is to multiply: to start new groups out of existing ones.

Jesus showed the way. He didn't keep His disciples all together in one big group forever. He sent them out in pairs.

> *And He summons the twelve, and He began to send them out two **by** two, and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits.* (Mark 6:7)

Here is a simple way to multiply groups well. From the very first meeting, every group leader should be looking for an apprentice, a man who can co-lead with him and learn to lead on his own. When the group gets big enough, the apprentice and a few men start a new group. The original leader finds a new apprentice, and the cycle continues. That is 2 Timothy 2:2 in action.

Splitting a group can be painful. Men get attached to each other, and that is a good thing. So talk about multiplying from the beginning. Help men see it as sending, not losing. Celebrate when a new group

starts. Have the old group pray over the new one. Plan a reunion breakfast once or twice a year so men can stay in touch.

Another option is to keep the original group together and send out a pair of men to start something new. This is often easier on everyone and keeps the core of the original group intact.

When a Group Stalls

Every group goes through dry seasons. Attendance drops. Discussions go flat. Men seem to be going through the motions. This is normal, and it doesn't mean the group has failed. But it does mean the leader needs to pay attention.

Here are some common reasons groups stall, and what to do about them.

Sometimes the group has grown too comfortable. Men know each other well and like being together, but nobody is being stretched. Try a harder book of the Bible, a service project, or ask each man to invite one new man.

Sometimes the leader is worn out. He has been leading for years and is running on fumes. Give him a break. Let his apprentice lead for a season.

Sometimes the study isn't connecting. Men aren't engaged with the material. Change it. Ask the men what they want to study.

Sometimes something happened in the group: a conflict, a broken confidence, or a hurt that was never dealt with. The leader needs to address it directly and gently, and bring in the point leader or pastor if needed.

Sometimes life changed. Men changed jobs, moved, or entered a new season. Sometimes a group has simply run its course.

Picture a group led by a man named Lyle. For three years his Tuesday night group was the strongest in the church. Then, slowly, it faded. Two men moved away. One started working nights. The men who were left still liked each other, but the conversation kept circling back to the same complaints, and nobody had opened his Bible during the week in months. Lyle felt like a failure. When he finally talked to the point leader, they prayed together and made a plan. Lyle would ask the remaining men what they wanted, invite two newer men from the fall kickoff, and switch to a study in the book of James that would push everyone a little. Within a couple of months, the group had new life. Not every stalled group turns around like that, but many do when a leader stops pretending things are fine and asks for help.

Go back to that last reason for a moment. Not every group needs to last forever. Sometimes the best thing a group can do is end well. Thank God for what He did. Celebrate the friendships. Help every man find his next group. And let the men go out to start new things.

The writer of Hebrews gives a reason why men need each other continually. He tells believers to exhort one another every day, so that no one is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13).

Sin hardens a heart slowly. A man drifts by degrees, a little at a time, and often doesn't realize it until he is far from where he started. Daily encouragement from other men is one of God's tools for keeping a heart soft. That is what a group does at its best.

The Teacher closed his thought about companionship with a picture worth remembering.

> *And though **someone** may overpower the one, the two will stand against him; and the threefold cord will not quickly be torn apart.* (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

A man alone is easy to overpower. Men together, with Christ binding them, are hard to pull apart. Build groups like that, and they will last.

Talk It Over

1. Have you ever been part of a small group of men? What made it work, or what kept it from working?
2. Read Acts 2:42. Which of the four things the early church devoted itself to is strongest in your men's groups? Which is weakest?
3. Which kind of group from this chapter does your church most need right now? Why?
4. Think of a man in your church who could be a good group leader but has never been asked. What qualities do you see in him?
5. What would make it hard for the men in your church to multiply a group? How could you help them see it as sending rather than losing?
6. Read Hebrews 3:13. Who urges you on "every day"? Who are you urging on?

Try This Week

If you are in a group, ask one man this week to be your apprentice and co-lead with you next season. If you aren't in a group, find one this week, or ask one or two men to start reading the Gospel of Mark with you, one chapter a week, over coffee.

Chapter 16: Keeping It Going

> *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*
>
> 2 Timothy 4:7 (SLB)

Starting a men's ministry is exciting. There is energy in the first meeting of a new core team, in the first fall kickoff, in the first group that actually works. Men are glad something is finally happening. The pastor is encouraged. Everyone is ready to go.

Keeping it going is harder. Three years in, the excitement has worn off. The point leader is tired. A couple of core team members have moved or stepped back. Attendance at breakfasts is down a little, and nobody is sure why. One of the group leaders fell into sin and had to step down, and the men are still unsettled. This is when many men's ministries quietly fade away. Nobody decides to end them. They just stop.

This last chapter is about how to keep a men's ministry healthy over the long haul. It is about measuring the right things, checking in honestly, caring for the leaders, raising up new ones, handling hard seasons, and staying under the authority of the church. Then I will close the main part of this book with a charge.

Count Names, Not Crowds

How do you know if a men's ministry is working? Most of us instinctively count heads. How many men came to the breakfast? How many signed up for the retreat? Those numbers aren't useless. But they can fool you.

A breakfast with eighty men looks like a success. But what if seventy-five of them are the same men who have been coming for ten years, and none of them is in a group? A breakfast with twenty-five men might look like a disappointment. But what if eight of them were first-timers, and five of those joined a group the next week? Which one is the stronger ministry?

That is why I encourage you to count names, not crowds. Jesus told a story about a shepherd who counted.

> *What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that has been lost until he finds it?*
> (Luke 15:4)

The shepherd knew he had a hundred sheep. He also knew when one was missing. He didn't just count how many came back to the fold at night. He knew each one, and he noticed when one was gone.

That is what the Name List is for. In Chapter 12 we talked about how to build it: every man connected to your church, written down by name, each with a core team member or group leader who checks on him, and a next step noted beside his name. The Name List is your most important measuring tool. When you look at it, ask questions like these.

- How many men are on the list? Is that number growing as new men connect with the church?

- Does every man on the list have someone checking on him? Which men have no one?
- How many men took a next step since the last time we looked? Who moved from the back row into a group? Who started walking with another man?
- Which men have dropped out of sight? Has someone reached out to them?
- Where do most of our men stand right now? Are we heavy in one place and thin in another?

These questions keep your attention on men, not events. They remind you that every name is a person God loves, with a home, a job, a heart, and a soul.

Scripture has a word for leaders about this kind of attention.

> *You shall surely know the face of your flock; set your heart on the herds* (Proverbs 27:23)

A good shepherd knows the condition of his flock, not just its size. Is that man growing? Struggling? Ready for more? Hurting? You can't know those things from a headcount. You can only know them by knowing men by name.

The Health Check

Twice a year, in January and June, the core team should sit down for a Health Check. It is a simple review of how the ministry is doing. Think of it like walking through a building project with a punch list, the list a builder makes near the end of a job to catch the little things that still need fixing. You aren't tearing anything down. You are looking carefully at what you built and noting what needs attention.

The Health Check doesn't need to be complicated. Set aside two or three hours. Start by praying. Then walk through a short set of questions and give each area an honest rating: strong, okay, or needs attention. The full Health Check form is in Appendix A3, but here are the main areas.

Area	Questions to ask
Men	Look at the Name List. Who took a step? Who drifted? Who has no one checking on him?
Groups	How many men are in groups? Which groups are healthy? Which are stalled? Do we need a new group?
Leaders	How are the point leader, core team, and group leaders doing spiritually? Is anyone worn out? Who is ready to lead?
Events	Did each event offer a clear next step? Did men take it? Did follow-up happen within a week?
Pastor and church	Are we in step with the pastor? Are we serving the whole church or competing with it?
Plan	Are we on track with this year's goals on the Plan on a Page? What should we change, add, or stop?

Be honest. The Health Check only works if the core team is willing to say, "That isn't working." Many ministries keep doing things for years because nobody wants to admit they have stopped bearing fruit. A good Health Check gives you permission to stop.

At the end, choose two or three things to work on before the next Health Check. Write them down. Assign an owner to each. Then share a short summary with the pastor. He will appreciate being kept in the loop, and his perspective may help you see things you missed.

Tired Leaders and Real Rest

Men's ministry leaders get tired. That isn't a sign of weakness. It is a sign that they have been carrying something heavy. The question is what they do with the weariness.

Moses knew about this. We saw in Chapter 11 how Aaron and Hur held up his tired arms in the battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17:12). Moses didn't just push harder. He sat down and let two other men hold him up. No point leader should be holding up his arms alone.

If you are a point leader, here are a few honest questions to ask yourself. Am I still spending time alone with God, or has ministry crowded it out? Am I neglecting my wife or kids for the sake of the men's ministry? Am I doing things other men could do, simply because it's easier than asking? Am I angry, short-tempered, or numb in ways I wasn't before?

If you answered yes to any of these, it may be time to rest. Talk to your pastor. Let a core team member take the lead for a month or a season. Take the summer off. There is no shame in this. The ministry belongs to Jesus, not to you, and He will keep it going while you rest.

Elijah is a picture of a leader who hit the wall. After the great victory on Mount Carmel, he ran into the wilderness, sat down under a tree, and asked God to take his life. Notice what God did. He didn't lecture him. He let him sleep, and sent an angel with food. Then He let him sleep again and fed him again. Only after Elijah had rested and eaten did God speak to him about what came next. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a tired man can do is take a nap and eat a good meal.

If a leader's weariness has turned into something darker, such as thoughts of not wanting to live or a depression that won't lift, rest alone isn't enough. He needs to talk to his pastor and to a doctor or licensed Christian counselor. If he is in danger, call 911, or in the U.S. call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Leaders aren't exempt from the help we would urge for any other man.

Jesus offers rest to all of us. His invitation to the weary in Matthew 11:28 has no exception for leaders.

Raising New Leaders and Handing Off

One of the surest signs of a healthy men's ministry is that it is always raising new leaders. A ministry that depends on one man will end when that man moves, gets sick, burns out, or dies. A ministry that is always raising new leaders can go on for generations.

Moses understood this. Near the end of his life, he laid his hands on Joshua and prepared him to lead the people into the Promised Land.

> *And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*
> (Deuteronomy 34:9)

Joshua didn't appear out of nowhere. He had been at Moses' side for forty years, watching, learning, serving. When the time came for him to lead, he was ready.

Every point leader should have a Joshua, a man he is preparing to take his place. Every group leader should have an apprentice, as we talked about in Chapter 15. Every core team member should be watching for men who could someday join the core team. This is the Send Him Out station of the Workshop Path applied to leadership itself.

Picture a point leader named Ron. In his second year, he noticed a younger man named Doug who never missed a service day and always stayed to stack the chairs. Ron started asking Doug to ride along when he visited men on the Name List. He let Doug run the spring breakfast with Ron standing in the back of the room. He talked through the Health Check with him afterward and asked what Doug would change. None of it was formal. It was just one man letting another man watch him work and then handing him the tools a little at a time. By the time Ron's season was ending, nobody had to wonder who would lead next. The men already followed Doug, because they had watched Ron trust him.

How long should a point leader serve? There is no single right answer, and good churches do this differently. Some point leaders serve well for many years. But I would encourage most point leaders to think in terms of seasons, perhaps three to five years, with a clear plan for handing off when the time comes. That keeps the ministry from becoming one man's project, and it gives other men a chance to grow into leadership.

When the time comes to hand off, do it well. Talk with the pastor first. Name your successor early, and let him lead alongside you for a season before you step back. Hand him your notes, your Name List, your Plan on a Page, and your Year at a Glance. Introduce him to the men. Then step back and let him lead, even if he does things differently than you would. Stay available to help, but don't hover. And bless him publicly. Let the men see you put your hands on his shoulders, so to speak, and pray for him.

Toward the end of my first career, one I gave thirty-five years to, I had the chance to build a new mentoring program at work, along with a new training program to help employees grow and get ready for bigger responsibilities. It took a lot of planning, a lot of training material, and a lot of thought about how experienced people could pass on what they knew. I believed in it, and I put a lot of myself into it.

But the hardest part wasn't building it. It was making sure it could run without me. There is a certain pride in building something from the ground up, but if those programs depended entirely on me, I hadn't really done my job. The real test was whether they kept helping people after I retired, even if the people who came next changed them and took them places I never thought of. I retired from that career and started a second one in project management, and that lesson came with me. Men's ministry is the same. Keep checking what is working, fix what isn't, raise up the next leaders, and be willing to step aside when the time comes. If everything falls apart when you leave, you built it around yourself. The best legacy isn't a program with your name on it. It's the people you prepared to carry the work forward.

When the Ministry Stalls or a Leader Falls

Every ministry hits hard seasons. Sometimes it stalls. Attendance drops, groups dwindle, and energy fades. Sometimes something worse happens, and a leader falls into serious sin.

When the ministry stalls, don't panic and don't just add more events. Go back to the basics. Pray. Look at the Name List. Ask the men what they need. Talk to the pastor. Often a stall comes from one of a few causes: the ministry has drifted from its purpose, the leaders are worn out, or the ministry has stopped reaching new men and turned inward. Name the cause honestly and deal with it. Sometimes the best thing to do is to pause big events for a season, focus everything on groups and personal relationships, and rebuild from there.

Don't give up. Paul knew the temptation.

> *And let us not lose heart in doing the good, for in **its** own time we will reap, not fainting.*
> (Galatians 6:9)

When a leader falls, it hurts everyone. Men feel betrayed. Some feel angry. Some wonder if the whole thing was fake. The fallen man's family is often devastated. How you handle it matters a great deal.

First, go to the pastor right away. A fallen leader is a matter for the pastor and elders, not just the men's ministry. Don't try to handle it quietly on your own. If the sin involves a crime, abuse, or a child at risk, follow the law and the church's reporting policy without delay. No one should ever promise to keep that kind of thing secret. If the man who has fallen is the pastor himself, or a staff member the pastor can't be expected to judge fairly, or if the pastor won't act, go to the elders, the deacons, or whatever body your church or denomination has set over him. Scripture expects leaders to be held to account too (1 Timothy 5:19-20). And a report about a child never waits on any church leader. Make it yourself.

Second, the leader should step down from his role, at least for a season. This isn't about punishment. It is about protecting the ministry and giving the man room to deal with what has happened. Restoration to fellowship and restoration to leadership are two different things, and the pastor and elders will decide what each looks like in his case.

Third, care for the man and his family. Galatians 6:1 tells those who are spiritual to restore a fallen brother gently, watching themselves so they aren't tempted too. That means grace and truth together. Don't pretend the sin is no big deal. Don't cast him out either. If he is willing, help him get the help he needs, including a licensed Christian counselor or a recovery group if that fits. And remember his wife and children. They are often the ones hurt most.

Fourth, tell the men what they need to know, and no more. Work with the pastor on what to say. Avoid gossip and speculation. Pray together. Remind the men that our hope was never in any leader but in Jesus Christ, who never fails.

I have watched more than one leader I respected, in church and at work, make choices that made people question his character. What troubled me most was how fast people turned on someone they once admired. Leadership doesn't excuse wrongdoing, and nobody should be shielded from accountability. But

I have failed too, with alcohol and with seasons when I wandered from God. I know how fast a man's life can turn, and how much courage it takes to admit he needs help.

How we respond when a leader falls says a lot about our own faith. There has to be truth and accountability, especially when someone has been hurt, and the people who were harmed come first. Grace doesn't mean ignoring sin or putting a man back in leadership. It means remembering there is still a person there who needs prayer and a real chance to repent. My pastor didn't excuse my mistakes, but he didn't turn his back on me either. We can hold a man accountable without abandoning him as a brother. And our hope was never in any man, pastor or leader. It is in Jesus Christ.

Staying Under the Church's Authority

A men's ministry isn't a club on the side. It serves under the local church and its pastor and elders. I want to say that plainly one more time, because over the years this is one of the easiest things to drift from.

A strong men's ministry can start to feel like its own thing. It has its own leaders, its own calendar, its own budget, and its own events. Men may feel more connected to the men's ministry than to the church as a whole. Without care, it can turn into a church within the church, and that isn't healthy.

Scripture is clear that God places shepherds over His people, and that they will give an account for the souls in their care.

> *Obey those who lead you and submit **to them**, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this **would be** unprofitable for you.* (Hebrews 13:17)

For a men's ministry, this looks like a few simple practices. Keep the pastor informed. Share your Plan on a Page, your Year at a Glance, and your Health Check summaries with him. Ask for his input before major decisions. Follow the church's policies on money, safety, and communication. Point men to the church's worship services, not just men's events. Support the church's priorities and serve them gladly. And when you disagree with the pastor, talk to him privately and respectfully. Never stir up the men against him. (The one exception is a serious concern about the pastor himself, which goes to the leaders over him, as described above.)

Pastors change too. When a new pastor comes, don't assume he has blessed what the last one blessed. Go see him early. Bring the Plan on a Page, tell him what God has been doing among the men, and ask what he wants for them. Then fit the ministry to his leadership, the same way you started.

The goal is to be a ministry the pastor is glad to have. When he thinks of the men's ministry, you want him to think, "Those men make my job easier. They strengthen our families, they serve the church, and they bring new men to Jesus."

Finishing Well

Near the end of his life, sitting in a Roman prison, Paul wrote to Timothy. He knew his time was short. And he looked back on his life with a simple sentence: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Every one of us is running a course. Some of us are early in it. Some of us are near the end. The question isn't how fast we run or how many people notice. The question is whether we finish faithfully.

Finishing well in men's ministry isn't about building something big. It is about being faithful with the men God gives you. It means knowing their names, praying for them, walking with them, and helping each one take his next step toward Jesus. It means raising up other men who will do the same after you are gone.

> *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not empty in **the** Lord.* (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Your toil isn't in vain. The breakfast that seemed to change nothing. The phone call to a man who never called back. The group that met for two years and then quietly ended. The man you walked with who drifted away. None of it is wasted when it is done for the Lord. God sees every bit of it, and He is building something far bigger than any of us can see.

So here is my charge to you. Start with one man. Learn his name. Open your door and your life. Walk with him toward Jesus, one next step at a time. When he stumbles, help him up. When he grows, send him out to walk with another man. Do it under your pastor, alongside your brothers, and in the strength God supplies.

And when you are tired, rest. When you fall, get up. When you are tempted to quit, remember the men whose names are on your list and the Savior who knows every one of them better than you do.

And remember where all of this is headed. Paul didn't stop at "I have kept the faith." He went on.

> *From now on **there** is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me in that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.* (2 Timothy 4:8)

The Lord Jesus is coming back for His people. Every name on your list, every breakfast, every hard conversation on a back porch is done in the light of that day. Work like a man who loves His appearing.

You aren't building this alone. You are being built together, with every man you serve and every man who serves beside you, into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. That is a work worth giving your life to. Finish well.

Talk It Over

1. If you counted names instead of crowds in your men's ministry, what would you learn? Which men would you discover have no one checking on them?
2. Read Proverbs 27:23. What would it look like for your core team to "know the face of" the men in your church?
3. Which part of the Health Check do you think would be hardest for your ministry to answer honestly? Why?
4. Read Exodus 17:12. Who holds up your arms when you are tired? Whose arms are you holding up?

5. Who is the Joshua you could be preparing to lead after you? What is one step you could take to start investing in him?
6. Read 2 Timothy 4:7. What would it mean for you to finish well in the work God has given you with men?

Try This Week

Sit down this week with your Name List and circle every man who has no one checking on him. Pick one of those men, call him before the week is out, and ask how you can pray for him. Then bring the rest of the circled names to your next core team meeting.

A Closing Word: The Man Next to You

and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works

Hebrews 10:24 (SLB)

We've covered a lot of ground in this book: plans, calendars, groups, events, and lists. All of it matters. None of it is the point.

The point is a man. He has a name, a story, a family, a job he worries about, and a soul Jesus died for. Maybe he's sitting a few rows behind you. Maybe he lives next door. Maybe he works the next shift over, or he's the guy you see every Saturday at the hardware store. He may not know it yet, but he needs a brother who will walk with him toward Jesus.

You don't have to have it all figured out to be that brother. You only have to take the next step. Learn his name. Make the call. Buy the coffee. Open your Bible with him. Pray for him by name. Then, when he's ready, hand him the same work and watch him do it for someone else.

As I close, I find myself thinking about a pastor I know who needs encouragement and prayer. Pastors have carried me through some of my darkest moments. But pastors are human too. They carry everyone else's burdens while quietly dealing with their own, and we rarely stop to ask how they are doing. The man behind the pulpit on Sunday needs the same friendship and grace as the men in the pews. He was never meant to carry it all alone.

So here is my prayer for him, and for every man who leads while quietly carrying his own struggles. Lord, renew his strength, encourage his spirit, protect his family, and surround him with faithful men who will stand beside him in the good seasons and the hard ones. Let him know he doesn't have to have every answer or always look strong. Amen.

I have been the man who needed help, and I have seen what one caring man can do. Never underestimate what God can do when one man chooses to stand beside another. The man who needs you most may not be in the back row. He may be the one standing at the front, preaching God's Word and needing someone to remind him that he, too, is loved and never alone.

That is how God builds His church: one life joined to another, fitted together, clamped tight by love, and set in place by His Spirit. You and the men around you are being built together. Go find the man next to you.

Appendix A: Tools for the Work

These tools go with Part Three. They are simple on purpose. Copy them, change them to fit your church, and keep them where your core team can see them. A tool that lives in a drawer doesn't build anything.

A1. The Plan on a Page

Fill this in with your core team. Keep it to one page. Review it at each Health Check in January and June, and write a new one each year at the August planning day (see Chapters 12, 13 and 16).

Item	What to write	Our plan
Our purpose	One or two sentences: why this men's ministry exists. Example: "To help every man connected to our church take his next step with Jesus, together."	
Who we are trying to reach	The men on our Name List, the men on the edges, and the men in our community. Name the kinds of men you most want to reach this year.	
Where our men stand today	A rough count of men in each of the five places from Chapter 4: the Man Outside, the Man in the Back Row, the Man Starting Over, the Growing Man, and the Man Who Builds Others.	
Name List	How many men are on it, how many have a leader, and who keeps it.	
This year's goals (three or four)	Each goal is specific and has a finish line. Example: "Start two new groups by October."	
Owner for each goal	One man's name per goal, not "the team."	
Who owns what	One name for each core team area: Name List, groups, events, outreach and welcome, prayer, and serving.	
The calendar	Key dates from the Year at a Glance: kickoff, groups, events, retreat, service days, and the two Health Checks.	
Budget	What we need, where it comes from, and who approves spending.	
How we'll know it's working	Names, not crowds. Example: "Every man on the Name List was personally contacted at least once every two months."	
Pastor's review	Date reviewed with the pastor and any changes he asked for.	

A2. The Name List

Keep the Name List in a place your church approves, protected by a password, never on a shared or public link. The point leader and the man who keeps the list can see all of it. Each other leader sees only the men assigned to him. Treat it with care. These are men, not prospects. Never share it outside the leaders who use it.

Name	Phone or email	Leader who checks on him	Where he stands	Last contact	Next step
(example) Ray S.	(phone)	Mike	Man in the Back Row	Coffee, Oct 3	Invite to the fall breakfast

Rules for the Name List: every man has one leader. No leader carries more men than he can really know, usually eight to twelve. A man who hasn't been contacted in two months comes up at the next core team meeting. "Where he stands" is a guide for how to help, never a label to use in front of him. Write only what a man would be comfortable reading about himself. Never write down details of sin, addiction, abuse, health, or marriage trouble; write "check in weekly" and talk in person instead. When a man moves away or asks not to be contacted, take him off the active list. When a leader steps down, take away his access the same week. The prayer list follows the same rules: nothing goes on it, or into a group text, without the man's okay.

A3. The Health Check

Do this twice a year, in January and June (see Chapter 16). Set aside two or three hours and start with prayer. For each line, the core team agrees on a rating: strong, okay, or needs attention. Talk about the "needs attention" lines first, then choose two or three things to work on before the next Health Check, each with one owner. Send a short summary to the pastor.

Area	Question	Strong, okay, or needs attention?	What we will do, and who owns it
Men	Every man on the Name List has a leader who knows him, and we know who took a step and who drifted.		
Men	New men are contacted within a week of first showing up.		
Men	Men are coming to faith in Christ or coming back to Him.		
Men	Hurting men get real help, not just a pat on the back.		
Groups	Our groups open the Bible and talk honestly, and new men can find a group.		
Groups	No group is stalled without a plan, and we know where the next group will come from.		
Leaders	Our leaders are rested, praying, and not burning out.		
Leaders	We are raising new leaders, not just using the same few.		
Events	Each event offered a clear next step, men took it, and follow-up happened within a week.		
Pastor and church	Our pastor knows what we are doing and is behind it, and we serve the whole church instead of competing with it.		
Pastor and church	Men are serving in the church and the community, and marriages and families are stronger for it.		
Plan	We are on track with this year's goals on the Plan on a Page, and we know what to change, add, or stop.		

A4. The Follow-Up Call Guide

Use this when a man is new, when he hasn't been around for a while, or after he attends his first event. Call within a week. A text is fine to set up a time, but a voice or a face is better than a screen.

1. **Say who you are and why you're calling.** "Hey Ray, this is Mike from church. I sat next to you at the breakfast Saturday. I just wanted to say I'm glad you came."
2. **Ask one or two easy questions and listen.** "How long have you lived in town?" "What kind of work do you do?" Let him talk. Remember what he says and write it down afterward.
3. **Offer one next step, not five.** "A few of us grab coffee Friday mornings before work. Want to join us?" If he says no, that's fine. Ask if you can check in again.

4. **Ask if there's anything you can pray about.** If he gives you something, pray for it, and ask about it the next time you talk.
5. **Write it down.** Update the Name List with the date and his next step. Keep anything personal off the list. Tell your point leader if anything needs attention.

If a man shares that he or someone else is in danger, do not wait. Call 911 for an emergency. In the United States, a man thinking about suicide can call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If a child is being harmed or is at risk, report it to child protective services or the police the same day. Tell your pastor the same day. See A9.

A5. Event Planning Checklist

Start this list eight to twelve weeks before the event (see Chapter 14). One man owns the event, and his name goes at the top. A retreat is different. Book the place at your August planning day or sooner, because good retreat centers fill up six months to a year ahead.

- ☐ What is the purpose of this event, in one sentence?
- ☐ What is the one next step we will offer every man who comes?
- ☐ Date, time, and place confirmed with the church calendar.
- ☐ Budget set and approved. Who handles money, and how?
- ☐ Speaker or program confirmed, and he knows our purpose and our next step.
- ☐ Food, setup, cleanup, and a greeting crew assigned by name.
- ☐ Invitations: personal asks first, then announcements. Each core team member invites at least two men.
- ☐ A simple way to get names and contact information from first-timers.
- ☐ Someone assigned to look out for first-timers and introduce them around.
- ☐ Plan for follow-up: who calls each first-timer within a week.
- ☐ Safety: first aid kit and building rules followed. If minors are coming, follow the church's child safety policy: screened adults only, no man alone with a child who isn't his own, and parents' permission.
- ☐ For shooting, water, roof or ladder work, power tools, overnight, or travel events: check with the church's insurance carrier first, use an established venue or a qualified crew leader, collect signed releases, and use drivers the church has approved. On service days, keep untrained men off roofs and have the homeowner or agency sign off on the job.
- ☐ Who calls 911 if someone is hurt, and where is the nearest hospital? Ask about food allergies.
- ☐ After the event: thank-you notes, follow-up calls made, and a short review at the next core team meeting.

A6. Group Leader Checklist

- ☐ I pray for each man in my group by name every week.
- ☐ I know where each man stands and what his next step is.
- ☐ I contact any man who misses two meetings in a row.
- ☐ We open the Bible every time we meet.

- ☐ Every man gets a chance to talk, and no one man runs the room.
- ☐ What is said in the group stays in the group, except when someone is in danger, a child or vulnerable adult is at risk, or a serious matter has to go to the pastor. The men know this rule from the first meeting.
- ☐ I am preparing at least one man who could lead a group someday.
- ☐ I meet with the point leader or the core team member who oversees groups at least once a month.
- ☐ I am in the Word and in prayer myself, and I am honest with at least one man about my own life.

A7. First Core Team Meeting Agenda

Plan on about 90 minutes. Meet somewhere relaxed, and feed the men.

1. **Open in prayer (5 minutes).** Ask God to lead the work before anyone talks about it.
2. **Why we're here (10 minutes).** The point leader shares the purpose and the pastor's blessing. If the pastor can come, let him say it.
3. **Stories (30 minutes).** Let each man tell how he came to Christ and who walked with him along the way. Keep it to a few minutes each.
4. **Pray for the men of your church (40 minutes).** Pray by name if you can, starting with the men you know are hurting or drifting. This is most of the meeting, on purpose.
5. **Next time (5 minutes).** Set the next meeting date before anyone leaves. At the second meeting you'll start the Name List, and at the third you'll talk through where your men stand and give each man an area (see Chapter 11).

A8. The First 90 Days

For a man who just said yes to leading the men's ministry. Don't try to do it all at once. Do the next thing on this list.

When	What to do	Done
Week 1	Meet with your pastor. Ask what he hopes for the men, what boundaries he wants, and how often he wants to hear from you (Chapter 11). Start praying daily for the men by name.	
Weeks 2 to 3	Ask two to five men to pray about joining a core team. Look for character before talent (Chapter 11).	
Week 4	Hold your first core team meeting using A7. Mostly pray.	
Weeks 5 to 6	Start the Name List with the church office (A2 and Chapter 12). Ask the women's and children's ministry leaders for names, and ask wives before anyone contacts their husbands. Get your church's safety and reporting policy and read it.	
Weeks 7 to 8	Talk through where your men stand (Chapter 4). Give each core team man an area. Make sure every man on the list has one man checking on him.	
Weeks 9 to 10	Write a first Plan on a Page (A1 and Chapter 12) with two or three goals, not ten. Take it to your pastor for his input and blessing.	
Weeks 11 to 12	Train your group leaders, including the safety rules in Chapter 9 and the card in A9. Launch one or two groups. Plan one simple gathering.	
Week 13	Look back with your core team. Who took a next step? Who has no one checking on him? Thank God, then set your next 90 days.	

If you only get through half of this in 90 days, that is fine. Steady beats fast.

A9. When Someone Is in Danger

Copy this page for every leader. Keep a photo of it in your phone. These are U.S. numbers. If you live elsewhere, write in your own.

- **Anyone in immediate danger:** call 911.
- **Thoughts of suicide:** call or text 988 (veterans press 1; chat at 988lifeline.org). Ask him directly. Stay with him.
- **A child being harmed or at risk:** report it to child protective services or the police today, then tell your pastor. Childhelp, 1-800-422-4453, can tell you how to report where you live.
- **An elderly or disabled adult being abused or exploited:** call Adult Protective Services. The Eldercare Locator, 1-800-677-1116, can connect you.
- **Abuse in a home:** 911 if anyone is in danger. For the person being hurt: National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788. Don't confront the abuser yourself.
- **Sexual abuse, past or present:** National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-4673.
- **Drugs or alcohol:** SAMHSA National Helpline, 1-800-662-4357. Never tell a heavy drinker to quit all at once without a doctor.
- **Sexual images of minors:** don't promise secrecy, don't look at or forward anything, and go to your pastor the same day. Stop It Now, 1-888-773-8368, helps men who want to stop.
- **Our pastor's cell:** _____
- **Our church's reporting policy is kept:** _____

Never promise to keep any of these secret. Getting help is how you love him.

Appendix B: Scripture for Walking With Men

These passages fit the conversations you will have with men. Read them yourself first, then open them together.

When a man...	Read together
wonders if God could ever take him back	Luke 15:11-24; Psalm 51; 1 John 1:9
needs to understand the gospel	Romans 3:23-24; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4
doubts he is really saved	John 10:27-29; Romans 8:1, 38-39; 1 John 5:11-13
is fighting temptation	1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:13-15; Psalm 119:9-11; Hebrews 4:15-16
is angry	James 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32; Proverbs 15:1
is worried about money or work	Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7, 11-13; Colossians 3:23-24
wants to be a better husband	Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7
wants to be a better father	Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 103:13
is grieving	Psalm 23; John 11:25-35; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
feels like a failure	John 21:15-19; Philippians 3:12-14; Micah 7:8
is ready to lead or serve	2 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Mark 10:42-45; 1 Peter 4:10-11
needs other men	Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Proverbs 27:17; Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 6:1-2

Appendix C: Further Reading

Many good books have been written about ministry to men and about making disciples. These are a few that have helped many churches think more clearly about the work.

- Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Revell). A close look at how Jesus trained His disciples.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (HarperOne). A short classic on Christian community.
- Patrick Morley, David Delk, and Brett Clemmer, *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Sustain a Thriving Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your Church* (Moody Publishers). A well-known guide to building a men's discipleship ministry in the local church.
- Patrick Morley, *The Man in the Mirror: Solving the 24 Problems Men Face* (Zondervan). A book for men about the gap between the faith they claim and the lives they live.

About This Book

This book is for pastors, men's ministry leaders, and any man who wants to help another man follow Jesus. Part One shows why men matter, how Jesus built men, and what men need. Part Two walks with one man at a time along the Workshop Path: open the door, know his name, ground him in Christ, build him up, stand with him when he is hurting, and send him out.

Part Three shows how to run a men's ministry that lasts: start with the pastor and a few good men, put the plan on one page, lay out the year, and build events and groups that lead somewhere. Every chapter ends with questions to talk over and one step to take this week.

The appendices give you tools for the work, Scripture for walking with men, and further reading.