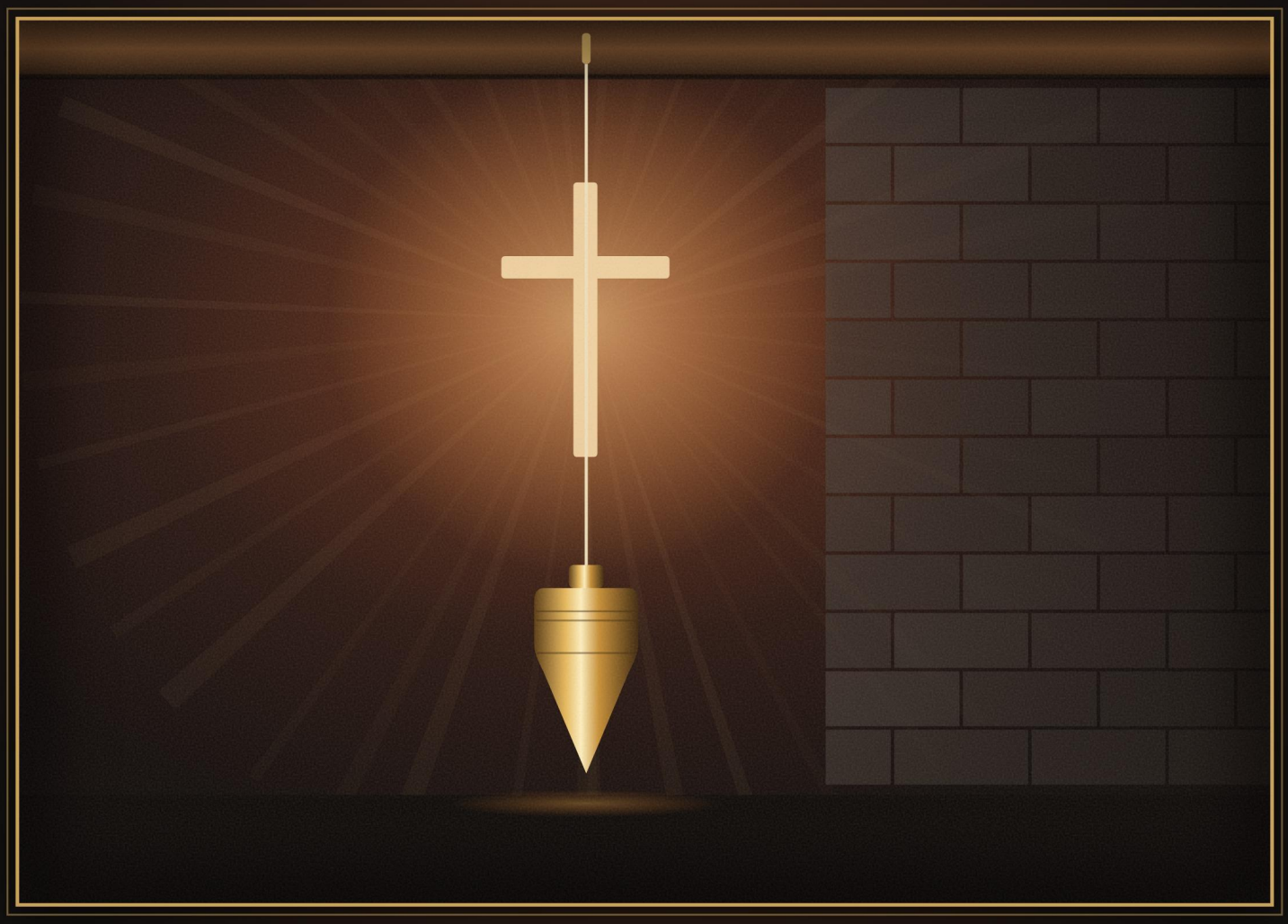
PLUMB LINE

Becoming God's Man in a World That Pulls You Crooked



One man at a time, starting with you

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Plumb Line

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Andrew Dominguez

Plumb Line: Becoming God's Man in a World That Pulls You Crooked

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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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Start Here

> *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. And see if **there is** a way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.*
>
> Psalm 139:23-24 (SLB)

Most men I know aren't falling apart in public. They're going to work, paying bills, showing up at their kids' games, and sitting in church on Sunday. From the outside, the wall looks straight. But if you could hang a plumb line next to their lives, you'd see the lean. A marriage drifting into silence. A phone that owns the first and last hour of every day. A secret that's been growing for years. A fear that wakes them at three in the morning. A faith that hasn't left the church parking lot in a long time.

If you are drifting right now, stop telling yourself you have it under control and nobody notices. I told myself that for years while I was still succeeding at work, and it nearly cost me everything. You do not have to climb out alone, and you do not have to clean yourself up before you ask for help. Be honest with God and with one trustworthy man today.

I know that lean because I've lived it. This book is for men who are tired of pretending the wall is straight.

Why I Wrote This Book

Men today face problems our fathers and grandfathers never imagined. Our phones never sleep. Pornography is a click away from every twelve-year-old. Betting apps live in our pockets. Machines are changing the work we thought would carry us to retirement. Loud voices online are telling young men what a "real man" is, and most of what they say is wrong. And underneath all of it, a lot of men are lonelier than they've ever been.

But the deepest problems haven't changed at all. Pride, fear, anger, lust, greed, and the desire to run our own lives have been with us since the garden. So has the answer. God's Word is still the plumb line. Jesus Christ is still the only Savior. And God still builds men the same way He always has: one man at a time, with other men walking beside them.

This book starts with you. Not your son, not your friend, not the guy at work who really needs it. You. Then, when God has started straightening some things in you, it will ask you to turn around and reach back for the next man.

Who This Book Is For

I wrote this book for the ordinary man. The plumber, the programmer, the trucker, the salesman, the soldier, the retiree, the young guy just starting out. You don't need to be a church leader or a Bible scholar to read it. If you've never trusted Christ, Chapter 2 explains the good news plainly, and you're welcome here. If you've walked with Jesus for forty years, I think you'll still find a few walls that need checking.

It's also a companion to my book *Built Together*, which is written for men who want to walk with other men and help their church build men. This book is about becoming the man God is building. That one is about building others. You can read either one first.

The Men You'll Meet

Every chapter opens with a scene from the life of an ordinary man facing the problem that chapter covers. These men are not real people. I created them to put a face on problems that many real men face. If one of them sounds a lot like you, that's the point.

Two men run through the whole book. **Cole Barrett** is a forty-one-year-old heating and air technician, married to Jen, with three kids: Ethan, Lily, and Owen. He's busy, tired, and out of plumb when we meet him. **Walt Kessler** is a retired machinist in his seventies, a widower and a Vietnam veteran, who has coffee in his garage shop on Saturday mornings for any man who wants to come. Over the course of a year, many of the men in these chapters end up on a stool in Walt's shop.

The stories I tell about my own life are true. I've included them, as plainly as I can, because I'm not writing to you from the top of the mountain. Many of them come from my hardest seasons, including my battle with alcohol, and from the men God used to bring me back.

How Each Chapter Works

Every chapter follows the same pattern, so you'll always know where you are.

The scene. A few pages from one man's life.

Straight talk. What God's Word says about the problem, in plain words, with some of my own story where it fits.

Your Move. One specific thing to do this week. Don't skip it. Reading about change and changing are two different things.

Pass It On. One way to take what you've learned and help another man with it.

Talk It Over. Questions to answer on your own, with a friend, or in a group.

The book has five parts. **Part One: Start With You** looks at the man himself: busyness, real faith, and who you are when the job is gone. **Part Two: What Pulls a Man Crooked** faces the things that bend men today: the phone, pornography, addiction, anger, fear, depression, pride, money, and the loud voices about manhood. **Part Three: The People Who Count on You** turns to marriage, fatherhood, and friendship. **Part Four: How a Man Lives** covers time, health, integrity, coming home from military service, and suffering. **Part Five: One Man at a Time** explains how a man really changes, and how to help the next man do the same.

At the back you'll find a one-page Plumb Line Check, a list of places to get help, and a simple plan for walking with one man.

Using This Book With a Friend or a Group

This book is meant to be read with other men. Here are a few ways to do that.

Two men over coffee. Read one chapter a week and meet for an hour. Spend most of your time on the Talk It Over questions, then tell each other what your Move will be. Start the next meeting by asking how it went.

A small group. Four to eight men is a good size. Meet weekly for sixty to seventy-five minutes. Open with prayer, give each man a few minutes to share how his Move went, work through the questions, and close by praying for each other by name. At one chapter a week, the book takes about five months. Some groups take two chapters a week and finish in about three.

A father and son, or an older and younger man. Read it together. The older man should go first in answering the hard questions.

A few ground rules make a group work. What's said in the group stays in the group, with one exception: if someone is in danger, or a child is at risk, the leader must get help and follow the law and the church's reporting policy. Nobody has to answer every question. Nobody gets lectured. And everybody gets prayed for.

Some chapters deal with heavy subjects, like pornography, addiction, depression, suicide, and war. A group leader should read ahead, know where to find help (Appendix B), and be ready to talk privately with a man who opens up.

A Few Notes Before We Start

Scripture quotations in this book come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. When I don't quote a passage, I give the reference so you can read it for yourself. Please do. Don't take my word for anything in this book. Open your Bible and check it, the way the Bereans did in Acts 17:11.

I capitalize the pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (He, Him, His, You, Your) as a sign of reverence. Inside a Scripture quotation, I leave the capitals exactly as the translation prints them.

This book offers Bible teaching and brotherly encouragement. It is not a substitute for a doctor, a licensed counselor, or emergency help. Where a chapter touches on addiction, depression, suicide, abuse, or trauma, I'll point you to real help. If you or someone else is in danger, call 911. If you're thinking about ending your life, call or text 988.

Let's go hang the line.

Part One: Start With You

Chapter 1: Out of Plumb

> *Thus He showed me, and look, the Lord **was** standing on a plumb-line wall, and in His hand **was** a plumb line. And the LORD said to me, "What **are** you seeing, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." And the Lord said, "Look, I **am** setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it."*
>
> Amos 7:7-8 (SLB)

The Eleventh Call

The cold snap hit on a Monday, and by Thursday Cole Barrett had stopped counting the calls. Furnaces that had limped along all fall were quitting across town, and everybody wanted heat yesterday. At 7:40 that night, his eleventh call of the day, he pulled his service van into a gravel driveway on the edge of town and sat for a second with the engine running.

His phone buzzed on the dash. A text from his wife, Jen: *Owen's still up. He wants to show you his Lego thing.* Then another one from dispatch with two more addresses for the morning. Then a notification from a sports app, a news alert, and a reminder that the truck payment was due Friday. Cole flipped the phone face down, grabbed his tool bag, and walked to the door.

The man who answered was in his seventies, tall and thin, wearing a flannel shirt buttoned all the way up and a wool cap. "Walt Kessler," he said, and shook Cole's hand like he meant it. "Furnace quit about four o'clock. I'd have looked at it myself, but my knees don't do crawl spaces anymore."

It didn't take long. A cracked igniter. Cole had the part on the van, and twenty minutes later warm air was moving through the vents. When he came up out of the crawl space, Walt had two cups of coffee poured at the kitchen table.

"I've got another call," Cole said.

"You've got a cup of coffee," Walt said. "Five minutes won't change the world."

Cole sat. His phone buzzed twice in his pocket. He didn't look at it, but he felt it, the way you feel a bad tooth.

Walt asked about the job, about how long Cole had been in the trade, about his family. Cole gave the usual answers. Nineteen years in heating and air. Married sixteen years. Three kids, sixteen, eleven, and seven. Busy. Good busy, mostly.

"Good busy," Walt said. He let the words sit there a second. "When's the last time you did something that wasn't for somebody's money?"

Cole laughed, but it came out thin. He didn't have an answer.

On his way out, Cole passed the open door to Walt's garage. It wasn't a garage anymore. It was a shop: a lathe, a milling machine, a wall of hand tools hung on pegboard with outlines drawn around each one.

Hanging from a nail on a ceiling joist was a brass plumb bob on a string, perfectly still, a few inches above the concrete.

“What’s that for?” Cole asked.

“That’s how you find out if something is straight,” Walt said. “A wall can look fine. You can stand back and squint at it and swear it’s true. Then you hang a line next to it, and the line doesn’t lie.” He tapped the string and watched it settle. “Most things don’t fall over all at once, you know. They lean a little at a time. You don’t notice until the door won’t close.”

He pulled a card out of his shirt pocket and wrote on the back. “I have coffee out here Saturday mornings at seven. A few men come by. No sermon, no sign-up sheet. You’re welcome if you want.”

Cole put the card in his pocket and didn’t think about it again until he pulled into his own driveway at 9:15. The house was dark except for the light over the stove. Owen’s Lego creation sat on the kitchen table with a note in crooked letters: *FOR DAD.* Jen was asleep.

Cole sat in the truck a long time with the engine off. He was forty-one years old. He had a good job, a good wife, and three kids who loved him. He had a mortgage he could almost afford, a phone that never stopped, and a feeling he couldn’t name, as if he had built his whole life a little crooked and was only now noticing that the doors wouldn’t close.

He took Walt’s card out of his pocket and turned it over in the dashboard light.

The Line Doesn’t Lie

I’ll be meeting you in these pages through men like Cole. He isn’t a real person, and neither are the other men you’ll meet in the scenes that open each chapter. But I think you know him. You might be him.

Most men I know aren’t living in open rebellion against God. They aren’t robbing banks or running from the law. They are working hard, paying bills, coaching ball teams, and trying to do right by their families. And a lot of them, if they were honest, would tell you they feel like Cole felt in that driveway. Tired. Busy. Empty in a way they can’t explain. Pulled in ten directions and not sure which one is true.

The prophet Amos lived about 2,700 years ago, and he never saw a smartphone or a service van. But God showed him a picture that fits every man reading this book.

> *Thus He showed me, and look, the Lord **was** standing on a plumb-line wall, and in His hand **was** a plumb line. And the LORD said to me, “What **are** you seeing, Amos?” And I said, “A plumb line.” And the Lord said, “Look, I **am** setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it.”* (Amos 7:7-8)

A plumb line is about as simple as a tool gets. It is a weight on a string. Gravity pulls the weight straight down toward the center of the earth, so the string hangs perfectly vertical every time. Builders have used it for thousands of years because it can’t be fooled. It doesn’t care how good the wall looks or how hard the mason worked or how much the house cost. It shows you what is true.

In Amos's day, God held His plumb line up next to His people, and they were way out of true. They were still going to worship. They were still saying the right words. But their lives had drifted. They cheated in business, ignored the poor, and trusted their own strength instead of God. They had been leaning a little at a time for years, and they hadn't noticed.

God's Word is that plumb line for us. It doesn't bend to fit the times, and it doesn't flatter us. Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. When a man holds his life up against it, he finds out where he really stands.

That is what this book is about. Not my opinions, and not the latest advice from the internet about how to be a man. We're going to hold your life, and mine, up against the line that doesn't lie.

Busy and Empty

Let's start where Cole started: busy and empty.

Men today are busier than ever, and most of us are proud of it. Ask a man how he's doing, and half the time he'll say, "Busy." It has become a kind of badge. If you're busy, you must be important. If you're busy, you must be providing. If you're busy, nobody can accuse you of being lazy.

But busy is not the same as fruitful. You can work seventy hours a week and build nothing that lasts. You can run from one thing to the next for twenty years and wake up one day wondering where it all went.

King Solomon tried everything this world has to offer. He built houses, planted vineyards, collected gold, hired singers, and denied himself no pleasure. Then he stepped back and looked at the whole thing.

> *And I myself turned to all my works that my hands had done and to the toil that I had toiled to do, and look, everything **was** futility and a chasing of wind, and **there was** no advantage under the sun.* (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Solomon had more than any of us will ever have, and his verdict was that it was all vapor, like chasing the wind. That doesn't mean work is bad or that good things are evil. It means none of them can carry the weight we try to put on them. They were never meant to be the center.

Jesus put it even more plainly.

> *For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?* (Mark 8:36)

Here is the hard truth. Many of us are gaining a little of the world and losing a lot of our soul, and we don't notice, because it happens one late night, one missed dinner, and one more buzz of the phone at a time. Walt was right. Most things don't fall over all at once. They lean.

How a Man Drifts

Nobody sets out to drift. No man stands at the altar on his wedding day and says, "I plan to ignore this woman in about twelve years." No man holds his newborn son and thinks, "I'll be too tired to really know this boy." No man gets saved at a camp meeting and says, "I'll keep this up until life gets busy."

Drift happens through small things. You skip church a few Sundays because of travel ball. You quit reading your Bible because mornings are rushed. You stop calling your friend because you're both busy. You start checking your phone in bed. You take the promotion that adds fifteen hours a week because the money will help. None of those decisions feels like a turn away from God. Each one makes sense by itself. But put twenty of them together over five years, and you're a long way from where you started.

Hebrews warns us about exactly that.

> *Because of this we must give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard, lest we drift away.* (Hebrews 2:1)

The picture in that verse is a boat that has slipped its mooring. Nobody rowed it out to sea. It just wasn't tied down, and the current did the rest. The current of this world is strong, and it never stops. If you aren't tied to something solid, you will drift. Every man does.

Where I Have Been

I'm not writing to you from the top of the mountain. I'm writing as a man who has drifted further than I like to admit.

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 had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. I didn't get there in one day. I got there the way most men do, one small step at a time, each one easy to explain away.

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. You'll hear about some of them in these pages. They are a big part of why I wrote this book. I know what one man can do for another, because men did it for me.

Why Start With You?

This book is about building men up, one man at a time. But it doesn't start with your son, your friend, your coworker, or the guy at church you think really needs it. It starts with you.

That's not because you're the worst man in the room. It's because you're the only man you can actually change with God's help, and because no man can lead another man somewhere he hasn't been willing to go himself. Jesus said it this way: first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye (Matthew 7:5).

King David, a man who drifted badly and came back, prayed a prayer every man should learn by heart.

> *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. And see if **there is** a way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.* (Psalm 139:23-24)

That is a dangerous prayer. David is asking God to hang the plumb line next to his life and show him where he is out of true. Most of us would rather not know. We'd rather stand back, squint at the wall, and tell ourselves it looks fine.

But here is the good news, and it's the most important thing I'll say in this chapter. God does not show you where you're crooked so He can condemn you. He shows you so He can straighten you. The same God who holds up the plumb line is the God who sent His Son to die for crooked men like you and me. Romans 8:1 says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Him, the line isn't there to shame you. It's there to set you true.

And if you don't belong to Him yet, keep reading. The next chapter is for you.

Come to Me

Before we go any further, I want you to hear what Jesus says to tired men.

> *Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke **is** easy, and My burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus spoke those words to people who were worn out, not from hard work alone, but from trying to carry life on their own strength. He doesn't say, "Try harder." He doesn't say, "Get organized." He says, "Come to Me."

A yoke is a wooden beam that fits across the necks of two oxen so they can pull together. Jesus isn't offering you a life with no work in it. He's offering to get in the harness with you. When you're yoked to Him, the load is shared, the pace is His, and the direction is true. That is the rest your soul has been looking for, and you won't find it in a bigger paycheck, a better phone plan, or a longer vacation.

How This Book Works

Every chapter in this book follows the same pattern, so you'll know what to expect.

Each one opens with a scene from the life of an ordinary man facing the problem that chapter covers. Most of those scenes cross paths with Cole and Walt, because their year runs through the whole book. Then I'll talk straight with you about what God's Word says, and I'll share some of my own story where it fits.

At the end of each chapter you'll find **Your Move**, one specific thing to do this week. Don't skip it. Reading about change and changing are two different things. Then comes **Pass It On**, one way to take what you've learned and help another man with it. Finally, **Talk It Over** gives you questions to answer on your own or, better yet, with a friend or a small group.

If you only read this book, it will be one more book on your shelf. If you do what's in it, with God's help and another man beside you, it can change the direction of your life.

Three Places to Hang the Line

If God's Word is the plumb line, how does a man actually hang it next to his life? I've found three places where it happens most.

The first is in the Word itself. When you read Scripture slowly and honestly, it reads you back. You'll be reading about David or Peter or a parable of Jesus, and a sentence will stop you cold because it describes exactly what you did on Tuesday. Don't rush past those moments. They're the line swinging next to the wall.

The second is in other men. You can't see your own blind spots. That's what makes them blind spots. A wife, a friend, or a group of brothers who have permission to tell you the truth will see the lean long before you do. Proverbs 27:6 says faithful are the wounds of one who loves. A man who surrounds himself only with people who agree with him has thrown his plumb line in the trash.

The third is in honest time alone with God. Not just reading, but stopping. Sitting quietly and asking, "Lord, where am I out of true?" and then waiting long enough for an answer. Most of us never do that, because we're afraid of what we'll hear. But the God who shows you the lean is the same God who loves you enough to straighten it.

Cole didn't know it yet, but over the next year he'd find all three in an old man's garage.

A Prayer to Start

> *Lord, I've been busy, and I've been leaning, and I haven't wanted to look. Search me and know my heart. Show me where my life is out of plumb, in my work, my home, my habits, and my faith. Don't let me drift any further. I'm tired, and I'm coming to You for rest. Straighten what's crooked in me, and give me the courage to let You do it. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Pray David's prayer from Psalm 139:23-24 every morning this week before you look at your phone. Then take ten minutes and write down, honestly, where you think your life is out of plumb right now. Your work, your marriage or relationships, your kids, your faith, your habits, your health, your money. Don't fix anything yet. Just look at the wall with the line hanging next to it.

Pass It On

Think of one man in your life who seems as busy and tired as Cole. Send him a text this week that has nothing to do with work or favors: "Been thinking about you. How are you really doing?" That's it. You don't need a plan. You just need to notice him.

Talk It Over

1. Where do you see yourself in Cole's story? What part of that night in the driveway feels familiar?

2. Walt said most things don't fall over all at once; they lean. What small decisions have pulled your life out of plumb over the last few years?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 2:11 and Mark 8:36. What are you most tempted to chase that can't carry the weight you put on it?
4. What would it take for you to honestly pray Psalm 139:23-24? What are you afraid God might show you?
5. Jesus offers rest to the weary (Matthew 11:28-30). What would it look like this week for you to come to Him instead of just trying harder?

Chapter 2: Sunday Faith, Monday Man

> *This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me.*
>
> Matthew 15:8 (SLB)

The Greeter

Every Sunday for eleven years, Brent Harlan stood at the east door of Grace Community Church and shook hands. He knew every regular by name. He knew whose kid had made the varsity team and whose mother was in the hospital. He wore a pressed shirt, smiled easily, and said "God bless" more times on a Sunday morning than most men say it in a year.

On Monday mornings, Brent ran a property management company with forty-two rental units across town. Cole Barrett had done plenty of work for him over the years: water heaters, rooftop units, a furnace or two. Brent always paid on time. He also always had an angle.

"Write this one up as a warranty failure," Brent told Cole one spring afternoon, standing beside a dead condenser behind a duplex. "The manufacturer will cover the part, and I'll split the difference with you on labor. Everybody does it."

Cole knew the unit was twelve years old and had died of plain old age. "I can't do that, Brent."

Brent shrugged and laughed it off. "Suit yourself. God bless." He wrote the check for the full amount and never mentioned it again. But two weeks later he called a different company for his next job.

That summer, Brent's father had a stroke. Brent sat by his bed in the intensive care unit for six days. His dad had been a deacon for thirty years, a man who never missed a Sunday, and Brent had always assumed that whatever his father had with God, he had too. It came with the family, like the last name.

On the fifth night, a hospital chaplain stopped by and asked Brent if he wanted to pray. Brent said yes, and then sat there with his head bowed and nothing to say. He knew how to pray in public. He had done it at church dinners and Little League banquets. But sitting alone with his dying father in the middle of the night, he realized he had no idea how to talk to God like Someone who was actually there.

His father died the next morning.

A month later, Brent's truck pulled into Walt Kessler's driveway on a Saturday at seven. Cole had been coming to Walt's coffee for a few months by then. He was surprised to see Brent, and Brent seemed surprised to be there. Someone at the funeral had mentioned Walt's shop, and Brent had driven past it three Saturdays in a row before he finally stopped.

He didn't say much that first morning. When the other men left, he stayed behind, turning a coffee mug in his hands.

“I’ve been in church my whole life,” he finally said to Walt. “I could teach a Sunday school class. And I sat by my dad’s bed and found out I don’t know God at all. I just know about Him.”

Walt didn’t say anything for a while. Then he said, “That’s the most honest thing anybody’s said in this shop in a long time. That’s a good place to start.”

My family attended church when I was young, and I came to Christ through a neighbor, Pastor Jimmy Carter. Even after I was baptized in 1995, there were seasons when I treated faith like a Sunday habit while making bad choices during the week. It took hitting bottom to learn that a man cannot coast on borrowed faith. Faith becomes real when Christ governs Monday morning, not just Sunday.

Two Kinds of Faith

There are two kinds of faith in America today, and they can look exactly alike from the parking lot.

The first is cultural faith. It’s the faith you inherit, the way you inherit your grandfather’s watch or your family’s favorite football team. You were raised in church, or you live in a part of the country where most people say they’re Christians. You know the songs. You can find the book of John without looking at the table of contents. You believe in God, you think Jesus was a good man and probably more, and you’d check “Christian” on a survey. But if you’re honest, your faith doesn’t change much about Monday. Your money, your calendar, your mouth, your marriage, and your private life run pretty much the way they would if you’d never heard of Jesus.

The second kind is real faith. It’s a personal relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. It starts when a man stops trusting in his own goodness and puts his full trust in Christ, and it changes things. Not overnight, and not perfectly, but really. It shows up in how he treats his wife, how he does business, what he does when nobody’s watching, and how he faces death.

Jesus warned that the first kind can fool a man right up to the end.

> *Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of My Father who **is** in **the** heavens. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.’* (Matthew 7:21-23)

Those are some of the most sobering words in the Bible. Notice who Jesus is talking about. These aren’t atheists or men who never darkened a church door. They called Him “Lord.” They did religious things in His name. And He says, “I never knew you.”

The issue isn’t how much they knew about Jesus. It’s whether He knew them. That is the difference between cultural faith and real faith.

Knowing About and Knowing

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah to the most religious men of His day: these people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Brent Harlan could have been the poster boy for that verse, and he finally knew it.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, put it in a way that should shake us.

> *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder.* (James 2:19)

Even the demons have correct beliefs about God. They know He exists, and it terrifies them. Believing that there is a God, or even believing true facts about Jesus, does not make a man a Christian. Saving faith isn't just agreeing that something is true. It's trusting a Person with your whole life.

Here's a way to think about it. You can know everything about a bridge: who built it, how much steel is in it, how much weight it can hold. That knowledge won't get you across the canyon. At some point you have to put your weight on it and walk. Saving faith is putting your full weight on Jesus Christ and what He did for you.

Where I Was

I know the difference between those two kinds of faith from the inside.

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 down the road to his boy before the boy could make up for anything (Luke 15:20). That is the God I want every man reading this book to meet.

The Plumb Line on Your Faith

So let me ask you straight. Which kind of faith do you have?

Paul told the church at Corinth to do something most of us avoid.

> *Test yourselves **to see** whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not recognize yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you are unapproved?* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

That isn't meant to make you anxious. It's meant to make you sure. God doesn't want you guessing about the most important question of your life. First John 5:13 says these things were written so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Here are a few honest questions to hold up against your life:

- Can you point to a time when you personally turned from your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ, or are you counting on your parents' faith, your church attendance, or the fact that you're a decent guy?
- Do you think of God as Someone you know and talk to, or as a set of rules and traditions?
- When you sin, do you feel the weight of it as an offense against a Person who loves you, or just as a broken rule?
- Has anything in your life actually changed because of Jesus, or would your Monday look the same if you'd never heard of Him?

None of us does any of that perfectly. Real Christians still sin, still doubt, and still fail. But a real Christian has a real relationship with a real Savior, and that relationship changes the direction of his life even when his steps are shaky.

The Good News, Plainly

If you read those questions and realized you have cultural faith and not real faith, I have good news for you. You're in the same place Brent was at Walt's kitchen table. And as Walt said, that's a good place to start.

Here is the good news of Jesus Christ, as plainly as I know how to say it.

God made you to know Him. But every one of us has turned away from Him and gone our own way. The Bible calls that sin.

> *for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23)

Sin isn't just doing bad things. It's living as though we are God, running our own lives our own way. And sin has a price.

> *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

Death here means more than physical death. It means separation from God, now and forever. That's what we've earned. But notice the second half of that verse: the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. You can't earn a gift. You can only receive it.

God didn't wait for us to fix ourselves. He sent His Son, Jesus, who lived the perfect life we haven't lived, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose from the dead on the third day.

> *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

That gift is received by faith, not earned by effort.

> *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)

To receive it, you turn from your sin, which the Bible calls repentance, and you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

That's it. It isn't complicated, but it is costly, because it means handing Him the keys to your life. And it is the best trade a man will ever make.

A Prayer for a Man Who Wants to Come Home

If you're ready to settle this with God, you can pray something like this. The words themselves don't save you. Faith in Jesus does. But this is how a man can tell God what's happening in his heart.

> *Lord Jesus, I come to You just as I am. I have sinned, and I can't fix it on my own. I believe You are the Son of God, that You died on the cross to pay for my sins, and that You rose from the dead. I turn from my sin, and I put my trust in You as my Lord and my Savior. Please forgive me and wash me clean. From today on, lead my choices. Thank You for Your grace and for the gift of eternal life. Amen.*

If you prayed that and meant it, tell someone today. Tell a pastor, a Christian friend, or your wife. Find a church that teaches the Bible and go next Sunday. And keep reading. The rest of this book is about what it looks like to walk with Jesus as a man in today's world.

From Sunday to Monday

If you already know Christ, don't skip past this chapter too quickly. Plenty of real Christians live like cultural Christians for long stretches. They know Jesus, but they've let their faith shrink down to a Sunday morning compartment.

James has a word for that too.

> *So also the faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.* (James 2:17)

James isn't saying good works save us. Paul already settled that in Ephesians 2:8-9. James is saying that real faith is alive, and living things grow and move. If a man's faith never leaves the church parking lot, something is wrong.

Brent's test came behind a duplex on a Monday afternoon, not in a church lobby on Sunday morning. That's where most of our tests come. Do you tell the truth on the invoice? Do you speak to your kids the way you speak to the pastor? Do you treat the waitress, the subcontractor, and the guy who cut you off in traffic like people made in God's image?

Real faith doesn't make you perfect. It makes you honest about where you're not, and it keeps pulling you back toward the line.

What Changes When Faith Is Real

How can a man tell if his faith is the real thing? Not by how much he knows, how long he's attended church, or how good he is at praying in public. The Bible points to a few marks that show up, imperfectly but truly, in the life of someone who belongs to Christ.

Real faith brings new desires. Before Christ, a man may want God's blessings but not God Himself. After Christ, he finds himself wanting to know God, wanting to please Him, and grieving when he doesn't. He still fights old desires, but now there's a war inside him that wasn't there before (Galatians 5:17).

Real faith shows up as love for God's people. First John 3:14 says we know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. A man who wants nothing to do with other Christians should ask himself some hard questions.

Real faith obeys. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Not perfectly, and not to earn anything, but because love wants to please the one it loves.

Real faith keeps repenting. A Christian isn't a man who never sins. He's a man who keeps coming back to God, agreeing with Him about his sin, and turning again.

If you read that list and saw yourself in it, even a little, thank God. Those are signs of life. If you didn't, don't despair. Go back to the good news earlier in this chapter. God's door is still open.

A Prayer for Real Faith

> *Father, I don't want a Sunday faith that disappears on Monday. I don't want to know about You without knowing You. Thank You that Jesus died for my sins and rose again. I put my whole weight on Him. Make my faith real, and let it show up in my work, my home, my words, and my private life. When I drift into going through the motions, wake me up and bring me back. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Answer the four questions in this chapter honestly, in writing. If you've never personally trusted Christ, settle that this week, and tell someone. If you have, write down one area of your Monday life where your faith hasn't shown up. Your business, your mouth, your money, or your home. Ask God to start there.

Pass It On

Write down the story of how you came to faith in Jesus in one page or less. What was your life like before, how did you come to trust Christ, and what has changed since? Then share it with one man this month who needs to hear it. Your story is one of the most powerful tools God has given you.

Talk It Over

1. What's the difference between knowing about God and knowing God? Which better describes you right now?

2. Read Matthew 7:21-23. Why do you think so many people can be religious and still not know Jesus?

3. Brent said, “I just know about Him.” When did you first realize, if you have, that faith had to be your own and not just your family’s?

4. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and James 2:17 side by side. How do they fit together?

5. Where in your Monday life is your faith most likely to go missing? What would it look like to bring it with you?

Chapter 3: When the Badge Stops Working

> *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 (SLB)

Tuesday Morning

Glenn Patterson found out his job was gone when his badge didn't open the door.

He was fifty-seven years old. He had worked twenty-six years for the same freight and logistics company, starting on the loading dock and working his way up to regional scheduling manager. He knew every driver by name. He knew which routes flooded in spring and which customers needed a phone call instead of an email. He had a parking spot with his name on a little sign.

On a Tuesday in June, the badge reader blinked red. A woman from human resources he'd never met was waiting in the lobby with a folder. The company had brought in new scheduling software that spring. It used artificial intelligence to plan routes, balance loads, and predict delays, and it did in four seconds what Glenn's team of six had done in a day. The whole team was "restructured." Glenn got sixteen weeks of severance, a box for his desk, and a pamphlet about career transition services.

Two weeks later, Cole Barrett was in Glenn's attic replacing a blower motor. It was 104 degrees outside and worse up there. When he came down, Glenn was sitting at the kitchen table in the middle of a weekday in a polo shirt with the company logo on it.

"Day off?" Cole asked.

Glenn told him. Then he said something Cole thought about for a long time afterward. "The worst part isn't the money. We'll figure out the money. The worst part is, I don't know who I am now. For twenty-six years, when somebody asked what I did, I knew what to say. Now I don't even know what to tell my grandkids."

Cole didn't know what to say either, so he did what Walt would have done. He told Glenn about Saturday coffee.

That Saturday, Glenn sat on an overturned bucket in Walt's shop beside Marcus, a twenty-eight-year-old who wrote software from his apartment and hadn't been inside an office in three years. Marcus listened to Glenn's story and went quiet. Then he admitted something he hadn't said out loud to anyone. "I'm worried about the same thing. The tools I use at work can already write half my code. I don't know if my job will exist in five years. And honestly, I'm not sure it means anything now. I sit alone in my apartment all day moving numbers around for people I've never met."

Walt let the two of them talk. A twenty-eight-year-old who feared losing a job that didn't feel real, and a fifty-seven-year-old who had lost one that had felt like everything. When they were done, Walt got up, took a worn steel rule off the pegboard, and set it on the bench in front of them.

"I ran machines for forty-one years," he said. "Then one day I didn't. I'll tell you what I learned. If a job is what holds you up, the day it goes, you go with it. You've got to be standing on something that can't be taken away."

What Do You Do?

When two men meet, the first question is almost always the same: "What do you do?" Women ask that too, but for men it carries extra weight. We tend to answer it as if it means, "Who are you?"

"I'm an electrician." "I'm in sales." "I'm a cop." "I'm a project manager." We say "I am" and then name our work. Over time, many of us stop being able to tell the difference.

That's why losing a job hits men so hard. It's not only the paycheck. It's that something we built our sense of worth on has been pulled out from under us. The same thing happens at retirement, after an injury that ends a career, or when a business fails. A man who was somebody on Friday feels like nobody on Monday.

And the ground is moving faster than ever. Artificial intelligence and automation are changing work in every field, from trucking to accounting to writing software. Remote work has emptied offices and left many men working alone in a spare bedroom. Careers that used to last forty years now last ten. If your identity is built on your job, you are building on sand that's shifting under your feet.

Work Is Good

Before we go further, I want to be clear about something. Work is not the problem. God designed work, and He designed men to do it.

> *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)

Notice that God gave Adam work before sin ever entered the world. Work is not a curse. It's part of what it means to be made in the image of a God who works. He made the world, and He made us to cultivate it, build in it, fix what's broken, and provide for the people we love. When you rewire a house, balance a budget, teach a classroom, or keep a semi on the road, you're doing something God made you for.

What sin did was make work hard. Genesis 3:17-19 says the ground was cursed, and that a man would eat by the sweat of his face, fighting thorns and thistles. That's why work frustrates us. Projects fail, bosses are unfair, machines break, and companies lay off good men. But the curse made work painful. It didn't make it meaningless.

Paul wrote the words at the top of this chapter to slaves, people with no choice about their work and no hope of promotion. He told them to work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to men. If that was true for them, it's true for a man on a loading dock, at a laptop, or in an attic in July.

Working for the Right Boss

Here is what changes everything about work: you aren't ultimately working for your company. You're working for Christ.

In my career as a project and program manager, I've 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. 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.

When you work for Christ, a few things change. You do good work even when nobody checks it. You tell the truth even when it costs you. You treat the people under you the way you'd want to be treated. And when your work is taken away, you haven't lost your real Boss. He's still there, and He still has work for you.

Who You Are When the Work Is Gone

So if your job isn't who you are, who are you?

If you belong to Jesus Christ, the Bible answers that question with a name no layoff can touch.

> *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God! Because of this the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.* (1 John 3:1)

You are a son of God. Not because of your job title, your income, or your performance review, but because the Father chose to love you and adopt you through His Son. That's an identity you didn't earn and can't lose.

Paul, who had been one of the most impressive men of his day, said it this way.

> *I have been crucified with Christ; and I live—no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and what I now live in* ***the*** *flesh, I live in faith, that of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

When Christ lives in you, your life has a center that doesn't move. Jobs come and go. Titles change. Bodies get old. But the man who is in Christ has something underneath him that holds.

That doesn't mean losing a job won't hurt. It will. Glenn grieved, and he should have. Twenty-six years is a big piece of a man's life. But grief is different from being lost. A man who knows he's God's son can grieve a job without losing himself.

You Were Made for More Than a Paycheck

God doesn't just give you an identity. He gives you a purpose.

> *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)

That word "workmanship" means something God made, like a craftsman's best piece. And notice that He made you for good works He prepared ahead of time. Your purpose is bigger than your job. Your job may be one of the places you live it out, but it isn't the whole thing.

Your purpose includes the way you love your wife, raise your kids, serve in your church, help your neighbor, and point other men to Jesus. Many men find out what really matters only after the job is gone. Glenn did. Within a year, he was coaching his grandson's team, driving older men from his church to medical appointments, and working part-time at a hardware store where half the customers asked his advice. He made less money than he used to. He told Walt it was the best year of his life.

Toward the end of my own first career, one I gave thirty-five years to, I had the chance to build a mentoring program at work, along with a training program to help employees grow and get ready for bigger responsibilities. I put a lot of myself into it. But I learned that the real test of that work wasn't whether it had my name on it. It was whether it kept helping people after I was gone. I retired from that career and started a second one in project management, and that lesson came with me. The best things you build aren't programs or titles. They're people.

When the Ground Shifts

Let me speak to the man who's worried about the future of his work. Maybe you're like Marcus, watching the tools get smarter and wondering if there will be a place for you. Maybe your industry is shrinking, or your body is starting to tell you that you can't do this job forever.

Here's what I'd tell you. Be wise, and don't be afraid.

Be wise. Keep learning. Pick up new skills. Save money when you can, so a layoff is a hardship and not a disaster. Proverbs 6:6-8 points us to the ant, who prepares in summer for the winter ahead. Planning isn't a lack of faith. It's faithful stewardship.

But don't be afraid. The God who fed Israel in the desert and clothed the lilies of the field hasn't lost track of you.

> *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For the nations seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:31-33)

Machines will change how we work. They won't change who holds the future. Proverbs 16:9 says a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. Make your plans. Then hold them with an open hand.

Working Alone

One more word, for men like Marcus who work from home or work alone. Remote work can be a blessing. It saves hours of commuting and gives a man more time at home. But it can also leave a man isolated in a way he doesn't notice until it's deep in his bones. No coworkers, no lunch break conversations, no one who notices that he looks tired.

If that's you, you'll need to be deliberate about being with people. Get out of the house. Find a group of men. Go to the same coffee shop at the same time each week. Serve somewhere with your hands. We'll talk more about this in the chapter on friendship, but don't wait until then. God didn't design you to spend all day alone with a screen.

When You're Out of Work

If you're reading this chapter because your badge stopped working too, here are some practical things that have helped many men through a layoff or a long stretch without work.

Tell the truth at home. Don't leave the house every morning pretending you're going to work. Your wife and kids need to know, and you need them on your team.

Keep a routine. Get up at the same time, get dressed, and treat finding work like a job. Set hours for applications, phone calls, and learning a new skill. Then quit at a reasonable hour and be present with your family.

Get your money in order quickly. Sit down with your wife and look at every bill. Cut what you can. Call creditors early if you'll be late. A plan made in the first week is much better than one made in the fourth month.

Tell other men. Most jobs come through people, not websites. Let the men at your church and in your life know what you're looking for. Pride will tell you to keep quiet. Ignore it.

Serve somebody. Use some of your free hours to help a widow, coach a team, or volunteer at church. It reminds you that your worth doesn't come from a paycheck, and it often opens doors you didn't expect.

Watch your soul. Unemployment can slide into depression, drinking, or long days in front of a screen. Stay in the Word, stay with your brothers, and get help if the dark starts closing in.

And remember Joseph. He was sold into slavery, falsely accused, and forgotten in prison for years. But God was with him the whole time and was preparing him for something he couldn't have imagined (Genesis 39:21-23; 50:20).

A Prayer for Your Work

> *Lord, thank You for the work You've given me, and for making me to work. Forgive me for the times I've let my job become my identity. Help me remember that I'm Your son before I'm anything else. Help me work today as if I'm working for You, with honesty and care. If my work is shaky, give me wisdom and peace. If it's gone, be my provider and show me my next step. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Finish this sentence in writing, three different ways, without mentioning your job: “I am...” Use Scripture if it helps (1 John 3:1, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10). Then go to work this week with Colossians 3:23-24 written somewhere you’ll see it, and do one task as if Jesus Himself were going to inspect it.

Pass It On

Think of a man you know who has lost a job, retired, been injured, or is worried about his work. Take him to lunch this week. Don’t try to fix his career. Ask him how he’s really doing, listen, and remind him that he’s more than what he does.

Talk It Over

1. When someone asks, “What do you do?” how do you usually answer? How much of your sense of worth is tied to your work?
2. Have you ever lost a job, retired, or been unable to work? What did it show you about where your identity was?
3. Read Genesis 2:15 and Colossians 3:23-24. How does knowing that work is God’s design change the way you see your job?
4. How are changes like AI, automation, or remote work affecting your field? What would being wise and not afraid look like for you?
5. If your job disappeared tomorrow, what would be left of your purpose? What good works might God have prepared for you beyond your paycheck?

Part Two: What Pulls a Man Crooked

Chapter 4: The Glow in Your Pocket

> *Therefore see carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*
>
> Ephesians 5:15-16 (SLB)

Did You See Me?

Tyler Grant lived next door to Cole Barrett. He was thirty-four, an insurance claims adjuster, married to Rachel, with a six-year-old daughter named Ava who thought the sun rose and set on her daddy.

In May, Ava had her first dance recital. Tyler took the afternoon off. He got there early, found a seat in the third row, and when the lights went down and Ava's class came out in sparkly purple costumes, he held his phone up and recorded the whole thing. Somewhere in the middle, a work email came in about a claim that was going sideways, and he answered it with his thumb while the camera kept rolling. Then he checked a score. Then he posted a clip of Ava twirling, with three heart emojis, and watched the likes come in.

Afterward Ava ran to him in the lobby, flushed and beaming. "Daddy, did you see me? Did you see me do the spin?"

"I saw it, baby. You were amazing," he said. And then, on the drive home, he realized he hadn't. Not really. He had seen a small rectangle with his daughter in it. He'd been there, and he had missed it.

That night, he did something he'd been avoiding. He opened the screen time report on his phone. It said he averaged six hours and forty-one minutes a day. He picked up his phone more than a hundred times a day. The first pickup was usually 5:52 a.m. The last was usually after midnight.

He did the math sitting on the edge of his bed. If he slept seven hours and worked nine, he had about eight waking hours left in a day. He was giving most of them to the glass in his hand.

The next Saturday, Tyler walked over to Walt's shop with Cole. He told the story about the recital, and he expected the older man to lecture him. Walt didn't. He just pulled an old flip phone out of his pocket and set it on the bench.

"I'm not smarter than you," Walt said. "If I'd had one of those things at your age, I'd have been worse. I spent half of my thirties in front of a television set, and my boys still remember it." He picked up a block of maple and turned it in his hands. "The question isn't whether that phone is bad. The question is who's holding who."

Between work, writing and guitars, my phone and computer are always within reach. A quick look at messages can eat the first quiet minutes of the morning before I open my Bible. Putting the screen away reminds a man who is in charge of his day.

Who's Holding Who?

I want to be fair to the smartphone. It's an amazing tool. It lets me call my family from anywhere, look up a Bible verse in seconds, find my way through a strange city, pay a bill, and read the news. Many of us use it to do our jobs. I'm not going to tell you to throw it in a lake.

But Walt asked the right question. Who's holding who?

Most men today carry a device in their pocket that was designed by some of the smartest people in the world to grab their attention and keep it. Every buzz, notification, red dot, and endless scroll is built to bring you back. The apps are free because you aren't the customer. Your attention is what's being sold.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about a different set of temptations, but the principle fits perfectly.

> *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.* (1 Corinthians 6:12)

Paul isn't saying everything is good. He's saying that even good and lawful things can become masters. A phone is lawful. Checking a score is lawful. Watching a video is lawful. But if you can't put it down, if it's the first thing you reach for in the morning and the last thing you see at night, if you feel anxious when it isn't in your pocket, then it's no longer a tool. It's a master.

Where Your Attention Goes, Your Life Goes

Here's something most men never think about. Your attention is one of the most valuable things God has given you. Whatever gets your attention gets your life.

Jesus said the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22-23). What you look at shapes what you become. If you spend six hours a day filling your mind with outrage, gossip, highlight reels, and noise, it will shape you. You'll be more anxious, more distracted, more discontent, and more shallow than you would otherwise be. You won't decide to become that man. You'll just drift there.

That's why Scripture tells us to guard our hearts.

> *More than all guarding, guard your heart, for from it **are** the outflows of life.* (Proverbs 4:23)

And it tells us what to fill our minds with instead.

> *Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever **things are** honorable, whatever **things are** righteous, whatever **things are** pure, whatever **things are** lovely, whatever **things are** of good report, if **there is** any excellence and if any praise, ponder these things.* (Philippians 4:8)

Hold your phone up against that verse. How much of what you scrolled through yesterday was true, honorable, righteous, pure, lovely, and of good report? I'm not asking that to make you feel guilty. I'm asking it because it's a plumb line, and a man ought to know where he stands.

Time Is Life

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul tells us to walk carefully, not as unwise men but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

To redeem something is to buy it back. Paul is saying our time is being stolen, and we need to take it back on purpose. In his day, the thieves were idleness, foolish talk, and worldly distractions. In ours, many of them come through a screen.

Moses prayed a prayer that every man with a smartphone should pray.

> *So teach **us** to count our days, that we may bring in a heart of wisdom.* (Psalm 90:12)

Counting your days isn't morbid. It's wise. You have a limited number of them. Your kids will be six for one year. Your father will be alive for a certain number of Christmases. Your wife will be beside you for a set number of evenings. Every hour you give to the glow in your pocket is an hour you can't give to them.

Tyler figured out that if he kept his habits for the next twelve years, until Ava turned eighteen, he'd spend more than three full years of waking time on his phone. He told Walt that number made him sick. Walt said, "Good. Now you can do something about it."

Still and Quiet

There's one more thing the phone steals, and it might be the most important. It steals silence.

Most men today never sit in silence. We fill every gap. Waiting in line, we scroll. Sitting at a red light, we check. Lying in bed, we watch. In the bathroom, we read. We have trained our brains to panic at the first second of boredom.

But God often speaks in the quiet.

> *Let go, and know that I **am** God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted on the earth.* (Psalm 46:10)

The words "let go" mean to stop striving, to drop your hands and quit grabbing. That is hard to do with a phone in your hand.

Jesus, the busiest man who ever lived, with crowds pressing on Him from every side, made room for silence on purpose.

> *And early, **while it was** very much night, having risen up, He went out and departed into a deserted place, and there He was praying.* (Mark 1:35)

If the Son of God needed quiet time with the Father before the sun came up, how much more do we? Yet most of us start our day by grabbing a device that fills our heads with other people's voices before we've said one word to God.

Taking It Back

So what do you do? You don't need to become a hermit. But you do need a plan, because good intentions won't beat a device that was engineered to win. Here are some practical steps that have helped many men. Pick a few and start this week.

- **Get it out of the bedroom.** Buy a cheap alarm clock. Charge your phone in the kitchen overnight. This one change can give you back your first and last hour of every day.
- **Give God the first word.** Don't touch your phone until you've opened your Bible and prayed, even if it's only five minutes.
- **Turn off almost every notification.** Keep calls and texts from your family and your boss. Turn off everything else. You decide when to check. The app doesn't.
- **Delete the worst offenders.** If an app eats your time and gives nothing back, remove it. You can always use the website on a computer if you really need it.
- **Make the table a phone-free zone.** Meals are for faces, not screens. That goes for Dad first.
- **Watch the games carefully.** Video games can be harmless fun. They can also swallow a man's evenings, his sleep, and his family. If you're gaming more than you're talking with your wife or kids, it's time to cut back.
- **Take a weekly break.** Pick a few hours each week, maybe Sunday afternoon, when the phone goes in a drawer.
- **Tell someone.** Ask your wife or a friend to hold you to your plan. Show them your screen time report every week.

Tyler did several of those things. He bought a $12 alarm clock. He deleted two social media apps and a game. He started leaving his phone in the truck when he went to Ava's events. He told Walt later that the first two weeks were rough. He kept reaching for a phone that wasn't there. By the third week, he noticed he was sleeping better. By the second month, Rachel said he seemed like a different man.

At Ava's next recital, he didn't record anything. He watched every second. When she came running into the lobby and asked, "Daddy, did you see me?" he got down on one knee and told her exactly what he saw.

Your Kids Are Watching

One more word, for fathers. Your kids are learning how to use technology by watching you. If you tell your teenager to get off his phone while you're scrolling through yours, he hears the second message louder than the first.

The best phone rules for your family start with the rules you keep yourself. If you want your kids to be present, be present. If you want them to look people in the eye, look them in the eye. If you want them to put God first, let them see you open your Bible before you open your apps.

The Comparison Trap

There's one more thing the phone does to men that deserves its own warning. It feeds comparison.

Social media is a highlight reel. You see another man's new truck, his vacation, his promotion, his perfect family at the beach, and his workout results. You don't see his debt, his arguments, his depression, or the

forty photos he took before he got the one he posted. But your mind doesn't make that adjustment. It compares your behind-the-scenes to everyone else's highlight reel, and you come up short every time.

Paul warned about men who measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, and he said they do not understand (2 Corinthians 10:12). Comparison will rob you of contentment, gratitude, and joy faster than almost anything. It makes you envious of men who have more and proud toward men who have less. Neither one is how God wants you to see people.

The same feed that breeds envy also breeds outrage. Many apps are designed to show you whatever makes you angriest, because anger keeps you scrolling. Men who never would have raised their voices at a neighbor now spend their evenings furious at strangers. That's not making you a better man. It's making you a more anxious, angry, and divided one.

Here's a simple test. After you scroll, ask yourself, "Am I more grateful, more loving, and closer to God than I was twenty minutes ago?" If the answer is usually no, it's time to change what you're feeding on.

A Prayer for Your Attention

> *Lord, I've given my attention to things that don't deserve it, and I've given too little to You and to the people You've put in my life. Forgive me. Help me take back my time and my eyes. Teach me to be still and know that You are God. Make me present with my wife, my kids, and my friends. Let my first word each day be with You, and fill my mind with what is true, honorable, and pure. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Look at your screen time report today. Don't flinch, and don't make excuses. Then choose three of the steps in this chapter and do them this week. At minimum, charge your phone outside your bedroom every night for seven nights in a row, and don't touch it in the morning until you've spent five minutes with God.

Pass It On

Talk to another man about what you're doing. Most men are fighting the same battle and are relieved when someone admits it first. Invite him to try the seven-night challenge with you, and check in with each other at the end of the week.

Talk It Over

1. Walt asked, "Who's holding who?" Honestly, which answer fits you?
2. What did your screen time report show you? What surprised you?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 and Philippians 4:8. What would change if you used them to judge what you watch and read?
4. When was the last time you sat in silence with God for ten minutes? What gets in the way?
5. What is your phone teaching your children or the younger men around you about what matters most?

Chapter 5: The Secret on the Screen

I have made a covenant for my eyes; and how would I look attentively at a virgin?

Job 31:1 (SLB)

The Van

Josh Keller had been Cole's apprentice for a year and a half. He was twenty-six, quick with his hands, and good with customers, especially the older ladies who wanted to feed him cookies while he worked. He'd been married eight months to a girl named Kayla he'd met in their church's young adults group. At the wedding, Cole had watched Josh cry when Kayla came down the aisle.

One Thursday in October, Josh was quiet all morning. Between calls, sitting in the van in a grocery store parking lot, he finally said, "Can I ask you something? Not about work."

Cole put down his sandwich.

"Kayla found my search history last night," Josh said. He was staring at the dashboard. "On my phone. She cried for three hours and then went to her mom's." He swallowed hard. "It's been going on since I was twelve. My buddy showed me on his phone at a sleepover, and I've never really stopped. I thought getting married would fix it. It didn't. I don't even want to look at that stuff, half the time. I just do. And then I feel like garbage, and I promise God I'll quit, and three days later I'm right back."

Cole was quiet for a long moment. Then he said something that surprised both of them. "I fought that same thing in my twenties. Before smartphones, but it was there. I never told anybody. Not even Jen. I got some distance from it, but I never really dealt with it. I just kind of outran it." He looked at Josh. "You're braver than I was. You're telling somebody."

"Kayla told somebody," Josh said. "I just got caught."

"Maybe," Cole said. "But you're the one talking about it now."

That Saturday, Cole brought Josh to Walt's. When the other men had gone, the three of them stood around the workbench, and Josh told the story again. Walt listened all the way through without a word. Then he said, "Son, you're not a freak. You're a man who's been fed poison since he was twelve years old by people who make money off it. That's not an excuse. You still have to own it. But it means you're not alone, and it means there's a way out. I've seen men walk out of this. It takes the truth, it takes help, and it takes Jesus. You've got the first one started."

The Battle Nobody Talks About

If you've never fought this battle, praise God, and keep reading anyway, because the man sitting next to you in church probably has. For most men today, it isn't a question of whether they'll be exposed to pornography. It's a question of when, and what they'll do about it.

A generation ago, a boy had to go looking for this stuff, and it was hard to find. Today it finds him, often before he's a teenager, through a device in his pocket that's never more than an arm's length away. It's free, it's endless, and it's private. Nobody has to see you buy it. Nobody has to know.

That's what makes it so dangerous. It grows in secret, and secrets are where sin does its best work.

What Jesus Said

Some men tell themselves that looking isn't really a big deal, as long as they don't act on it. Jesus closed that door.

> *You heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Matthew 5:27-28)

Jesus took the standard and raised it from the body to the heart. Lust isn't just a physical act. It's a heart that treats a woman, made in the image of God, as an object for my use. That's true whether she's on a screen or across the street.

The woman on the screen is somebody's daughter. Many of the people in that industry were abused, used, or trapped before they ever got there. When a man watches, he isn't just harming himself. He's taking part in harm done to real people.

Job understood this thousands of years ago. Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. He made a covenant for his eyes. He made a decision ahead of time about where he would and wouldn't look, because he knew that if he waited until the moment of temptation to decide, he'd lose.

How It Gets Its Hooks In

James describes exactly how this kind of sin works.

> *But each one is tempted by his own desire, being drawn away and being enticed. Then the desire, having conceived, gives birth to sin; and the sin, having been brought to completion, brings forth death.* (James 1:14-15)

Notice the process. Desire, then enticement, then the act, then death. It always promises life and always delivers death. Death of intimacy in a marriage. Death of a clean conscience. Death of a man's ability to look his wife or his kids in the eye. For some men, the death of a marriage, a ministry, or a career.

Think about King David. He was a man after God's own heart. But one evening he was on his rooftop when he should've been at war with his men, and he saw a woman bathing. He looked. Then he kept looking. Then he sent for her. Within a few months he had committed adultery, arranged a murder, and covered it up (2 Samuel 11). It started with a look.

Many men who fight this battle notice that it comes back at certain times. Recovery groups have an old saying: watch out when you're hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. Pornography is often less about desire than about escape. A man is stressed, bored, lonely, or hurting, and he reaches for something that numbs the

pain for a few minutes. That's why simply trying harder rarely works. You have to deal with what's underneath.

Flee

The Bible's battle plan for sexual temptation is short and blunt.

> *Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man may do is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit* ***who is*** *in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

Paul doesn't say "resist" here. He says "flee." With some sins, you stand and fight. With this one, you run. Joseph is the picture. When his master's wife grabbed him by his cloak, he didn't stay and debate. He left the cloak in her hand and ran out of the house (Genesis 39:12).

In practical terms, fleeing means making it hard to get to the stuff:

- **Put filters and accountability software on every device.** Phones, tablets, laptops, gaming systems, and smart TVs. Have someone else set the passwords.
- **Know your danger zones.** Late at night, alone, after a fight, after a bad day, when traveling. Plan ahead for those moments.
- **Keep devices out of the bedroom and the bathroom.** Most men fall in the same two or three places.
- **Cut off the side doors.** Social media feeds, certain shows, certain search habits. If it reliably leads you toward the edge, get rid of it.
- **Have a plan for the moment.** When temptation hits, get up and leave the room. Call or text your accountability partner. Pray out loud. Go for a walk. Do push-ups. Anything except staying there and negotiating.

Bring It Into the Light

Barriers help, but they won't set you free by themselves. Pornography thrives in secret, and secrets lose their power in the light.

One of the biggest lessons of my own 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. The prayer of a righteous* ***man****, being at work, prevails much.* (James 5:16)

That's why Josh's story turned a corner in a grocery store parking lot. Nothing had changed yet, but for the first time, the secret was out where another man could help him carry it.

If you're married, your wife deserves the truth. How and when you tell her matters, and I'd strongly encourage you to get help from your pastor or a Christian counselor so you do it wisely and she gets support too. Her hurt will be real. Give her room to feel it. Don't rush her to forgive you so you can feel better. Earn back her trust slowly, with honesty and changed behavior.

If you're single, don't think marriage will fix this. Josh thought that, and so did many men before him. Marriage doesn't cure lust. It just gives it someone else to hurt.

Grace for the Man Who Keeps Falling

Some of you reading this have tried to quit a hundred times. You're tired of promising God you'll stop. You wonder if He's tired of hearing it.

Listen to me. God's grace is bigger than your failure.

> *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

That promise doesn't depend on how many times you've fallen. It depends on how faithful God is. Confession isn't groveling or begging. It's agreeing with God about what you did and trusting Him to do what He promised.

And if you belong to Christ, this sin isn't who you are. Second Corinthians 5:17 says that anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away. You aren't a pornography addict who happens to go to church. You're a son of God who is fighting an old enemy, and you have the Holy Spirit living in you to fight it.

Freedom rarely comes in a single moment. For most men, it comes one day at a time, one honest phone call at a time, one fled room at a time. The goal isn't just to stop. It's to be changed.

> *And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God **is**, the good and well-pleasing and perfect **will**.*
> (Romans 12:2)

You renew your mind by filling it with something better. Scripture. Prayer. Real friendship. Real intimacy with your wife. Work that matters. Rest. Over time, the old pull gets weaker, because you're feeding something else.

Josh didn't get fixed in a week. He and Kayla went to counseling. He put filters on everything and gave Cole the passwords. He met Walt every Tuesday morning for coffee and an honest question: "How are you doing with your eyes?" He fell twice in the first three months, and both times he called Cole the same night. A year later, he told the men at Saturday coffee that it had been nine months. Kayla was sitting in their truck in the driveway, waiting for him, and she was smiling.

Protecting the Next Generation

Josh was twelve when he was first exposed to pornography, on a friend's phone at a sleepover. That story is common, and many boys today are younger than that. If you're a father, this chapter isn't only about you. It's about your kids.

Here are a few things every dad can do.

Talk early, and talk often. Long before your son or daughter has a phone, tell them, in words that fit their age, that there are pictures and videos on screens that show people without clothes or doing things that are meant for marriage. Tell them that if they ever see something like that, they won't be in trouble for telling you. Then keep that promise.

Put filters and limits on every device in your home, and know what apps your kids use. Keep devices out of bedrooms at night. Many problems start after everyone else is asleep.

Don't hand a young child a smartphone just because everyone else has one. There's no rule that says a phone has to come with internet access and every app.

And most important, tell your own story when the time is right. A son who knows his dad fought this battle and found help is much more likely to come to his dad when he's fighting it himself. Shame grows in silence. Freedom grows when fathers and sons can talk honestly.

A Prayer for Purity

> *Lord Jesus, You know every secret I've kept and every place I've fallen. I don't want to hide anymore. Thank You that if I confess my sins, You are faithful and righteous to forgive me and cleanse me. Give me the courage to tell the truth to another man. Help me make a covenant for my eyes and keep it. Renew my mind. Protect my marriage, and protect my children. When temptation comes, help me flee. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

If this is your battle, tell one trusted Christian man this week. Not someday. This week. Install a filter and accountability software on every device you own, and give someone else the passwords. Write down your danger zones and your plan for each one. Memorize 1 Corinthians 6:18 or Job 31:1.

Pass It On

If you've found freedom in this area, your story could be the thing that helps another man open up. Be the first one to say, "I've fought that too." Then make yourself available. Offer to be the man he calls when it's hard.

Talk It Over

1. Why do you think this struggle is so common among men today, and so rarely talked about?
2. Read Matthew 5:27-28 and Job 31:1. What would a "covenant for your eyes" look like in your daily life?

3. James 1:14-15 describes desire, enticement, sin, and death. Where have you seen that pattern in your own life?

4. Which of the “flee” steps would make the biggest difference for you? What keeps you from taking it?

5. Read James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9. Why is confession to another man so hard, and why is it so powerful?

Chapter 6: The Bottle and Other Hiding Places

> *In the freedom with which Christ set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery.*
>
> Galatians 5:1 (SLB)

The Cooler in the Truck

Rick Sorensen had been framing houses for thirty years, and he was one of the best. Cole had worked alongside his crews on a dozen new builds, roughing in ductwork behind Rick's walls, and he'd never seen a crooked stud or an out-of-square corner come off that man's job. Rick was forty-nine, loud, funny, and generous. He'd give you the shirt off his back and then give you a hard time about the size.

Everybody knew about the cooler in Rick's truck. It was a running joke. "Five o'clock somewhere," Rick would say, popping a can at 3:30 on a Friday. Nobody thought much of it. Lots of guys in the trades drink.

What nobody knew about were the pills. Rick had hurt his back falling off a ladder four years earlier, and the doctor had given him a prescription for pain medicine. The back healed. The prescription ran out. Rick found other ways to get the pills. He told himself he needed them to keep working, and some days that was even true. The beer took the edge off the pills, and the pills took the edge off the beer, and somewhere in there he stopped being able to tell how much of either he was using.

In February, on the way home from a job, Rick drifted across the center line and sideswiped a minivan. Nobody was badly hurt, thank God. There was a mom and two kids in that van. Rick blew twice the legal limit. He spent the night in jail, lost his license, and had to tell his wife, his crew, and his grown daughter what happened.

Cole heard about it from one of Rick's carpenters. He didn't know Rick well enough to call, but he knew someone who would. That Saturday, he told Walt the story.

Walt was quiet. Then he said, "My brother died of drink when he was fifty-three. Nicest man you'd ever want to meet. Everybody loved him. Nobody ever told him the truth, me included, because we didn't want to hurt his feelings." He set down his coffee. "I'll go see Rick."

Walt drove to Rick's house that afternoon. He didn't lecture him. He sat on the back porch and told him about his brother. Then he said, "You've got a choice your brother never had the nerve to make. You can be done hiding. There are men who'll walk with you. I'll drive you to the meeting myself."

Rick cried, which nobody who knew him would have believed. The next Tuesday night, Walt drove him to a Christ-centered recovery group at a church across town. Rick sat in the back row with his arms crossed and didn't say a word. But he went back the next week, and the week after that.

Every Man Has a Hiding Place

Not every man reading this has a problem with alcohol or drugs. But I've never met a man who didn't have a hiding place.

For some men, it's the bottle. For others, it's pills, marijuana, gambling, pornography, video games, work, food, or the phone. The substance or activity changes, but the pattern is the same. Life hurts, or feels empty, or is just too much, and a man reaches for something that makes him feel better for a little while. Then he needs a little more to get the same relief. Then he can't stop. Then it owns him.

The Bible calls that slavery.

> *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you that everyone who does sin is a slave of sin. Now the slave does not abide in the house forever; the son abides forever. Therefore if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* (John 8:34-36)

Jesus isn't calling people who struggle with addiction bad people. He's describing what sin does to every one of us. It promises freedom and delivers chains. But notice the end of that passage. The Son sets slaves free, and when He does, they're free indeed.

My Hiding Place

I've told you a little of my story already. Here's more of it.

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 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.

My battle with alcohol 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.

What the Bible Says About Drinking

The Bible doesn't say that drinking alcohol is a sin in itself. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11). But Scripture is very clear that drunkenness is sin, and it paints a vivid picture of where it leads.

> *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaint? Who has wounds without cause? Who has dullness of eyes? Those who linger over the wine, those who go to examine mixed wine.* (Proverbs 23:29-30)

Read the rest of that passage, Proverbs 23:31-35, sometime. It describes a man who wakes up bruised, doesn't remember how he got hurt, and the first thing he thinks is, "When will I awake? I will add; I will seek it again" (Proverbs 23:35). It could have been written yesterday.

Paul gives the contrast.

> *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, but be filled with* ***the*** *Spirit*
> (Ephesians 5:18)

Drunkenness and being filled with the Spirit are both about control. The question is what's going to control you. Alcohol, drugs, and every other hiding place offer a counterfeit of what only God can give: comfort, courage, peace, and joy. The Spirit gives the real thing.

If you've struggled with alcohol or drugs, let me say something plainly as a man who has been there. The safest thing for you is not to drink at all. Some men can drink a beer with dinner and never think about it again. If you're not one of those men, stop pretending you are.

The Wrestling Match Inside

If you've ever tried to quit something and couldn't, you'll recognize the man Paul describes in Romans 7. He wants to do right and doesn't. He hates what he does and does it anyway.

> *For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh; for to want is present with me, but to work out the good I do not find. For the good that I want, I do not do; but the evil that I do not want, this I practice.* (Romans 7:18-19)

Many men in addiction live right there. They aren't fooling themselves about whether it's wrong. They know. They just can't stop. And every failed promise piles on more shame.

But Paul doesn't leave us there. A few verses later he cries out, "Who will deliver me out of the body of this death?" and then answers his own question: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). And in the very next chapter he says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit of life has set us free (Romans 8:1-2).

Willpower alone will lose this fight. Jesus will not.

Freedom Takes a Community

One of the biggest mistakes men make is trying to get free alone. We don't want anyone to know, so we try to quit in secret. And in secret, the addiction keeps winning.

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. Men who had barely said a word started telling the truth.

It's part of why I later wrote my own Scripture-based 12-step course, *New Beginnings*. I've seen what happens when a man stops hiding and starts walking with other men toward Jesus. One man's honesty gives the next man courage.

> *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)

Practical Steps Out

If you're caught in a hiding place, here's where to start.

- **Tell the truth to one person.** A pastor, a trusted friend, your wife, a counselor. Say it plainly: "I have a problem, and I can't stop on my own."
- **See a doctor.** This is especially important with alcohol, prescription pills, and other drugs. Stopping some substances suddenly can be dangerous, even deadly. Get medical help to do it safely.
- **Find a recovery group.** Celebrate Recovery and other Christ-centered groups meet in churches all over the country. Go, sit in the back if you need to, and keep going back.
- **Call for help if you don't know where to start.** In the United States, the SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) is free, confidential, and open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English and Spanish. They can help you find treatment near you.
- **Get rid of the supply.** Clear it out of the house, the truck, and the garage. Change the route that takes you past the bar or the liquor store.
- **Deal with what's underneath.** Pain, grief, trauma, anger, loneliness. A Christian counselor can help you face the things you've been numbing.
- **Make amends.** When the time is right, and with help, go to the people you've hurt and own what you did, without excuses.

And none of this happens once and is done. Recovery has good days, bad days, and days when old temptations come back. That's 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.

Rick's First Year

Rick Sorensen didn't change overnight. He relapsed once, about two months in, and almost quit the group out of shame. Walt showed up at his door the next morning with two cups of coffee and said, "You fell. Get up. We're going Tuesday." Rick went.

A year later, Rick stood up at that same group and told his story. He'd gotten his license back. His crew still worked for him. His daughter was letting him see his grandkids again. And he'd driven a young carpenter from his own crew to his first meeting the week before.

“I spent thirty years building straight walls,” Rick said, “and my own life was falling over. God’s been tearing it down to the studs and framing it again. It’s slow. But it’s straight this time.”

When It’s Someone You Love

Some of you are reading this chapter not for yourself, but for someone you love. A son who can’t stop using. A brother who drinks every night. A friend whose life is coming apart.

That’s one of the most painful places a man can stand. Here are a few things that help.

Tell him the truth, with love. Walt said nobody ever told his brother the truth because they didn’t want to hurt his feelings. Love doesn’t stay quiet while someone destroys himself. Speak plainly, specifically, and without contempt. “I love you, and I’m scared for you. Here’s what I’ve seen.”

Don’t protect him from the consequences. It’s natural to want to rescue the people we love. But paying his debts, making his excuses, or cleaning up his messes can keep him from hitting the place where he’s finally ready to change. Counselors sometimes call that enabling. It feels like love, but it can prolong the disease.

Set boundaries, and keep them. You can love a man and still refuse to give him money, let him drive drunk with your kids, or let him live in your home while he’s using.

Get help for yourself. Families of people caught in addiction carry a heavy load. Many churches and communities have groups for family members. Talk with your pastor or a counselor.

And keep praying. Never stop. The father of the lost son in Luke 15 kept watching the road. You can keep watching too.

A Prayer for Freedom

> *Lord, I’ve been hiding, and I’m tired. You know what I reach for when life hurts. I can’t break this on my own. I confess it to You, and I surrender my life into Your hands again today. Give me the courage to tell the truth to another person and to get the help I need. Set me free, Lord, because if the Son sets me free, I will be free indeed. Keep me on the path one day at a time. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Your Move

Name your hiding place, honestly, in writing. What do you reach for when life hurts? If it has become something you can’t stop, tell one person this week and make one phone call: a doctor, a counselor, a recovery group, or the SAMHSA helpline. If you’re not sure whether it’s a problem, ask your wife or a close friend. They probably already know.

Pass It On

Is there a Rick in your life, a man everybody laughs with but nobody tells the truth to? Pray for him by name this week. Then ask God for the courage to have the conversation Walt had on that back porch. Lead with your own story and your own weakness, not a lecture.

Talk It Over

1. What hiding places are most common among the men you know? What's yours?
2. Read John 8:34-36. How is addiction a kind of slavery? What does it mean to be "free indeed"?
3. Why do you think men try so hard to quit things in secret? Why doesn't it usually work?
4. Read Romans 7:18-19 and 7:24-25. Where do you see yourself in Paul's struggle? Where does he find hope?
5. Walt said nobody ever told his brother the truth. Is there someone in your life who needs you to be honest with him?

Chapter 7: A Short Fuse

> *So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of a man does not produce the righteousness of God.*
>
> James 1:19-20 (SLB)

The Hole Behind the Door

The call was for a noisy return vent in a back bedroom. When Cole pulled the grille off the wall, he noticed something behind the bedroom door: a patch in the drywall, about the size of a fist, mudded over but never sanded or painted. He'd seen enough of those in his career to know what they usually were.

The homeowner was Dwayne Pruitt, forty-four, a shift supervisor at a distribution warehouse. He was friendly enough, but he had a way of standing too close and talking too loud. While Cole worked, Dwayne's twelve-year-old son, Caden, came down the hall, saw his dad, and flinched. Just a little. It was the kind of thing you'd miss if you weren't looking. Cole was looking.

Three weeks later, Dwayne showed up at Walt's shop on a Saturday morning. Somebody at his church had told him about it. He sat down hard on a stool and didn't touch his coffee.

"I need to tell somebody something," he said, "and I don't want to tell my pastor, because he'll look at me different."

Walt nodded for him to go on.

"Last Sunday, I had Caden in the truck. Some guy cut me off on the highway. I lost it. I chased him for two miles, riding his bumper, laying on the horn, screaming out the window. When he finally pulled off, I followed him into a gas station. I got out of my truck. I don't even know what I was going to do. He saw me coming and drove off." Dwayne stared at the floor. "And then I turned around, and Caden was sitting in the passenger seat crying. He was so scared he'd wet himself. Twelve years old."

Nobody said anything for a while.

"My dad was a yeller," Dwayne said. "He never hit us much, but he'd put his fist through things. Doors, walls, the windshield of his own car once. I swore I'd never be him." He laughed, but there was nothing funny in it. "There's a hole in the wall of my son's bedroom. I put it there in March."

Walt set his mug down. "Dwayne, I'm going to tell you something, and I want you to hear it. The fact that you're sitting here means you're not your dad. Your dad never sat on a stool in another man's shop and told the truth about it. You can stop this. But not by promising harder. You're going to need some help."

Anger Isn't Always Wrong

Let's be clear about something first. Anger itself isn't always sin.

God gets angry. The Bible speaks of His wrath against sin and injustice many times. Jesus got angry too. When the religious leaders cared more about their rules than about a man with a withered hand, Mark tells us Jesus looked around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of their hearts (Mark 3:5). When men turned the temple into a marketplace, He made a whip and drove them out (John 2:13-17).

Anger, rightly used, is a response to something that is really wrong. A man should get angry when he sees a child abused, a widow cheated, or the weak trampled. That kind of anger can drive him to act for justice.

But be honest. That isn't most of our anger. Most of our anger isn't about God's glory or justice for the weak. It's about me. Somebody cut me off. Somebody disrespected me. Somebody got in my way. My kid didn't listen. My wife didn't do what I wanted. Things didn't go my way.

> *Be angry, and do not sin; let the sun not set on your anger, nor give place to the devil.*
> (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Paul assumes we'll get angry. What he warns against is letting anger turn into sin, and letting it sit and fester until it gives the devil a place. Think of that place as a foothold, a small spot to stand. Give the enemy a foothold in your anger, and he'll use it to climb into your marriage, your home, and your kids' hearts.

Crouching at the Door

The first murder in the Bible started with anger. Cain was furious that God accepted his brother's offering and not his. Before Cain ever lifted a hand, God warned him.

> *And the LORD said to Cain, "Why do you burn **with anger**, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, **is there** not a lifting up? And if you do not do well, sin **is** crouching at the door; and to you **is** its desire, and you shall rule over it."* (Genesis 4:6-7)

Sin is pictured like a wild animal crouching at the door, waiting to pounce. God told Cain that he still had a choice. He could rule over it. Cain didn't. He let his anger sit, and it grew, and he killed his brother in a field.

Most of us will never do anything that extreme. But many men live with an animal crouching at the door of their hearts. They're always one bad day, one rude driver, or one disobedient kid away from letting it loose. And the people who live with them learn to walk on eggshells.

What's Under the Anger?

Here's something that helps many men. Anger is often a cover for something else.

Counselors sometimes call anger a "secondary" emotion. Underneath it there's usually something we don't want to feel: fear, hurt, shame, embarrassment, helplessness, or exhaustion. For many men, anger is the only emotion that feels manly. We can't admit we're scared or hurt, so it comes out as rage.

When Dwayne finally sat down with a Christian counselor, he figured out that his worst blowups came when he felt disrespected or out of control. At work he was under constant pressure from managers

above him. At home, when his son didn't obey right away, it felt like one more person who didn't respect him. The guy on the highway was just the last straw. And underneath all of it was a little boy who'd watched his dad put a fist through a door and had decided the only way to be safe was to be the scariest person in the room.

Understanding that didn't excuse anything. But it helped him see what he was really fighting.

Quick to Hear, Slow to Speak

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. James gives three commands: be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Then he explains why. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

That's the bottom line. Your anger won't make your kids more obedient, your wife more loving, your coworkers more respectful, or the world more just. It might get you what you want in the moment. It'll cost you what you really want in the long run.

Proverbs has a lot to say about this.

> *Better **is** one long of anger than a mighty **one**, and he who rules over his spirit than he who captures a city.* (Proverbs 16:32)

> *A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger.* (Proverbs 15:1)

A man who is slow to anger and rules his own spirit is better than a soldier who conquers a city. That's the opposite of what our culture tells men. It says real men explode. God says real men rule their spirits.

Putting It Off

So what does a man do with a short fuse? Paul gives us a picture of putting off the old and putting on the new.

> *Let all bitterness and rage and wrath and clamor and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.* (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Here are some practical steps that have helped many men:

- **Know your warning signs.** A tight jaw, a hot face, clenched fists, a racing heart. Learn what your body does before you blow, so you can catch it early.
- **Take a time-out, and say so.** "I'm getting too angry to talk about this well. I'm going to take a walk, and I'll be back in twenty minutes." Then come back. Walking away isn't running away if you return.
- **Don't drive angry.** If someone cuts you off, let him go. Pull over if you need to. Nothing on the road is worth your family's safety.
- **Name what's underneath.** Ask yourself, "What am I really feeling? Hurt? Scared? Embarrassed? Exhausted?" Then tell God, and maybe your wife.
- **Watch the fuel.** Lack of sleep, alcohol, stress, and hunger all shorten the fuse.
- **Apologize fast and fully.** When you blow it, go back and own it. No "but." Your kids need to hear their father say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"

- **Get help.** A Christian counselor or an anger management group isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign that you love your family enough to change.

A Hard Word About Violence

I need to be very direct here. If your anger has ever led you to hit, shove, choke, or threaten your wife or your children, or to put them in danger the way Dwayne did on the highway, you are past the point where this chapter is enough. You need professional help now, from a licensed Christian counselor and your pastor, and your family may need a safe place while you get it. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911.

This isn't about shaming you. It's about protecting people God gave you to protect. Husbands are called to love their wives the way Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). Fathers are told not to provoke their children to anger (Ephesians 6:4). A man who makes his family afraid of him has turned God's design upside down. The good news is that God can change a violent man. But it takes honesty, help, and time.

Breaking the Chain

Dwayne did the hard things. He went to counseling for a year. He told his pastor, who didn't look at him any differently, except maybe with more respect. He started meeting with Walt and Cole on Saturdays. He sold his big lifted truck, partly because of the payment and partly, he said, because he drove like a different man in it.

The hardest thing he did was sit down with Caden. He told his son he was sorry for the highway, for the wall, and for all the yelling. He told him what his own dad had been like. He told him, "It stops with me. I'm getting help, and if I ever scare you like that again, I want you to tell me, and tell Mom."

Then he and Caden patched the hole in the bedroom wall together. They sanded it smooth, primed it, and painted it. Dwayne told the men at Walt's that it was the best afternoon he'd spent with his son in years.

A chain of anger can run through a family for generations. But it can stop with one man who decides, by God's grace, that it will stop with him.

Anger in the Comments

Anger used to need a target in the room. Now it can find one anywhere in the world.

Many men who would never yell at a neighbor spend their evenings typing furious replies to strangers online. They argue about politics, sports, religion, and news stories with people they'll never meet. They send emails at work they'd never say to a coworker's face. And because there's a screen in between, they say things that would shame them if anyone they loved read them.

The Bible's rules for speech don't change when you're typing. Ephesians 4:29 says no rotten word should come out of your mouth, but only what is good for building up. James 3 says the tongue is a small fire that can set a whole forest ablaze. That's true of your thumbs too.

Here are a few rules that have helped many men. Never post, comment, or send an email while you're angry. Write it if you have to, then wait until tomorrow. Ask, "Would I say this to his face, with my kids watching?" Ask, "Will this build up anybody?" And remember that the person on the other side of that screen is made in the image of God, whether he acts like it or not.

A Prayer for Self-Control

> *Father, You know how quickly I get angry, and You know what's underneath it. Forgive me for the times I've hurt the people I love with my words and my temper. Help me be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When I feel it rising, help me stop and come to You. Put away my bitterness, rage, and harshness, and make me kind and tenderhearted. Let the chain of anger stop with me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Ask your wife, your kids, or a close friend this week: "Do you ever feel afraid of my anger?" Then listen without defending yourself. Write down your warning signs and the situations that set you off most. Pick one step from this chapter and practice it every day. If anyone in your home is afraid of you, call a Christian counselor this week.

Pass It On

If you've learned to control your temper, you have something valuable to offer. Look for a younger man who is struggling with anger, especially a young father. Share your story honestly, including your failures. Offer to be the man he can call when he's about to lose it.

Talk It Over

1. What makes you angriest? What does that say about what you value?
2. Read Ephesians 4:26-27. What's the difference between being angry and letting anger turn into sin?
3. Dwayne's anger covered fear, disrespect, and an old wound from his father. What tends to be underneath your anger?
4. Read Proverbs 16:32. How is that picture of strength different from the one our culture gives men?
5. Is there a chain of anger in your family's history? What would it take for it to stop with you?

Chapter 8: The 3 A.M. Mind

> *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 4:6-7 (SLB)

Chest Pains

Sam Whitaker woke up at 3:07 in the morning with his heart pounding so hard he could feel it in his teeth. His chest was tight. His left arm tingled. He couldn't get a full breath. He was thirty-nine years old, and he was sure he was having a heart attack.

His wife, Megan, drove him to the emergency room in her pajamas. They ran an electrocardiogram, drew blood, and kept him for four hours. His heart was fine. The doctor, a young woman who looked like she'd been awake for two days, sat on a rolling stool and asked him a few questions. Was he under a lot of stress? Was he sleeping? Did this happen often?

Sam laughed. Then, to his own surprise, he started to cry.

He owned a small landscaping company with six employees. He'd started it with a used truck and a borrowed trailer twelve years earlier, and he was proud of it. But the last eighteen months had been brutal. Fuel prices went up, a big commercial client went bankrupt and never paid him, and he'd taken out a loan to buy new equipment right before the work slowed down. Six families depended on his paychecks. So did his own. For months he'd been lying awake running numbers in his head, worst case after worst case, until the sun came up.

"You had a panic attack," the doctor said gently. "They're very real, and they're very scary. But they won't kill you. I want you to follow up with your regular doctor, and I'd like you to think about talking to a counselor."

Sam nodded and said he would. In the truck, he told Megan he didn't need a counselor. He just needed a good month.

Two weeks later, Sam's crew was mowing the lawn at the church where Walt Kessler went. Walt brought out a pitcher of iced tea, the way he always did, and noticed that Sam looked terrible. They got to talking. When Sam mentioned the ER, Walt pulled up a folding chair.

"I had the same thing," Walt said, "about thirty years ago, when the shop I worked for was going under. I thought I was dying. I was too proud to tell anybody but my wife, and she's the one who made me go see somebody." He took a sip of tea. "You know what my problem was? I was trying to carry tomorrow on today's strength. A man can't do that. God doesn't give it to you."

For years I believed a strong Christian man should handle his struggles alone. That pride kept me isolated until my wife caught me on May 29, 2020, and took me to my first 12-step meeting. She waited in the

truck. I went in drunk and wept through the whole meeting. Sitting with other men who admitted they needed help showed me that getting help is not a lack of faith. It is honesty.

The Worry Nobody Sees

Many men live with a low hum of fear that never quite goes away. They don't call it anxiety. They call it stress, or being responsible, or just life. But it shows up at 3:00 a.m. It shows up as a tight chest, a short temper, a knot in the stomach, a mind that won't shut off, and a habit of imagining the worst.

Men today have plenty to worry about. Jobs feel less secure. Prices keep climbing. The news never stops. Every screen in our lives feeds us a steady drip of threat and outrage. Many of us carry the weight of providing for a family in a world that feels shakier every year.

And most men carry it alone. We think worry is part of the job. We think admitting fear is weakness. So we push it down, and it comes out sideways: in anger, in drinking, in overwork, in sleepless nights, in panic attacks in the middle of the night.

Jesus on Worry

Jesus talked about worry more than you might think. In the Sermon on the Mount, He spent a good part of a chapter on it (Matthew 6:25-34). He pointed at the birds, who don't plant or harvest, and said your heavenly Father feeds them. He pointed at the wildflowers and said not even Solomon was dressed like one of these. Then He asked a question every worried man should hear: which of you, by being anxious, can add even a little to his lifespan (Matthew 6:27)?

And then He closed with this.

> *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about its own things. Sufficient for the day* ***is*** *its trouble.* (Matthew 6:34)

Walt had it right. Most of our anxiety comes from trying to live in tomorrow. We run scenarios, rehearse disasters, and carry problems that haven't happened yet and may never happen. God gives grace for today. He doesn't give you tomorrow's grace until tomorrow comes.

Pray Instead of Worry

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. It's one of the most practical passages in the Bible for an anxious man.

Paul says, be anxious about nothing. That sounds impossible until you read the rest. He doesn't just tell us to stop worrying. He tells us what to do instead: in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

In other words, turn every worry into a prayer. When your mind starts running the numbers at 3:00 a.m., take each fear and hand it to God, one at a time. "Lord, I'm afraid we won't make payroll. I'm handing that to You. Lord, I'm worried about my son. I'm handing him to You."

And do it with thanksgiving. Thanking God for what He's already done reminds you that He's been faithful before and will be again.

Then Paul makes a promise. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. "Guard" is a military word. It pictures a soldier standing watch. When you hand your fears to God, His peace stands guard at the door of your heart and your thoughts.

Peter, a man who knew a thing or two about fear, put it simply.

> *having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.* (1 Peter 5:7)

Prayer Doesn't Have to Be Pretty

Some men hear "pray about it" and think they don't know how. Let me tell you something I learned the hard way.

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.

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.

Fear Is Not the Boss

Fear isn't always sin. It's a normal human response to danger, and sometimes it keeps us alive. Even brave men feel afraid. David, the giant-killer, wrote this.

> ***In the** day I fear, I will trust in You.* (Psalm 56:3)

Notice he didn't say, "I'm never afraid." He said, in the day I fear, I will trust in You. The question isn't whether you'll feel fear. It's who you'll run to when you do.

God said the same thing to Joshua, a man stepping into a job far bigger than he was.

> *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and be bold. Do not be terrified, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God **is** with you in every **place** where you go.* (Joshua 1:9)

And through Isaiah, God spoke words that have steadied frightened people for thousands of years.

> *do not be afraid, for I **am** with you; do not look about, for I **am** your God. I have strengthened you; indeed, I have helped you; indeed, I have upheld you with the right hand of My righteousness.* (Isaiah 41:10)

When Peter stepped out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the water, he did fine as long as he looked at Jesus. When he looked at the wind and the waves, he started to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" and Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught him (Matthew 14:28-31). That's a picture of every anxious man. Where you look determines whether you walk or sink. And even when you sink, Jesus is close enough to grab your hand.

Help for the Body Too

I want to say something plainly, because many Christian men need to hear it. Anxiety is sometimes more than a spiritual problem. God made us body and soul, and the two affect each other. Panic attacks, constant worry, and sleepless nights can come from stress, but they can also be tied to your health, your sleep, your hormones, caffeine, alcohol, or the chemistry of your brain.

Seeing a doctor about anxiety isn't a lack of faith. Talking to a Christian counselor isn't a lack of faith. If a doctor prescribes medication to help you through a hard season, taking it is no more a lack of faith than taking medicine for high blood pressure. God often works through doctors, counselors, and medicine. Luke, who wrote two books of the New Testament, was a physician (Colossians 4:14).

Here are some other practical things that help:

- **Feed the right things.** Cut back on the news, the scrolling, and the caffeine, especially late in the day.
- **Move your body.** A walk, a workout, or yard work burns off stress like nothing else.
- **Protect your sleep.** Set a bedtime and keep your phone out of the bedroom.
- **Write it down.** When your mind is racing at night, keep a notepad by the bed. Write the worry down, pray over it, and leave it on the paper until morning.
- **Make a plan for what you can control.** Sam sat down with an accountant and a banker and made a real plan. Facing the numbers was scary, but it was less scary than imagining them.
- **Tell someone.** Fear grows in the dark. Saying it out loud to your wife, a friend, or a group of men shrinks it down to size.

Sam's Spring

Sam took Walt's advice. He saw his doctor and started meeting with a Christian counselor. He told his crew the truth about the business. They surprised him by offering to work a four-day week for a couple of months to get through the slow season. He started coming to Walt's on Saturday mornings.

The business didn't turn around overnight. But by spring, he'd landed two new commercial contracts, and he was sleeping through the night most nights. "Nothing changed at first," he told the men at Walt's. "The numbers were still the numbers. What changed was that I stopped trying to carry it by myself. I handed it to God about fifty times a day, and I let some of you help me carry it too."

When the Whole World Feels Shaky

Some fears are personal. Others come from watching the world. Wars, elections, prices, pandemics, crime, and a culture that seems to be changing faster than anyone can keep up with. Many men carry a low-grade dread about the future of their country, their kids, and their way of life.

The news is designed to keep you watching, and fear keeps people watching. If you feed on it all day, you'll be afraid all day.

God's people have lived through far worse than anything we're facing. The psalmist wrote one of the great songs of confidence while picturing the very mountains shaking in the heart of the seas.

> *God **is** a refuge and strength for us, a help in troubles, found abundantly. Therefore we will not fear when the earth changes and when mountains shake in the heart of the seas.* (Psalm 46:1-2)

God isn't wringing His hands over the headlines. He rules over the nations (Psalm 22:28). That doesn't mean we should ignore what's happening or stop caring. Christians should vote, serve, pray for their leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and work for the good of their communities. But we do it without panic, because our ultimate hope isn't in any election, economy, or country. It's in a King whose kingdom can't be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

Turn the news off sometimes. Pray for the things you're worried about. And then go love your neighbor. Fear shrinks when your hands are busy doing good.

A Prayer for Peace

> *Lord, You know the fears that keep me up at night. I've been trying to carry tomorrow on today's strength, and I can't. Right now I hand You my worries about my work, my money, my family, and my future. Thank You for every way You've been faithful to me before. Let Your peace, which surpasses all understanding, guard my heart and my thoughts in Christ Jesus. When I'm afraid, I will trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

This week, every time you notice yourself worrying, stop and turn it into a short prayer: "Lord, I'm handing You this." Keep a notepad by your bed. Write out Philippians 4:6-7 and read it every morning. If you've been struggling with anxiety for a long time, or having panic attacks, make an appointment with your doctor.

Pass It On

Many men around you are carrying fear in silence. Be the first to admit you've struggled too. Ask a friend, "What's keeping you up at night these days?" Then listen, and offer to pray with him right there.

Talk It Over

1. What worries tend to keep you up at night? How do they show up in your body or your behavior?

2. Read Matthew 6:34. What tomorrow are you trying to carry on today's strength?

3. Read Philippians 4:6-7. What would it look like for you to turn your worries into prayers this week?

4. Have you ever thought that seeing a doctor or counselor about anxiety would show a lack of faith? How does this chapter change that?

5. Peter began to sink when he looked at the wind instead of Jesus. Where are you looking right now?

Chapter 9: The Dark Room

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

Psalm 34:18 (SLB)

The Tools

Dale Hutchins had been coming to Walt's shop on Saturdays for about a year. He was fifty-five, a heavy-equipment mechanic, divorced two years after a twenty-six-year marriage. He lived alone in an apartment across town. His son, who was thirty, hadn't spoken to him since the divorce. Dale didn't talk much at Walt's, but he came every week, and he was the first man to pick up a broom when the coffee was done.

In late September, Dale missed a Saturday. Then he missed another. Cole texted him and got a short answer: "Busy. Next week." He didn't come the next week either.

The Wednesday after that, Dale showed up at the shop where Cole worked, at the end of the day, with the bed of his truck full of tools. Good tools. A rolling chest, a full set of wrenches, a torque wrench Cole knew cost more than his first car.

"Want you to have these," Dale said. "I'm not going to need them."

"You retiring?" Cole asked.

Dale shrugged. "Something like that."

Cole thanked him and helped unload. But driving home, something kept nagging at him. The missed Saturdays. The short texts. The way Dale wouldn't look at him. The phrase: I'm not going to need them. He called Walt from the truck.

Walt was quiet on the other end of the line for a second. Then he said, "Pick me up. We're going over there tonight."

Dale's apartment was dark when they knocked. He opened the door in a T-shirt he looked like he'd been wearing for days. The place smelled like stale beer. On the kitchen table, Cole saw a stack of envelopes, each one addressed by hand. One said *Kyle*, his son's name.

Walt didn't make small talk. He sat down at the table, looked Dale in the eye, and asked the question most people are too afraid to ask.

"Dale, are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Dale stared at him for a long time. Then his face crumpled, and he nodded.

"Do you have a plan?"

Another nod. He told them. He had it all worked out, down to the day.

Walt reached across the table and put his old hand on top of Dale's. "Thank you for telling me the truth. I'm not going anywhere. Neither is Cole. We're going to get you some help tonight, and we're going to stay with you."

Cole dialed 988 on his phone and put it on speaker. A calm woman's voice answered. She talked with Dale for a while, and then with Walt and Cole, and helped them decide what to do next. At eleven o'clock that night, they drove Dale to the emergency room and sat with him until a doctor came. Walt took the envelopes with him and later gave them back to Dale, unopened, when he was ready to burn them.

The Room Many Men Live In

I want to talk to you about something many men never talk about. Some of you reading this are living in a dark room right now. Maybe it isn't as dark as Dale's. Maybe it's a heaviness that won't lift, a gray fog over everything, a sense that nothing matters and nothing will get better. Maybe you've wondered if your family would be better off without you.

If that's you, please hear me. You are not weak, you are not crazy, and you are not alone. And you don't have to stay in that room.

This is one of the most serious problems facing men today. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the suicide rate among men in 2023 was about four times higher than the rate among women, and men make up nearly 80 percent of suicides. Those numbers are not just statistics. They're fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, coworkers, and friends. Many of them were men nobody suspected, because men are very good at hiding pain.

If You Are in That Room Right Now

If you are thinking about ending your life, please stop reading for a moment and do this first.

- In the United States, call or text **988** to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. It's free, confidential, and available 24 hours a day, every day. You can also chat online through 988lifeline.org.
- If you are a veteran or in the military, call 988 and press 1, or text 838255, to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.
- If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Tell one person today. Your wife, a friend, your pastor, anyone. Say the words: "I'm not okay, and I'm thinking about ending my life."

Then come back and keep reading. I'll be here.

Great Men of God in Dark Rooms

If you think a real man of faith would never feel this way, read your Bible. Some of the greatest men in Scripture spent time in the dark.

Elijah had just seen God send fire from heaven and defeat the prophets of Baal. It was the high point of his life. Then the queen threatened to kill him, and he ran into the wilderness, sat down under a broom tree, and asked God to let him die.

> *And he himself went into the wilderness a day's journey, and he came and sat under a certain broom tree; and he asked for himself to die, and he said, "**It is** enough now, O LORD; take my life, for I **am** not better than my fathers."* (1 Kings 19:4)

Look at what God did next. He didn't lecture Elijah. He let him sleep. Then He sent an angel to wake him up and feed him. Then He let him sleep again, and fed him again (1 Kings 19:5-8). Only after Elijah had rested and eaten did God speak to him, not in a wind or an earthquake or a fire, but in a low, gentle whisper. God gave him a job to do and a friend, Elisha, to walk with him. He also told Elijah he wasn't as alone as he thought (1 Kings 19:11-18).

There's a lesson there. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a man in the dark can do is sleep, eat, see a doctor, and let someone take care of him.

David wrote some of his most honest prayers from the dark room.

> *Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him, the salvation of my face and my God.* (Psalm 42:11)

Notice he's talking to himself. He's asking his own soul why it's so bowed down. And then he answers it: wait for God, because I will yet give thanks to Him. He doesn't pretend the darkness isn't there. He speaks truth into it.

There's even a psalm, Psalm 88, that ends in darkness, with no happy turn at the end. I'm thankful it's in the Bible. It tells me God isn't afraid of our darkest prayers. He wants us to bring them to Him, even when we can't see a way out.

I Have Been the Man Who Disappeared

I know a little about the dark room myself.

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.

And I think about the pastor who helped me when I was at my lowest. It wasn't a sermon or a verse or even his advice that I remember most. It was that he was there. 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 pull me out of the pit. He just refused to leave me alone in it while God gave me the strength to climb out.

God Is Near the Brokenhearted

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. The Lord is near to the broken of heart. When you feel furthest from God, He's actually closest.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote a whole book of grief called Lamentations after Jerusalem was destroyed. In the middle of it, he wrote some of the most hopeful words in the Bible.

> *This I bring back to my heart; therefore I will wait. The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end.* ***They are*** *new in the mornings; great* ***is*** *Your faithfulness.* (Lamentations 3:21-23)

New in the mornings. If you're in the dark room, you might not be able to see past tonight. That's okay. You don't have to. You only need enough hope to get to tomorrow morning, and God's mercies will be waiting there.

Help Is Not Weakness

Depression is real, and it's often a medical condition as well as a spiritual and emotional one. It can be caused or made worse by grief, trauma, loss, chronic pain, alcohol or drugs, health problems, and the chemistry of the brain. Prayer and Scripture matter deeply. But so do doctors, counselors, and sometimes medication. Using all of them is wisdom, not weakness.

If you're in the dark room, here's what I'd ask you to do:

- Tell someone the truth, today.
- See your doctor, and be honest about how you feel.
- Talk to a licensed Christian counselor.
- Cut out alcohol and drugs. They make depression worse.
- Remove or lock up anything you might use to hurt yourself, especially firearms and stockpiled medication. Ask a friend to hold them for you for now.
- Stay connected. Go to church. Go to your group. Answer the phone when your friends call.
- Take care of your body: sleep, eat, walk outside.

How to Help a Man in the Dark

For the rest of you, here's what Walt and Cole knew that night, and what you need to know too.

Watch for warning signs: a man pulling away from people, giving away things he values, talking about being a burden or about not being around, sudden calm after a long depression, increased drinking, getting his affairs in order, or saying goodbye in strange ways.

If you see them, ask directly, the way Walt did: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" Asking won't put the idea in his head. It gives him permission to tell the truth. If he says yes, don't leave him alone. Call or text 988 with him, or take him to an emergency room. If he's in immediate danger, call 911.

And don't promise to keep it a secret. A man's life matters more than his privacy.

Dale's Long Road Back

Dale spent five days in the hospital. Then came months of counseling, medicine that took a few tries to get right, and a lot of Saturday mornings at Walt's. He started going to church again. He joined a grief group for divorced men. The darkness didn't lift all at once. It lifted a little at a time, like fog burning off a field.

About a year later, Dale wrote his son a letter. This one wasn't a goodbye. It was an apology, with no excuses in it. His son didn't answer for three months. Then, one Sunday afternoon, Dale's phone rang.

Dale asked Cole to give him back his torque wrench about that time. He said he had a feeling he'd be needing it after all.

If You've Lost Someone to Suicide

Some of you reading this chapter have already lost someone. A father, a son, a brother, a friend from your unit. If that's you, I'm so sorry. That kind of grief is unlike any other. It often comes mixed with guilt, anger, confusion, and a thousand questions that may never be answered.

Let me say a few things gently.

It was not your fault. You may replay the last conversation a hundred times and wonder what you missed. But the person you lost made a choice in a moment of terrible pain, and you are not responsible for it. Even trained professionals can't always see it coming.

You don't have to have all the answers. Some questions won't be answered this side of heaven. It's okay to bring them to God anyway. He can handle your anger and your questions.

Get help for your own grief. Many communities have support groups for people who have lost someone to suicide. A pastor or counselor can walk with you. Watch your own heart, because grief this heavy can pull you toward the dark room too. If it does, call or text 988.

And remember that God is still near to the broken of heart. Talk about the person you lost. Remember his life, not just his death. And let other men carry you for a while.

A Prayer From the Dark

> *Lord, it's dark in here, and some days I don't know how to keep going. I can't see past tonight. But You said You are near to the broken of heart, so I'm asking You to be near to me. Give me the courage to tell someone the truth. Lead me to the help I need. Hold on to me when I can't hold on to You. Let me see Your mercies new in the morning. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

If you're in the dark room, tell someone today, and call or text 988 if you're thinking about ending your life. Make an appointment with your doctor this week. If you're not in that room, save 988 in your phone right now, and write down the warning signs in this chapter so you'll recognize them.

Pass It On

Think of a man you haven't heard from in a while, especially one who's been through a divorce, a job loss, a death, or a health crisis. Call him this week. Not a text, a call. If something seems wrong, ask him directly how he's really doing, and be ready to stay with him if the answer is hard.

Talk It Over

1. Why do you think men are so good at hiding depression and so much more likely to die by suicide?
2. Read 1 Kings 19:4-8. What does God's care for Elijah teach us about how to help a man in the dark?
3. Have you ever been in a dark room yourself? Who helped you, or who do you wish had?
4. Why is it so hard to ask a man directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" What would help you do it?
5. Read Lamentations 3:21-23. What does it mean to you that God's compassions are "new in the mornings"?

Chapter 10: Going It Alone

> *Likewise, younger **ones**, be subject to **the** elders. And all **of you**, being subject to one another, clothe yourselves with humility, because God opposes **the** proud, but gives grace to **the** humble. Therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in **due** time*
>
> 1 Peter 5:5-6 (SLB)

The Roof

Hank Lindgren had run his own towing company for thirty-one years. He'd pulled cars out of snowbanks at two in the morning, hauled wrecked semis off the interstate, and once winched a pickup out of a canal with the driver still in it. He was sixty-two, built like a fireplug, and proud of the fact that he'd never asked anybody for anything.

In March, Hank had open-heart surgery. Triple bypass. The surgeon told him no lifting over ten pounds for six weeks, no driving for four, no ladders for at least three months. Hank's wife, Linda, wrote the instructions on a card and stuck it to the refrigerator.

Six weeks after the surgery, the evaporative cooler on Hank's roof needed new pads and a pump before the heat came. Hank's son offered to come over Saturday. Cole Barrett, who'd done work for Hank for years, offered to do it at cost. A couple of the men from Walt's shop offered to help too. Hank told them all the same thing. "I've been doing my own cooler for thirty years. I'll take care of it."

On Tuesday, while Linda was at work, Hank leaned a ladder against the house and climbed up with a box of cooler pads under his arm. He made it to the roof. On the way down, his legs went shaky, and he missed a rung. He fell about eight feet onto the concrete patio and broke his wrist and two ribs. He lay there for forty minutes before a neighbor heard him.

The men from Walt's shop replaced the cooler pads and the pump that Saturday while Hank sat in a lawn chair in the yard with his arm in a cast, scowling. When they were done, Walt pulled up a chair next to him.

"You know what your problem is, Hank?" Walt said.

"I fell off a ladder," Hank grumbled.

"No. You fell off a ladder because you'd rather break your neck than let anybody see you need something." Walt said it kindly, but he said it. "I know, because I'm the same way. Took me sixty years to figure out it isn't strength. It's pride. And it nearly killed you."

Hank didn't say anything. But the next Saturday, for the first time, he showed up at Walt's.

I have spent about 40 years at work being the one who solves problems, not the one who asks for help. I carried that into my personal life and hid my drinking, even from my friend of more than forty years. It

took failing on my own to show me that isolation is a trap. Strength in the Christian life comes from walking shoulder to shoulder with other men.

The Lone Ranger Problem

Men are taught from boyhood that real men don't need help. Don't cry. Don't complain. Don't ask for directions. Handle it yourself. Our heroes in movies are almost always loners: the cowboy who rides into town alone, the soldier who takes on the whole army by himself, the detective nobody understands.

There's something good in that. God wants men to be strong, responsible, and willing to carry hard things. Galatians 6:5 says each will bear his own load. Nobody admires a man who won't pull his weight.

But there's also something deadly in it. A man who can never admit weakness, never ask for help, and never let anyone see him struggle is not strong. He's proud. And pride is one of the most dangerous sins in the Bible, because it's the one that keeps us from dealing with all the others.

> *Before breaking **is** pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit.* (Proverbs 16:18)

What Pride Really Is

Pride isn't the same as confidence or doing good work. You can be proud of your kids or your craftsmanship in a healthy way. Sinful pride is something deeper. It's putting myself at the center. It's trusting my own strength instead of God's. It's caring more about how I look than about what's true.

Pride shows up in a lot of ways in men's lives:

- Refusing to ask for help, even when you need it.
- Refusing to admit you're wrong, or to apologize.
- Refusing to go to the doctor, the counselor, or the pastor.
- Being unable to take correction from your wife, your boss, or a friend.
- Needing to win every argument.
- Looking down on other men who struggle with things you don't.
- Hiding your own sin so nobody knows you're not as together as you look.

The verse at the top of this chapter says God opposes the proud. That's a terrifying thought. When a man lives in pride, he isn't just standing on his own. He's standing against God, and God is standing against him. But the same verse says God gives grace to the humble. Humility opens the door to everything God wants to give.

A King Who Got Too Big

King Uzziah of Judah was one of the most successful kings Judah ever had. He won battles, built towers, dug wells, and developed new weapons. The Bible says he was marvelously helped until he was strong. Then this happened.

> *And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up until **he** acted corruptly, and he acted unfaithfully against the LORD his God, and he went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.* (2 Chronicles 26:16)

Uzziah decided he was too important to follow God's rules. He walked into the temple to burn incense, a job God had given only to the priests. When the priests confronted him, he got angry, and right there, God struck him with leprosy. He spent the rest of his life living alone in a separate house, cut off from the temple and from his people (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

Here's the pattern to watch for. Uzziah's pride grew in the good years, not the bad ones. Success is often more dangerous to a man's soul than failure, because when things are going well, we forget how much we need God, and we forget how much we need each other.

Letting Jesus Wash Your Feet

On the night before He died, Jesus did something shocking. He took off His outer robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin, and started washing His disciples' feet. That was a slave's job. The King of Kings got down on His knees in front of the men who would desert Him that very night.

When Jesus came to Peter, Peter refused.

> *Peter says to Him, "You will certainly never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me."* (John 13:8)

I used to think Peter's refusal was humility. It wasn't. It was pride. Peter didn't want to be served. He wanted to be the kind of man who didn't need it. And Jesus told him plainly that unless Jesus washed him, Peter had no part with Him.

That's the heart of the gospel. You can't be saved until you're willing to admit you need saving. A man who insists on doing it himself will never receive grace. And in the same way, a man who can't let anybody help him will never experience the kind of brotherhood God designed for him.

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

Notice that Paul says "one another." It goes both ways. Some days you'll carry another man's burden. Other days you'll need him to carry yours. Hank was happy to tow anybody's truck at two in the morning. He just couldn't stand being the one who needed the tow.

The Friend I Didn't Want

Let me tell you about a friendship God gave me that started out with plenty of pride on both sides.

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.

That friendship only became what it is because both of us had to set our pride down. I had to let him see my failures, including the drinking I'd hidden from him for years. He had to let me see his. Brotherhood isn't about always seeing eye to eye. It's about standing shoulder to shoulder when life gets hard, and that requires admitting that sometimes you can't stand on your own.

Jesus Shows Us the Way Down

If you want to know what humility looks like, look at Jesus.

> *For let this be thought in you which **was** also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in **the** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken **the** form of a slave, having come to be in **the** likeness of men; and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross.* (Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus is the strongest man who ever lived. He calmed storms, cast out demons, and raised the dead. And He used all that strength to serve. He emptied Himself. He took the form of a slave. He obeyed all the way to a cross.

Real strength isn't refusing help. Real strength is being secure enough in who you are in God that you can admit weakness, ask for help, take correction, and serve others without needing credit. That's the kind of man Jesus is, and that's the kind of man He's making you to be.

Practicing Humility

Humility isn't a feeling. It's a practice. Here are a few places to start:

- **Ask for help with one thing this week** that you'd normally handle alone.
- **Say "I was wrong" out loud** the next time you are, without adding "but."
- **Make the appointment** you've been putting off: the doctor, the dentist, the counselor, the pastor.
- **Ask your wife or a close friend,** "Where do you see pride in me?" Then listen and thank them.
- **Serve somebody** in a way nobody will notice or thank you for.
- **Thank God out loud** for the things you're tempted to take credit for.

Hank's wrist healed, and so did his heart. He still runs his towing company, but now his son handles the overnight calls. He's at Walt's most Saturdays, and he's the first one to show up with a trailer when one of the other men needs something hauled. The last time someone offered to help him load firewood, he said, "Yeah. I'd appreciate that." Linda says those words almost made her cry.

Pride in the Pew

Pride doesn't only live in tough guys who won't go to the doctor. It also lives in church.

Jesus told a story about two men who went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, a respected religious man. He stood and thanked God that he wasn't like other people: robbers, unrighteous men, adulterers, or even that tax collector over there. He listed his fasting and his giving. The other man was a tax collector, a man everyone knew was a sinner. He stood far off, wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven, beat his chest, and said, "God, be propitious to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). To be propitious means to

show mercy by turning wrath away. Jesus said it was the tax collector who went home justified (Luke 18:9-14).

Spiritual pride is sneaky. It looks down on the man who's fighting pornography because I'm not. It judges the brother who drinks because I don't. It keeps a mental scorecard of how often I'm at church compared to everyone else. It quietly believes I'm one of the good ones.

The cure is remembering the gospel. Every man in the church is there by grace, including you. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. The more clearly you see your own need for mercy, the more gently you'll treat the men around you who need it too.

A Prayer for Humility

> *Lord Jesus, You are the strongest man who ever lived, and You used Your strength to serve. Forgive me for my pride, for the times I've refused help, refused correction, and looked down on others. Teach me to ask for help when I need it and to admit when I'm wrong. Clothe me with humility. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Let me receive Your grace, and let me give it away to others. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Ask for help with one real thing this week. Then ask someone you trust, "Where do you see pride in me?" Write down what they say, and don't argue. Pray 1 Peter 5:6 over it: be humbled under the mighty hand of God, and let Him exalt you in due time.

Pass It On

Is there a Hank in your life, a man who's struggling but would rather fall off a roof than ask for help? Don't wait for him to call. Show up with a toolbox, a meal, or a truck, and tell him you're not leaving until the job's done.

Talk It Over

1. Where did you learn that real men don't need help? How has that shaped you?
2. Read Proverbs 16:18 and 1 Peter 5:5-6. Why do you think God opposes the proud so strongly?
3. Which of the ways pride shows up in men's lives fits you best?
4. Read John 13:8. Why is it sometimes harder to receive help than to give it?
5. Read Philippians 2:5-8. What would it look like for you to use your strength the way Jesus used His?

Chapter 11: Money, Debt, and the Bet in Your Pocket

> ***Let your*** *way of life* ***be*** *without love of money, being content with the things present; for He Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*
>
> Hebrews 13:5 (SLB)

The Parlay

Kevin Doyle was thirty-one and worked as an installer at the same heating and air company as Cole. He was a good worker and fun to be around, the kind of guy who always knew the score of every game and had an opinion about every coach in the country.

It started with a twenty-dollar promotion. A sports betting app offered him a "risk-free" first bet and a deposit match. He signed up on his lunch break, bet on a football game he was going to watch anyway, and won ninety dollars. It felt like free money. It felt like being smart.

Within a year, Kevin was betting on almost everything: football, basketball, baseball, tennis matches in countries he couldn't find on a map. He bet on single plays inside a game. He built parlays, stacking four or five bets together for a big payout, because the one time he'd hit a six-leg parlay he'd won $2,400, and he chased that feeling every day after. The app sent him a steady stream of offers, boosts, and "bonus bets." It knew exactly when he was most likely to play.

He told himself he was up overall. He wasn't. He stopped checking.

His wife, Brianna, handled the household bills, but Kevin had his own card for the app. When the losses got bigger, he started using "buy now, pay later" plans for groceries and gas so the cash would stay free for betting. Then he took a cash advance on a credit card. Then he borrowed against his paid-off truck. He was always one big win away from fixing everything.

In November, Brianna went to move money from savings to pay for their daughter's tonsil surgery. The savings account had eleven dollars in it. There had been almost nine thousand.

Kevin told Cole about it two days later in the parts room at work. He looked like he hadn't slept. "I don't even know how it got this bad," he said. "It was supposed to be fun."

Cole didn't know much about gambling, but he knew a man who'd lost something and couldn't stop chasing it. He told Kevin about Walt's Saturday coffee. And then he did something he'd learned from Walt. He asked, "Can I pray for you right now?" Right there in the parts room, between the filters and the capacitors, he did.

Money Talks

Jesus talked about money a lot, more than many of us would guess. That's not because God needs our money. It's because money has a grip on the human heart like almost nothing else. How a man handles his money tells you a lot about what he really trusts.

> *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Matthew 6:19-21)

Your bank statement is a plumb line. Show me where a man's money goes, and I'll show you what he loves. Not what he says he loves. What he actually loves.

And Jesus said something that should stop every man cold.

> *No one is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and wealth.*
> (Matthew 6:24)

Money makes a wonderful servant and a terrible master. It can feed your family, bless your church, and help people in need. But when it becomes the thing you trust, chase, and worry about most, it has become your god.

The Itch for More

Most money problems don't start in the bank account. They start in the heart. The Bible has a word for it: covetousness, which means wanting what you don't have so badly that it rules you.

> *And He said to them, "Watch out and guard yourselves from covetousness, because even when anyone has abundance, his life is not from his possessions."* (Luke 12:15)

We live in an economy built on making us want more. Every commercial, every feed, every bright display in a store is designed to make you feel that what you have isn't enough. The new truck. The bigger house. The better phone. The trip everyone else seems to be taking. And when you can't afford it, there's always a way to get it now and pay later.

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter: let your way of life be without love of money, being content with the things present, because God Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you." Contentment isn't settling. It's trusting that if you have God, you have enough.

Paul learned that the hard way. He'd been rich and poor, full and hungry. He said he'd learned the secret of being content in every situation, and the secret was Christ, who gave him strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

The Trap of Easy Money

Gambling has always been around. What's new is that it now lives in a man's pocket, open twenty-four hours a day, built by companies that study exactly how to keep him playing. A man can lose his savings on his lunch break without leaving the job site.

The Bible doesn't have a verse that says "Thou shalt not gamble." But it has plenty to say about the heart behind it.

> *Wealth from vanity will diminish, and he who gathers by hand will increase **it**.* (Proverbs 13:11)

> *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all the evils, which some, stretching after **it**, have been led astray from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.* (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

Paul says the desire to get rich is a snare, a trap. It drags men into ruin. Gambling feeds that desire directly. It promises something for nothing. It treats God's money as a lottery ticket. And for many men, it becomes a compulsion every bit as strong as alcohol or drugs.

If you can't stop betting, if you're hiding it, chasing losses, borrowing to play, or lying about it, you are not just having a little fun. You're in trouble, and you need help. In the United States, the National Problem Gambling Helpline is 1-800-MY-RESET (1-800-697-3738). Many betting apps and states also let you exclude yourself so you can't place bets. Use every tool you have.

The Chain of Debt

Kevin's betting dug the hole, but debt is what made it so deep. And debt is a trap for millions of men who've never placed a bet.

> *A rich **one** rules over poor **ones**, and a borrower **is** a servant to a man who lends.*
> (Proverbs 22:7)

The Bible doesn't say all borrowing is sin. But it says plainly that the borrower becomes a servant to the lender. When you owe money, part of your future is spoken for. Your paycheck belongs to someone else before you ever see it. That's why so many men feel trapped in jobs they hate. They can't afford to leave.

Credit cards, car loans, payday loans, and "buy now, pay later" plans make it easy to spend money you don't have. They're designed to feel painless. They aren't. The bill always comes.

Managing God's Money

Here's a truth that changes everything: none of it is yours. Psalm 24:1 says the earth and its fullness belong to the Lord. You're not an owner. You're a manager, a steward, and someday you'll give an account for how you managed what He gave you.

A good steward does a few simple things. None of them are complicated. All of them take discipline.

- **Know where it goes.** Write down what comes in and what goes out every month. You can't manage what you won't look at.
- **Spend less than you make.** It sounds obvious. Most of us don't do it.
- **Plan ahead.** Proverbs 21:5 says the plans of a diligent man lead to advantage, and everyone who hastens comes only to poverty.
- **Build a cushion.** Save a little every month for emergencies, so a broken transmission doesn't go on a credit card.
- **Attack your debt.** List every debt. Pay the minimums on all of them and throw every extra dollar at one until it's gone, then move to the next.

- **Be honest with your wife.** Money secrets destroy marriages. Make decisions together.
- **Give first.** Don't wait to see what's left over.

The Freedom of Giving

That last one might sound backwards. How does a man in debt afford to give? But giving isn't just about what it does for others. It's what it does to you. Every time you give, you break money's grip on your heart a little more. You're telling God, and yourself, that He's your provider, not your paycheck.

> *Now this **I say**: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings will also reap with blessings. Each **one should give** just as he purposes in the heart, not out of grief or out of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

God doesn't want your giving to be grudging or forced. He wants you to give generously, on purpose, and with joy. Start where you are. If you can't give much, give something, and give it first, as an act of trust.

Kevin's Way Back

Kevin's way back wasn't quick or easy. He told Brianna everything, including the debts she didn't know about. She was furious and heartbroken, and she had every right to be. They went to their pastor together, and he connected them with a couple in their church who'd been through their own financial mess and now helped other families build a budget.

Kevin deleted the apps and used the self-exclusion tools in his state. He called the gambling helpline and joined a support group. He gave Brianna full access to every account and agreed she'd handle the money for a while. They sold his truck, paid off the loan against it, and bought an older one with cash. It took them almost three years to dig out.

On the Saturday they paid off the last credit card, Kevin brought donuts for the men at Saturday coffee. "I used to think I was one big win away from fixing everything," he told the men. "Turns out I was one honest conversation away. That's what it took."

Teaching Your Kids About Money

Your kids will learn more about money from watching you than from anything you tell them. If they see you buying whatever you want on credit, fighting with their mother over bills, and gambling on games, that's what they'll learn. If they see you giving generously, saving patiently, and staying content, they'll learn that.

Here are a few simple ways to teach them.

Give them a chance to earn. Even young kids can do jobs around the house for a small amount of money. It teaches them that money comes from work.

Teach them to give, save, and spend. Many families use three jars or envelopes. A portion goes to give, a portion to save, and the rest to spend. Let them choose where their giving goes, and let them see you give too.

Let them wait. When they want something, help them save for it instead of buying it for them right away. Waiting teaches patience and makes them value what they buy.

Talk about sports betting. Your sons are seeing betting ads during every game they watch. Tell them plainly what it is and what it does. Tell them the house always wins in the long run, and tell them why you don't play.

And let them see you make mistakes and fix them. If you've been in debt, tell your older kids what you learned. Your honesty may keep them out of the same hole.

A Prayer for Contentment

> *Lord, everything I have belongs to You. Forgive me for loving money, for chasing more, and for trusting my paycheck instead of You. Teach me to be content with what I have, because You will never leave me nor forsake me. Give me wisdom to manage what You've given me, the discipline to get out of debt, and a heart that gives cheerfully. Break any hold that money or gambling has on me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Pull up your last three months of bank and card statements this week and go through them line by line, with your wife if you're married. Write down every debt you owe. If you bet on anything, add up what you've won and lost over the past year, honestly. If you can't stop, call 1-800-MY-RESET and tell one person today.

Pass It On

Money is one of the hardest things for men to talk about. Be the man who breaks the silence. Tell a friend about a money mistake you've made and what you learned. If you've gotten out of debt or beaten a gambling habit, offer to sit down with a younger man and help him make a plan.

Talk It Over

1. If someone looked at your bank statement, what would they say you love most?
2. Read Matthew 6:24. Where have you seen money try to become a master in your life?
3. Read 1 Timothy 6:9-10. Why do you think the desire to get rich is such a trap for men?
4. How has debt affected your choices, your stress, or your marriage?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. What would it look like for you to give generously and cheerfully this month?

Chapter 12: The Loud Voices

> *Watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strengthened. Let everything of yours be done in love.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (SLB)

High Value

Ethan Barrett was sixteen, and for about six months he'd been watching a lot of videos.

It started innocently. Workout videos. Then a guy who talked about discipline, waking up at 5:00 a.m., and taking cold showers. That was actually good for him. Ethan got up early, lifted weights in the garage, and stopped eating junk. Cole was proud of him.

But the algorithm kept feeding him more, and the voices got louder. Men in rented sports cars and expensive watches talking about being "high value." Men who said women only want money and status, so you'd better get both. Men who said emotions are weakness, apologizing is for losers, and a real man never lets anybody tell him what to do. Men who mocked marriage, mocked church, and mocked fathers who worked regular jobs as "beta" losers.

One night at dinner, Ethan's eleven-year-old sister, Lily, asked him to pass the potatoes. He said something to her, half joking, that he'd heard in one of the videos. It was crude and cruel, and it made her cry. Jen set her fork down and stared at him. Ethan shrugged. "It's just facts," he said.

Cole lost his temper. He yelled. He sent Ethan to his room and took his phone. Ethan slammed the door hard enough to rattle the pictures in the hallway. Later that night, through the wall, Cole heard him on his laptop, watching another video. A man was saying, "Your dad's generation got soft. They let the world walk all over them. Don't be your dad."

Cole lay awake most of the night. He knew that yelling hadn't worked. And somewhere in the back of his mind, he wondered if part of what that man was saying had landed because Ethan had watched his own father come home exhausted every night and fall asleep in front of the TV.

On Saturday, Cole didn't lecture. He asked Ethan if he wanted to come to Walt's shop and learn to run the lathe. Ethan shrugged, which from a sixteen-year-old means yes.

Walt let Ethan turn a tool handle out of a piece of ash. It took all morning. Ethan ruined two blanks before he got the hang of it. When the third one came off the lathe, smooth and true, Ethan grinned in a way Cole hadn't seen in months.

While Ethan sanded, Walt told him about the men he'd known in sixty years. The ones who'd made a lot of money and the ones who hadn't. The ones who'd been tough and loud. The ones who'd been faithful and quiet. "I'll tell you something, son," Walt said. "I've been to a lot of funerals. Nobody ever stands up at a man's funeral and talks about his watch. They talk about whether he kept his word, whether he loved his wife, and whether he showed up for his kids. Those are the men people cry over."

Ethan didn't say much. But on the way home, he asked his dad a question. "Is it true what Walt said? That he took care of his wife for four years when she was sick?"

"It's true," Cole said.

Ethan looked out the window for a long time. "That's harder than anything those guys on my phone are doing," he said.

Two Lies About Men

Young men today are growing up in the middle of a shouting match about what it means to be a man.

On one side, they hear that masculinity itself is the problem. They're told, in a hundred subtle ways, that strength is dangerous, that wanting to protect and provide is old-fashioned, and that boys need to be fixed. Many young men have absorbed the message that there's something wrong with them simply for being men.

On the other side, a whole industry of online voices has rushed in to fill the gap. They tell young men that real masculinity means money, muscles, dominance, and women. They promise to teach the secrets of being "alpha" and "high value." Some of what they say about discipline and responsibility is true. But much of it is poison: contempt for women, contempt for weakness, contempt for anyone who doesn't measure up, and a life organized entirely around self.

Both voices are wrong. The first says manhood is bad. The second says manhood is about me. The Bible says manhood is good, and it's about something far bigger than me.

God Made Men on Purpose

Scripture is clear that God made human beings male and female on purpose, and that both are made in His image.

> *And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:27)

Being a man isn't an accident or a problem to be fixed. It's a calling from God. Men and women are equal in worth and dignity. They are also different, and the differences are good. When Jesus was asked about marriage, He went right back to this verse and said that God designed marriage as one man and one woman becoming one flesh for life (Matthew 19:4-6). I'm not going to argue about that in this book. I'm just going to tell you plainly that that's what God's Word says, and that His design is good for men, for women, and for children.

So what does a real man look like? Let's let God define it instead of the internet.

Act Like Men

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul gives the church a short, punchy list: watch, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strengthened. Then he adds one line that changes the whole thing: let everything of yours be done in love.

Strength without love is a bully. Love without strength is soft. God calls men to both.

When King David was dying, he called his son Solomon to his bedside and gave him his last charge.

> *I **am** going in the way of all the earth. And you shall be strong and become a man. And you shall keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, so that you may act wisely in all that you do and in every **place** where you turn there* (1 Kings 2:2-3)

Notice how David defines being a man. Be strong, yes. Become a man. But what does that mean? Keeping the charge of the Lord, walking in His ways, and keeping His commandments. For David, manhood wasn't about how much a man could bench or how many women he could get. It was about obedience to God. And David had learned that the hard way. His own worst moments, the adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, came from a man who thought his power entitled him to whatever he wanted.

Jesus, the True Man

If you want to know what a real man looks like, don't look at an influencer in a rented sports car. Look at Jesus.

Jesus was no weakling. He worked with His hands as a builder for years. He spent forty days fasting in the wilderness. He faced down angry crowds, confronted corrupt religious leaders to their faces, drove money changers out of the temple, and walked toward a cross He knew was coming without flinching.

But look at how He used that strength. He touched lepers nobody else would touch. He welcomed children. He treated women with a dignity that shocked His culture. He wept at His friend's tomb. He washed His disciples' feet. And when His disciples argued about who was the greatest, He told them what real greatness is.

> *But Jesus, having called them to **Him**, says to them, "You know that those being accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and their great **ones** exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you will be your servant; and whoever of you desires to become first will be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many."*
> (Mark 10:42-45)

The world's idea of a powerful man is a man who uses others to get what he wants. Jesus' idea of a powerful man is a man who gives himself away for others. That's the plumb line for manhood.

What Real Strength Looks Like

Hold the online voices up against that line, and they fall over.

They say never apologize. Jesus' followers confess their sins to each other (James 5:16).

They say women are prizes to be won or used. Scripture tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25), and to dwell with them according to knowledge, rendering honor to them as co-heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).

They say emotions are weakness. Jesus wept (John 11:35). David wrote poetry. Real men feel deeply and control themselves, which is harder than either stuffing it down or letting it explode.

They say money and status prove your worth. Jesus said a man's life is not from his possessions (Luke 12:15).

They say look out for number one. Jesus said whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life on account of Him will find it (Matthew 16:25).

God's picture of a man shows up in the fruit the Holy Spirit grows in him.

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such* ***things*** *there is no law.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

That's a list you'll never see in a video about being alpha. But every one of those qualities takes more strength than anything those men are selling. Try being patient with a screaming toddler at 2:00 a.m. Try being faithful to one woman for fifty years. Try staying gentle when someone insults you. Try self-control when nobody's watching. That's where real men are made.

The Men Who Shaped Me

I didn't learn what a godly man looks like from a screen. I learned it from men I could watch up close.

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. 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's what young men need. Not more content. More fathers, uncles, coaches, and older friends who will let them see a real man up close.

A Word to Fathers

If you have sons, they're hearing these voices. If you don't speak up, someone else will. But yelling won't work, and neither will mocking what they're watching. Cole learned that.

Here's what helps. Be the kind of man you want your son to become, because he's watching you more than he's watching any screen. Spend time with him doing real things with your hands. Ask what he's watching and listen before you respond. Admit where those voices have a point, like discipline and

responsibility, and then show him where they go wrong. Take him around older men who've lived faithfully for decades. And keep loving him when he pushes back.

Ethan didn't change overnight. But he kept coming to Walt's shop. He made his sister a jewelry box on the lathe and apologized to her when he gave it to her. A few months later, he told Cole he'd unfollowed most of those channels. "They're always yelling about being strong," he said. "But Walt's the strongest guy I know, and he never yells."

Courage That Protects

There's one thing the online voices get partly right: the world needs men with courage. They just point that courage in the wrong direction. They want men brave enough to dominate. God wants men brave enough to protect.

Proverbs 31:8-9 tells a king to open his mouth for the mute, to judge in righteousness, and to plead the cause of the afflicted and needy. That's what godly strength is for. It stands between the weak and the people who would hurt them.

That might mean speaking up when a coworker is being harassed. It might mean stepping in when a kid is being bullied. It might mean telling the truth in a meeting when everyone else is going along with something wrong. It might mean walking a woman to her car in a dark parking lot, or refusing to laugh at a crude joke about her when she's not there. It might mean reporting abuse when everyone else would rather keep quiet.

Courage also means standing for Christ when it costs you something. Jesus said whoever is ashamed of Him and His words, He will be ashamed of that man when He comes in His glory (Luke 9:26). In a culture that increasingly mocks faith, it takes real courage for a man to say plainly, "I follow Jesus," and to live like it.

That's the kind of man young men are hungry to see. Not loud. Not cruel. Strong enough to stand up for what's right, and gentle enough that children and widows feel safe around him.

A Prayer for Godly Manhood

> *Lord Jesus, You are the true man. Forgive me for the times I've chased the world's idea of strength instead of Yours. Make me watchful, firm in the faith, and strong, and let everything I do be done in love. Grow Your fruit in me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Give me courage to protect the weak and to stand for You. And help me show the young men around me what a real man looks like. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Write down your own definition of a real man in one or two sentences. Then compare it with 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, Mark 10:42-45, and Galatians 5:22-23. Where does your definition need to change? Pick one quality of the fruit of the Spirit you most lack, and ask God to grow it in you this week.

Pass It On

Find a young man, maybe your son, nephew, grandson, or a teenager at church, and spend real time with him this month. Build something, fix something, fish, or work out together. Ask him what he's been watching and what he thinks a real man is. Listen first. Then tell him about the men who shaped you.

Talk It Over

1. What messages about manhood did you grow up with? Where did they come from?
2. What do you see as the two biggest lies about manhood in today's culture?
3. Read 1 Kings 2:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 16:13-14. How does the Bible define being a man?
4. Read Mark 10:42-45. How is Jesus' idea of greatness different from the world's?
5. Who are the young men in your life who need to see a godly man up close? What's one step you could take toward one of them?

Part Three: The People Who Count on You

Chapter 13: The Woman Beside You

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

Roommates

Nate Collins thought his marriage was fine.

He and Amber had been married twelve years. They had two kids, a nine-year-old and a six-year-old, a mortgage, a dog, and a schedule that ran like a freight train. Nate worked as an electrician, and he worked a lot of overtime. Amber worked part-time at a dental office and handled everything else: school, doctor's appointments, groceries, birthday parties, homework, and the hundred small things that keep a house running. They didn't fight much. Nate figured that meant things were good.

One Thursday night, after the kids were in bed, Nate was on the couch watching a game. Amber sat down in the chair across from him and said, "Can you turn that off? I need to tell you something."

He paused the game. She was holding a piece of paper.

"I've been seeing a counselor," she said. "For three months. I didn't tell you because I didn't think you'd notice." She looked down at the paper. "She asked me to write down how I feel, and then to read it to you. So here it is." Her voice shook. "I feel like a single mom with a roommate. You come home, you eat, you watch TV or look at your phone, and you go to bed. You haven't asked me a real question about my life in I don't know how long. We haven't been on a date in two years. I'm lonely, Nate. I'm lonelier married to you than I ever was single. And I don't know how much longer I can do this."

Nate sat there with the remote in his hand, stunned. He wanted to defend himself. He worked hard. He was faithful. He didn't drink or yell. He paid the bills. What more did she want?

But he looked at her face, and something stopped him. She wasn't angry. She was sad. And she was right, and he knew it.

Nate had been coming to Walt's shop for a couple of months because Cole had invited him. That Saturday, he stayed after the others left and told Walt the whole thing.

Walt listened. Then he walked over to a shelf in the corner of the shop and took down a small walnut box with a hinged lid. He opened it. Inside were dozens of folded notes on old paper.

"June and I were married forty-seven years," Walt said. "About fifteen years in, she told me almost the same thing Amber told you. I was working sixty hours a week and thought that was love. It wasn't. It was work. So I started courting her again. I started leaving her notes. One every week or so for thirty-two years. She kept every one of them." He closed the lid gently. "Your wife isn't asking you to be a better provider, son. She's asking you to come home."

Drifting Apart

Most marriages don't end in a blowup. They end in a drift. Two people who once couldn't stand to be apart slowly turn into business partners, then roommates, then strangers. Nobody decides to stop loving. They just stop paying attention.

For many men, the drift starts when we think our job is mostly to provide. We work hard, bring home a paycheck, fix the car, mow the lawn, and figure that's love. And it is part of it. But it's not the part your wife needs most. She married you, not your paycheck. She wants your heart, your attention, and your presence.

God's Design for Marriage

Marriage was God's idea from the beginning. After God made Adam, He said something that hadn't been said about anything else in creation.

> *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)

Then God made the woman and brought her to the man. And the Bible gives us the pattern for marriage that Jesus Himself would later repeat.

> *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:24)

Leave, cling, and become one. A man leaves his father and mother, which means his wife now comes before every other human relationship. He clings to her, which means he holds on to her and commits to her for life. And the two become one flesh, which means a union of bodies, lives, and souls so close that God says they're one.

The word "helper" in Genesis 2:18 doesn't mean a servant or an assistant. The same Hebrew word is used of God Himself, who is our help. It describes someone strong who brings what's missing. Your wife isn't your sidekick. She's your partner, a co-heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7), and God gave her to you because you weren't meant to do this alone.

Love Like Jesus Loves

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. That's the standard God gives husbands. Not "love your wife when she deserves it." Not "love your wife the way you feel like it." Love her the way Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

How did Christ love the church? He left heaven for her. He served her. He was patient with her failures. He laid down His life for her. Paul goes on to say husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing them, just as Christ does the church (Ephesians 5:28-29).

Some men hear the Bible's teaching that the husband is the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23) and think that means they're the boss. It doesn't. Biblical headship is servant leadership. It means taking responsibility, not taking control. It means going first in serving, first in apologizing, first in praying, and

first in sacrifice. A man who uses headship to demand his own way has missed the whole point. Jesus led by washing feet.

And Scripture adds a warning that every husband needs.

> *Husbands, love **your** wives, and do not be harsh toward them.* (Colossians 3:19)

Bitterness, harshness, and coldness have no place in a Christian marriage. Peter says it even more strongly: a husband who doesn't honor his wife will find his prayers cut off (1 Peter 3:7). How you treat your wife affects how you relate to God.

What I Learned From Watching a Pastor

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.

Coming Home

So how does a man come home to his marriage? Here are some practical steps that helped Nate, and have helped many others.

- **Listen without fixing.** When your wife tells you something hard, don't defend yourself and don't jump to solutions. Say, "Tell me more." Then really listen.
- **Ask real questions.** Not "How was your day?" but "What's been the hardest part of your week?" or "What are you dreaming about these days?"
- **Put the phone down.** When you walk in the door, give her ten minutes of your full attention before you give anything else yours.
- **Date her again.** Put a date night on the calendar at least twice a month. It doesn't have to cost much. A walk, a cup of coffee, a drive. The point is time alone together.
- **Share the load.** Notice what she carries and pick some of it up without being asked. The dishes, the bedtime routine, the doctor's appointments.
- **Pray with her.** Even a short prayer together at night builds a closeness nothing else can.
- **Say the words.** Tell her you love her. Tell her what you admire about her. Write it down sometimes, the way Walt did.
- **Guard your marriage.** Be careful with emotional closeness to other women at work or online. Don't let anyone else hear things your wife hasn't heard first.

- **Get help early.** Counseling isn't for marriages that have failed. It's for marriages worth saving. Go together if you can. Go alone if you have to.

Joy in Your Marriage

God doesn't just want you to survive your marriage. He wants you to enjoy it.

> *Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth* (Proverbs 5:18)

God designed marriage to include friendship, laughter, and physical intimacy. The whole Song of Songs celebrates the love between a husband and a wife, and Paul tells married couples not to deprive each other (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). But intimacy in the bedroom almost always grows out of intimacy everywhere else. A wife who feels unseen all week isn't likely to feel close to her husband on Friday night. When you pursue her heart, the rest tends to follow.

A Word for Hard Situations

Some men reading this are in marriages that are much harder than Nate's. There's been an affair, or addiction, or years of bitterness. Some of you are already divorced, and you carry grief and regret. I'm not going to try to answer every hard question about marriage and divorce in one chapter. Talk with your pastor and a good Christian counselor about your situation.

But I'll say this. God is a God of redemption. I've seen marriages that looked dead come back to life when one man humbled himself and started loving his wife like Christ. And if your marriage has ended, God hasn't ended with you. His grace is enough for that too.

And if there is abuse or violence in your home, safety comes first. Get help right away from your pastor and a licensed counselor, and if anyone is in danger, call 911.

Nate's Notes

Nate started small. He turned off the game and asked Amber what her counselor had been helping her with, and he listened for two hours. He asked if he could go to counseling with her. He started putting his phone in a drawer when he got home. He booked a babysitter for the first Friday of every month. He began leaving notes in her car, short ones, nothing fancy.

It took almost a year before Amber told him she felt like they were really married again. Nate said that was the hardest and best year of his life. He told the men at Walt's, "I always thought being a good husband meant not doing anything wrong. Turns out it means doing a lot of things right, every day, on purpose."

When You're the One Who Hurt Her

Some husbands reading this know they've done real damage. Maybe it was harsh words over years, neglect, an emotional affair, pornography, or worse. Saying "sorry" doesn't seem like enough, and it isn't, by itself. But a real apology is where rebuilding starts. Here's what one looks like.

Name it specifically. Not “I’m sorry if I hurt you,” but “I’m sorry I’ve been on my phone every night instead of talking with you. I made you feel alone, and that was wrong.”

Don’t explain or defend. The moment you add “but,” the apology is over. Your reasons can come later, if she wants to hear them.

Acknowledge the hurt. Tell her what you understand about how it affected her. Then ask, “Is there more I don’t understand?” and listen.

Ask for forgiveness, and don’t demand it. Forgiveness is a gift. She may need time. Rushing her so you can feel better is one more way of putting yourself first.

Change. The only apology that really counts is the one followed by a different life. Make a plan, tell her what it is, and let her see you keep it.

Trust takes much longer to rebuild than it does to break. Be patient. Keep showing up. Keep telling the truth. God is in the business of rebuilding what we’ve broken, and He often does it one ordinary faithful day at a time.

A Prayer for Your Marriage

> *Father, thank You for the woman You gave me. Forgive me for the ways I’ve neglected her, hurt her, or taken her for granted. Teach me to love her the way Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Help me listen, serve, pray with her, and pursue her heart again. Heal what’s broken between us. Protect our marriage from every attack. Let our home be a picture of Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Your Move

Ask your wife this week, “On a scale of one to ten, how close do you feel to me right now? What would make it one point higher?” Then listen without defending yourself. Put a date on the calendar in the next two weeks. Write her a note telling her one specific thing you love about her. If you’re not married, pray for the men around you who are, and for your own future if marriage is part of God’s plan for you.

Pass It On

Encourage another husband. Ask a married friend how his marriage is really doing, and be honest about your own. If you’ve been married a long time and have learned some things the hard way, offer to take a younger couple to dinner and let them ask you anything.

Talk It Over

1. Read Genesis 2:18 and 2:24. What do these verses teach about why God created marriage?
2. Nate thought his marriage was fine because they didn’t fight. Why can a quiet marriage still be in trouble?
3. Read Ephesians 5:25. What would it look like this week for you to love your wife the way Christ loved the church?

4. What's the difference between servant leadership and being the boss?

5. Which of the practical steps in this chapter does your marriage need most?

Chapter 14: The Kids Are Watching

> *And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them to your sons, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.*
>
> Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (SLB)

Every Other Weekend

Luis Navarro saw his son every other weekend and on Wednesday nights for dinner. That was the arrangement the judge had approved four years earlier, when Luis and his ex-wife, Dana, divorced. Mateo was six then. He was ten now.

Luis loved his son more than anything in the world, and he was terrified of losing him. So every other weekend became an event. Trampoline parks, go-karts, movies, a new video game, pizza every night. Luis let Mateo stay up as late as he wanted and never made him do homework. He told himself he only had four days a month, and he wanted them to be fun.

But something was off, and he knew it. Mateo seemed to love the weekends and then go quiet whenever they talked about anything real. When Luis asked about school, Mateo shrugged. When Mateo had a hard week, he called his mom, or he talked to Dana's new husband, Brian, a quiet guy who taught middle school math and coached Mateo's baseball team.

That's what finally broke Luis. At a baseball game in May, Mateo struck out with the bases loaded. He walked back to the dugout with his head down, fighting tears. Luis stood up in the bleachers to yell something encouraging. Before he could, Brian was kneeling in front of Mateo in the dugout, hand on his shoulder, talking quietly. Mateo nodded and wiped his eyes. Then he went back out to the field.

Luis sat back down. He felt like he'd been punched in the stomach.

Luis did drywall for a living, and he'd gotten to know Cole on job sites. A week after the game, he showed up at Walt's shop and told the men about it. He was angry at first. Brian was trying to replace him. Dana was turning Mateo against him. But as he talked, the anger ran out, and what was left was grief.

"I'm the fun dad," he finally said. "Brian's the real dad. He's there every day. I'm the guy with the go-karts."

Walt thought about that for a while. "You can't be there every day," he said. "That's the hard truth of where you are, and you can't change it. But you can be a real dad on the days you have. Kids don't need a theme park. They need a father. Be one when you're with him. And that man in the dugout? Thank God for him. Your boy needs every good man he can get."

My wife and I raised two daughters. I worked hard to provide for them, and I also had to learn that kids watch how a father handles his failures just as closely as his successes. Now that I have granddaughters, I see even more clearly how a man's integrity carries into the next generation.

The Job Nobody Trains You For

Being a father is one of the most important jobs a man will ever have, and nobody hands you a manual. Most of us parent the way we were parented, or we swing hard the other way to make sure we don't. Either way, we're making it up as we go.

And fathers today face pressures our grandfathers never imagined. Two working parents. Long commutes. Kids with phones in their pockets and the whole internet in their hands. Blended families, shared custody, and schedules that look like an air traffic control chart. Many men feel like they're failing at fatherhood and don't know how to fix it.

Here's the good news. God doesn't expect you to be a perfect father. He's the only perfect Father there is. But He does call you to be present, faithful, and pointing your kids toward Him.

Teach Them as You Go

The verse at the top of this chapter is one of the oldest instructions for fathers in the Bible. God told the fathers of Israel to put His words on their own hearts first. Then they were to repeat those words to their sons, speaking of them at home and on the road, at bedtime and when they rose up.

Notice the order. You can't give your kids what you don't have. Faith that isn't real in Dad's life will rarely take root in his kids.

And notice where the teaching happens. Not mainly in a classroom or a church service. In the truck. At the dinner table. On the walk to the bus stop. At bedtime. Fathering happens in the ordinary moments of life, which means you have to be there for the ordinary moments.

That's what Luis learned. His son didn't need more events. He needed more of his father in the everyday.

What Kids Need From a Father

Children are a gift, not a burden. The psalmist calls them the Lord's inheritance and a reward.

> *Look, the inheritance of the LORD **is** sons; a reward **is** the fruit of the womb.* (Psalm 127:3)

If they're God's inheritance and reward, then raising them is a sacred trust. Here are a few things every child needs from a father.

Your presence. Kids spell love T-I-M-E. They need you at the games, at the dinner table, and at bedtime. They need you with your phone in your pocket and your eyes on them.

Your words. Kids are starving to hear their father say, "I love you. I'm proud of you. You're good at that." Many grown men are still waiting to hear those words from their own dads. Don't make your kids wait.

Your example. Your kids will forget most of what you say, but they'll remember how you lived. How you treated their mother. How you handled anger. Whether you prayed. Whether you went to church. Whether you apologized when you were wrong.

Your discipline. Loving fathers set boundaries and enforce them, calmly and consistently. Hebrews 12:6 says the Lord disciplines the one He loves. Discipline isn't punishment for your convenience. It's training for their good.

Your gentleness. Scripture gives fathers one specific warning.

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

You can provoke your kids by being harsh, unpredictable, sarcastic, or never satisfied. You can also provoke them by being absent. Either way, you plant anger and discouragement in their hearts. Colossians 3:21 adds that fathers shouldn't provoke their children, so that they may not become discouraged.

Being Present at Home

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.

That's a trap many good fathers fall into. We provide, we fix, we organize, and we manage. All of that is good. But our kids don't need a household manager. They need a dad who looks them in the eye, listens to their stories, and knows what they're afraid of.

The Father You Had

Many of us can't talk about being fathers without talking about the fathers we had. Some of you had great dads, and you're grateful. Some of you had dads who were harsh, cold, absent, addicted, or abusive. Some of you never knew your father at all.

That wound runs deep. A boy who never got his father's blessing often spends the rest of his life looking for it in all the wrong places: in work, in women, in achievements, in the approval of other men.

If that's you, I want you to hear something. You have a Father in heaven who is everything your earthly father wasn't.

> *As a father has compassion on **his** sons, the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.* (Psalm 103:13)

When Jesus told the story of the lost son, the father in the story saw his son coming from a long way off, ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him before the boy could even finish his apology (Luke 15:20). That's the kind of Father God is. He knows your name, He's proud to call you His son, and He'll never walk out on you.

Let Him heal what your earthly father broke. Talk with a pastor or counselor if you need to. Forgive your dad if you can, even if he never asks for it. And then decide, by God's grace, that the pattern stops with you.

For Divorced Dads and Stepdads

If you're a divorced father like Luis, you're carrying a special kind of grief. You can't be there every day, and that hurts. Here's what I'd say to you:

- Be a father, not an entertainer. Keep normal routines on your time: chores, homework, church, bedtime.
- Stay consistent. Show up when you say you will, every time. Your reliability tells your child he's worth it.
- Never speak badly about your child's mother in front of them. It forces your child to choose, and it wounds them.
- Stay connected between visits. A phone call, a text, praying together over the phone at bedtime.
- If there's a good stepfather in your child's life, thank God for him. Your child can have two good men in his life, and that's a blessing, not a threat.

If you're a stepfather, you're stepping into a hard and holy job. Earn trust slowly. Respect the child's other parent. Love the kids as if they were your own, because in God's eyes, they're entrusted to you.

It's Never Too Late

Some men reading this have grown kids. You look back and see mistakes you can't undo. Maybe you were too busy, too harsh, or too absent. Maybe your kids don't talk to you.

It's never too late to start being the father you should have been. Call your grown son or daughter. Apologize, specifically and without excuses. Ask how you can be part of their lives now. Be a godly grandfather. God promised Israel that before the great day of the Lord, the prophet He would send would turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers (Malachi 4:5-6). He's still in that business.

Luis's Wednesdays

Luis made some changes. He kept some of the fun, because a little fun is good, but he started doing ordinary things with Mateo on his weekends. They cooked dinner together. They did homework at the kitchen table. They went to church together on Sunday mornings. He started calling every night at 8:30 to pray with Mateo over the phone, even on the nights when Mateo would rather be playing video games.

He also did something much harder. After a game one Saturday, he walked over to Brian, shook his hand, and said, "Thanks for what you did for Mateo in the dugout that day. I'm glad he's got you." Brian looked surprised, then grateful. The two of them aren't best friends. But they're on the same team now, and Mateo knows it.

Raising Kids in a Digital World

Our kids are growing up with technology our parents never imagined. A father today needs a plan for it, the same way he'd have a plan for teaching his son to drive.

Here are a few principles many Christian fathers have found helpful.

Go slow. There's no rush to give young kids smartphones, social media accounts, or unlimited internet. Many families wait until the teen years, and some start with a basic phone that only calls and texts.

Keep screens in common areas. Kids do better when devices stay in the kitchen and living room, not in bedrooms or bathrooms, especially at night.

Know what they're doing. Know their passwords, their apps, and who they're talking to. That isn't spying. It's parenting.

Set family rules, and keep them yourself. No phones at the table. No phones in bedrooms overnight. Screen-free time on Sundays. If Dad breaks the rules, the rules won't last.

Talk more than you restrict. Rules matter, but conversations matter more. Ask what they're watching, what their friends are saying, and what's bothering them. Talk about pornography, betting, online bullying, and the loud voices about manhood we talked about in Chapter 12, before they find those things on their own.

And fill their lives with better things. Teach them to fish, build, cook, hike, play music, serve, and read. A kid who knows how to enjoy real life is far less likely to disappear into a screen.

A Prayer for Your Children

> *Father in heaven, thank You for my children. They're Your gift and Your inheritance. Help me be present with them, speak words of love and blessing over them, and live in front of them the way I want them to live. Keep me from provoking them to anger. Protect them from the dangers they face. Draw them to Jesus early, and keep them close to You all their lives. Heal what my own father broke in me, and let the good things start with me. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Spend one-on-one time with each of your children this week, doing something they choose. Tell each one, in words, that you love them and you're proud of them, and name one specific thing. If you have a father wound, write down what you wish your dad had given you, and ask God to give it to you as your Father. If you have grown kids, call one of them this week.

Pass It On

Many kids are growing up without a father around. Look for one in your church, your neighborhood, or your kids' teams. Include him. Teach him to throw a ball, fix a bike, or change oil. You may be the only man in his life who shows him what a godly father looks like.

Talk It Over

1. What kind of father did you have? How has that shaped the father you are, or want to be?

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Where are the “ordinary moments” in your week when you could talk with your kids about God?

3. Of the things kids need from a father, which do you give most naturally? Which is hardest for you?

4. Read Ephesians 6:4. What are some ways fathers provoke their children, sometimes without knowing it?

5. Read Psalm 103:13. How does knowing God as your Father help you become a better father?

Chapter 15: Alone in a Crowd

Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor.

Proverbs 27:17 (SLB)

Five Days

Marcus Bell had more friends than he could count, at least on paper. He had a couple thousand followers online. He played games every night with a group of guys spread across four time zones. His phone buzzed all day with group chats, work messages, and notifications. He was twenty-eight years old and never, technically, alone.

He was also the loneliest he'd ever been.

Marcus wrote software from his one-bedroom apartment. He'd moved to town three years earlier for a job that went fully remote six months later. He didn't know his neighbors. His family lived eight hundred miles away. He'd tried the dating apps for a while and quit after a long string of conversations that went nowhere. He went to church most Sundays, sat in the back, and slipped out during the last song so he wouldn't have to make small talk.

In January, Marcus came down with a bad case of the flu. For five days, he lay on his couch with a fever of 103, too sick to cook and barely able to get to the bathroom. He ordered soup through a delivery app and had it left outside his door. His gaming friends noticed he was offline and sent a few jokes. Nobody called. Nobody came.

On the fifth day, Marcus's phone buzzed. It was Cole Barrett. They'd met at Walt's shop a few times back in the summer, and Cole had gotten his number. The text said: *Haven't seen you at Walt's in a while. You okay?*

Marcus stared at the message for a long time. Then he wrote back honestly: *Sick. Pretty bad. Been alone with it all week.*

Forty minutes later, Cole knocked on his door with a bag of groceries, a jug of orange juice, and a pot of chicken soup Jen had made. He didn't stay long. He just put the food away, checked that Marcus had medicine, and said, "Text me tomorrow. If you don't, I'm coming back."

When Cole left, Marcus sat on his couch and cried. Not because he was sick. Because somebody had noticed.

Three weeks later, Walt called Marcus and asked if he'd help build a wheelchair ramp for a widow from his church. Marcus had never used a circular saw in his life. He showed up anyway. Five men spent a Saturday measuring, cutting, and screwing down boards in the cold. They laughed, swore at a crooked post (and then apologized to Walt for swearing), ate burgers, and finished at sunset. The widow cried and hugged every one of them.

Driving home, Marcus realized he hadn't checked his phone once all day. And he realized something else. For the first time in three years, he felt like he belonged somewhere.

The Friendship Recession

Many men today are lonely. Not just single men, but married men, busy men, successful men, and men in churches every Sunday. They have coworkers, acquaintances, and online friends. But if you ask them, "Who would you call at two in the morning if your life fell apart?" many of them can't name anyone.

This isn't just a feeling. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on loneliness and isolation. It reported that in recent years, about one in two adults in America said they had experienced loneliness. It also said the health impact of being socially disconnected is similar to smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day. Loneliness doesn't just hurt. It can shorten your life.

Men are especially at risk. We tend to make friends through work, school, or sports, side by side, doing something. When those things end, the friendships often end too. Many men in their thirties, forties, and fifties look up one day and realize they haven't made a new friend in years. Then a divorce, a move, a job loss, or the death of a wife comes along, and they're completely alone.

Made for Brotherhood

God never designed a man to live alone. Before sin ever entered the world, God looked at Adam in a perfect garden, with perfect work, walking with God Himself, and said it was not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). That verse is about marriage, but the principle reaches further. We were made for relationship.

Solomon knew it.

> *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)

One man alone is easy to knock down. Two can stand back to back. And a threefold cord will not quickly be torn apart, especially when one of those strands is God Himself.

The Friends Jesus Chose

Jesus could have done His work alone. He was the Son of God. He didn't need help. But the first thing He did when He started His ministry was call a group of men to be with Him. Mark 3:14 says He appointed twelve, so that they might be with Him. Before He sent them out to do anything, He wanted them with Him.

Out of the twelve, He had three closer friends: Peter, James, and John. He took them up the mountain where He was transfigured. He took them closer than the others in the garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed. In His darkest hour, the Son of God wanted His friends nearby (Matthew 26:36-38).

And He called them friends, not just followers.

> *Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 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 15:13-15)

If Jesus needed friends, so do you.

What a Real Friend Is

The Bible gives us one of the great friendships of all time in David and Jonathan. Jonathan was the king's son, the heir to the throne. David was the shepherd boy God had chosen to take that throne instead. By every worldly measure, they should have been rivals. Instead, the Bible says the soul of Jonathan was bound with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Samuel 18:1). Jonathan protected David from his own father, strengthened his hand in God when David was running for his life (1 Samuel 23:16), and kept his promises to David to the end.

That's what a real friend does. He's loyal. He tells you the truth. He sharpens you, the way the verse at the top of this chapter says, iron against iron. He strengthens your hand in God when you're weak.

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

A crowd of companions can leave you shattered. One true friend sticks closer than a brother. You don't need fifty of those friends. You need a few. Most men would be blessed beyond measure to have two or three.

What One Conversation Can Do

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. 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.

How Men Make Friends

Friendship won't just happen to you, especially as you get older. You have to build it on purpose. Here's how men usually do it.

- **Side by side.** Men bond doing things together. Build a ramp, fix a car, fish, hunt, hike, lift, or work a service project. Conversation flows easier when your hands are busy.

- **Again and again.** Friendship grows from repeated time together. A weekly breakfast, a monthly project, a regular group. Show up to the same place with the same men, over and over.
- **Go first.** Don't wait to be invited. Text the guy. Ask him to lunch. Most men are waiting for someone else to make the first move.
- **Go deeper over time.** Start with work and sports. Over time, ask real questions. "How's your marriage?" "How are you doing with God?" "What's keeping you up at night?"
- **Get in a small group of men.** Most churches have one. If yours doesn't, start one with two or three other guys.
- **Don't quit when it's hard.** Friends disappoint each other. Forgive, talk it out, and keep showing up.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to consider one another for stirring up of love and good works, not forsaking the assembling together, but encouraging one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). That's the purpose of Christian friendship. It's not just company. It's mutual encouragement toward Jesus.

A Word to Single Men

Marcus's loneliness was tied up with being single, and many single men feel that ache. If that's you, I want to say a few things.

First, singleness is not a lesser life. Jesus was single. Paul was single, and he even called singleness a gift that frees a man to serve the Lord with undivided attention (1 Corinthians 7:7, 32-35). Your life isn't on hold until you get married. God has work for you now.

Second, being single doesn't mean you have to be alone. You need brothers, older men, younger men, and families who will welcome you. Don't let yourself disappear into an apartment and a screen.

Third, if you want to be married, it's good to pray for a wife and to pursue it wisely. But don't build your whole identity around finding one. Become the kind of man a godly woman would want to marry: faithful, hardworking, kind, growing in Christ, and pure. Keep yourself sexually pure, not as a way to earn a wife, but because your body belongs to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

And if you're single again after divorce or the death of your wife, your grief and loneliness are real. Let men walk with you through it. You don't have to rebuild alone.

Marcus's Saturday Mornings

Marcus kept showing up. He started coming to Walt's every Saturday. He joined a men's group at his church that met on Tuesday nights, and he stopped leaving church during the last song. He learned to use a miter saw, a router, and eventually Walt's lathe. A year later, he was the one organizing the next ramp build.

He still plays games online with his friends a couple of nights a week. But he told the men at Walt's, "I used to think I had a lot of friends. I had a lot of contacts. I didn't have anybody who'd bring me soup. Now I do. And now I know how to be that guy for somebody else."

The Church Is a Brotherhood

Some men tell me they don't need church. They can worship God in the woods or on the lake. They've been hurt by church people. They don't like the music, the preaching, or the politics. I understand some of that. Churches are full of sinners, because that's who Jesus came for.

But God's plan for a man's spiritual life has never been a solo act. The New Testament doesn't know anything about a Christian who isn't part of a local church. Every letter Paul wrote was to a church or to a church leader. The commands to love, encourage, forgive, serve, and bear with one another can only be obeyed in a real community of real people.

For many men, the local church is also the best place to find the brothers this chapter has been about. Not just by attending on Sunday and slipping out during the last song, but by joining a small group, serving on a team, showing up at the men's breakfast, and staying after for the awkward conversations. Brotherhood rarely happens in the service itself. It happens around the edges: in the parking lot, at the work day, on the mission trip, over coffee.

If you've been hurt by a church, I'm sorry. Talk to a pastor about it if you can. But don't let one bad experience keep you from the family God designed you to need. Find a church that teaches the Bible and loves people, and give it a real chance.

A Prayer for Brothers

> *Lord Jesus, You chose friends and wanted them near You. You know how lonely I've been, even surrounded by people. Give me real brothers, men who will sharpen me, tell me the truth, and stand with me when life gets hard. Give me the courage to go first and invite someone in. And help me be the kind of friend who notices the man in the back row and brings him soup when he's sick. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Answer this honestly: "Who would I call at 2:00 a.m. if my life fell apart?" If you can't name at least one man, make that your priority this month. Text one man this week and set a time to get together. If you're not in a group of men, find one, or start one with two other guys.

Pass It On

Look for the man who slips out during the last song. Look for the new guy, the widower, the divorced dad, the young single guy who works from home. Invite him to something specific: a project, a breakfast, a game, a group. And if he doesn't show up for a while, text him: "Haven't seen you in a while. You okay?"

Talk It Over

1. How many close friends do you have, men you could call in a crisis? How has that number changed over the years?
2. Why do you think so many men today feel lonely, even when they're surrounded by people?

3. Read John 15:13-15 and Matthew 26:36-38. What does it tell you that Jesus chose close friends and wanted them near in His darkest hour?

4. Read Proverbs 27:17 and 18:24. What's the difference between an acquaintance and a real friend?

5. Which of the ways men make friends could you start this month?

Part Four: How a Man Lives

Chapter 16: Where the Hours Go

> *"LORD, make me know my end, and the measure of my days, what it **is**; let me know how fleeting I **am**. Look, You have made my days handbreadths, and my lifespan **is** like nothing before You; surely all mankind **that** stands **is** all vanity." Selah.*
>
> Psalm 39:4-5 (SLB)

Double-Booked

Greg Walsh said yes to everything.

He was thirty-eight, a regional sales manager for a building supply company, and very good at his job. He coached his son's baseball team in the spring and his daughter's soccer team in the fall. He served as a deacon at church, sat on the building committee, and ran the sound board every other Sunday. He was remodeling the basement himself on weekends. He was the guy everybody called when they needed help moving, and he never said no.

People admired Greg. "I don't know how you do it all," they'd say. Greg didn't know either. He was running on five hours of sleep and a lot of coffee.

In October, Greg's wife, Kim, made reservations at the restaurant where they'd had their first date, for their fifteenth anniversary. She'd mentioned it three times. He'd put it in his phone. Then the church building committee scheduled an emergency meeting about a roof leak for the same night, and Greg, who was chairing it, went to the meeting. He texted Kim from the parking lot: *So sorry. Roof emergency. Make it up to you this weekend.*

He couldn't make it up to her that weekend. He had a tournament.

Kim didn't yell. She didn't cry, at least not where he could see. She just got quieter. A few weeks later, she told him she was thinking about going to stay with her sister for a while. "I'm not leaving you," she said. "I just need to figure out if there's room for me in your life."

Greg heard about Walt's Saturday coffee from Cole, whose company had done the HVAC on the church's new wing. He came because, for once, he had nothing scheduled that morning. He'd canceled everything after Kim's comment.

He sat on a stool and listed everything he did. It took a while. Walt let him finish.

Then Walt picked up a piece of steel bar stock and set it in the vise. "When you machine a part," he said, "the first thing you do is pick your datum. That's the reference surface. Every other measurement on the part comes off that one. If you get the datum wrong, or you skip it, every cut after that is off a little more, and by the end the part's junk, no matter how good your other cuts were." He tapped the steel. "You've got a lot of good cuts, Greg. But you never picked your datum. Everything in your life is measured off whatever's yelling the loudest."

I have spent about 40 years building a career, plus years building guitars and writing books. Looking back at how fast those years went makes Psalm 39:4-5 hit closer to home than it did in my twenties. Every hour buried in busywork or old regrets is an hour I cannot get back with my wife, my daughters or God's Word.

The Busy Badge

We talked about busyness in the first chapter. Now let's get practical. Where do your hours actually go?

Every man gets the same 168 hours a week. Nobody gets more, and nobody can buy extra. Take out sleep and work, and most of us have maybe forty or fifty hours left. How a man spends those hours tells you what he really values, no matter what he says.

Some men waste their hours on screens and entertainment. We talked about that in Chapter 4. Other men, like Greg, have the opposite problem. They fill every hour with good things. Work, church, coaching, projects, helping people. Nobody could accuse them of laziness. But they're so busy doing good things that they miss the most important things.

Life Is a Breath

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. David asked God to let him know the measure of his days and how fleeting he was. That's a strange thing to pray for, but it's wise. When you remember that your life is a breath, you start spending it differently.

James puts it bluntly.

> *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city and will spend one year there and will trade and will make a profit"; you who do not know the **things** of tomorrow. For what **is** your life? For it is a vapor that appears for a little **while** and then vanishes. Instead of your saying, "If the Lord wills, we will both live and do this or that."*
> (James 4:13-15)

Your life is a vapor. Your kids are only home for a few years. Your parents won't always be here. Your wife won't always be beside you. Your health won't always hold. If you plan to slow down and enjoy them "someday," you may find that someday never comes.

A Time for Everything

Solomon reminds us that life has seasons.

> *For everything **there is** an appointed time, and a time for every matter under the heavens*
> (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

There's a time to work hard and a time to rest. A time to coach and a time to step back. A time to serve on every committee and a time to say, "Not this season." Part of wisdom is knowing what season you're in, and what God is asking of you in it. A man with three kids under five has a different calling for his time than a man whose kids are grown. Neither one can do everything.

Mary and Martha

One of the most helpful stories in the Bible about time is about two sisters.

> *And it came to pass, as they were going, that He entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also, having sat down beside the feet of Jesus, was listening to His word. But Martha was distracted about much serving; and having come up, she said, "Lord, does it not concern You that my sister has left me alone to serve? Tell her therefore that she help me." And answering, Jesus said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; but there is need of one* ***thing****; and Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* (Luke 10:38-42)

Martha wasn't doing anything bad. She was serving Jesus, the most important guest who ever entered a house. But she was so busy serving Him that she missed being with Him. Mary sat at His feet and listened. Jesus said there was need of one thing, and Mary had chosen the good portion.

Many Christian men are Marthas. We're busy for God and too busy for God. We serve at church but never pray. We teach the Bible but never read it for ourselves. We help everybody and neglect the people at home. Jesus doesn't scold Martha harshly. He says her name twice, gently, the way a friend would. But He tells her the truth: there is need of one thing.

Greg's datum needed to be Jesus. Then his wife. Then his kids. Then everything else measured off those.

Jesus Had Time

Here's something that should encourage every busy man. Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry. He had the most important job in history and only about three years to do it. Crowds followed Him everywhere. Sick people lined the roads. And yet He regularly walked away from the crowds to pray.

> *But the word concerning Him was spreading still more; and great crowds were coming together to hear and to be healed by Him from their sicknesses. But He Himself was withdrawing in the deserts and praying.* (Luke 5:15-16)

When the disciples came back from a busy stretch of ministry, Jesus didn't give them a new list of tasks. He said, "Come, you yourselves, privately into a deserted place and rest a little" (Mark 6:31).

Jesus also said no. When the whole town came looking for Him, He told His disciples it was time to go to the next towns, because that's what He came to do (Mark 1:37-38). He didn't let other people's demands set His agenda. He did what the Father gave Him to do.

God Built Rest Into the Week

From the very beginning, God built rest into the rhythm of life. He worked six days and rested on the seventh, and He commanded His people to do the same.

> *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day* ***is*** *a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant*

*and your female servant, and your livestock, and your sojourner who **is** within your gates.*
(Exodus 20:9-10)

Christians have different convictions about exactly how to keep a day of rest today, and I'm not going to settle that here. But the principle is clear. God made you to need rest, and He commands it. A man who never stops isn't more faithful than God. He's less obedient. Rest is an act of trust. It says, "The world will keep turning without me for a day, because God is running it, not me."

Picking Your Datum

So how does a man take back his hours? Here are some steps that helped Greg.

- **Write down your datum.** In order: God, your wife (if you're married), your kids, your health, your work, your church service, everything else. Every decision gets measured off that list.
- **Track a week.** For seven days, write down how you actually spend your hours. Compare it with your list. The gap will tell you where to start.
- **Put the important things on the calendar first.** Time with God every morning. A date night. Your kids' games. Rest. Then let other things fill in around them.
- **Learn to say no.** Every yes to something is a no to something else. Before you agree to anything new, ask, "What will this take away from, and is it worth it?" It's okay to say, "Not this season."
- **Step down from something.** Most overcommitted men need to let go of at least one thing. Choose the one someone else could do as well as you.
- **Guard a day of rest.** Protect a weekly time to worship, rest, and be with your family.
- **Ask your family.** Say to your wife and kids, "If I could change one thing about how I spend my time, what would you want it to be?"

Greg's Datum

Greg made some hard decisions. He resigned as chair of the building committee and handed the sound board to a teenager who was thrilled to get it. He told the baseball league he'd help as an assistant coach next spring instead of running the team. He hired someone to finish the basement, which cost money but gave him back his weekends.

He and Kim went to dinner at the restaurant from their first date, three weeks late. He left his phone in the truck. He apologized for missing the anniversary and for a lot more than that. He told her she was his datum, after God, and that he was going to start measuring everything else off her.

Kim didn't go to her sister's. A few months later, she told the women's group at church that she felt like she'd gotten her husband back. Greg told the men at Walt's that he was doing about half as much as he used to, and his life was twice as full.

Work That Won't Let Go

For many men, the biggest thief of time is work. Not because they're lazy, but because work follows them everywhere now. Email on the phone, messages at dinner, calls on vacation. The workday never really ends.

Some seasons call for long hours. A new business, a big project, harvest time, a busy season in the trades. That's part of life, and a faithful man works hard. The danger is when a season becomes a lifestyle, and the people at home learn to live without you.

Here are a few ways to put boundaries around work.

Set a quitting time and keep it most days. Tell your family what it is. Let them hold you to it.

Turn off work notifications at home. If something is truly urgent, they'll call.

Talk with your boss. Many supervisors will respect a man who says, "I'll give you everything I've got from seven to five, but evenings are for my family unless it's an emergency."

Count the cost of a raise or a promotion. More money with fifteen more hours a week away from your family may not be a good trade.

And remember that you're not indispensable. The company will keep running if you take a vacation. God will keep running the world if you take a day off. Psalm 127:1 says that if the Lord does not build a house, its builders have toiled in vain. Your work matters, but it was never meant to be your whole life.

A Prayer for Your Time

> *Lord, teach me to number my days so I can gain a heart of wisdom. My life is a vapor, and I've spent too much of it on things that don't matter most. Forgive me for being busy for You and too busy for You. Help me pick the right datum: You first, then my family, then everything else. Give me the courage to say no, the wisdom to rest, and the joy of sitting at Your feet. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Write down your datum, in order, this week. Then track every hour of your time for seven days. At the end of the week, compare the two. Choose one thing to say no to or step down from, and one important thing to put on your calendar first.

Pass It On

Look for the man who's always busy and always tired, the one people say "does it all." Take him to lunch and ask him honestly how he's holding up. Tell him what you're learning about your own time. Sometimes a man just needs permission from another man to slow down.

Talk It Over

1. If someone looked at how you spent your hours last week, what would they say you value most?
2. Read Psalm 39:4-5 and James 4:13-15. How does remembering that life is short change how you want to spend your time?
3. Read Luke 10:38-42. Are you more of a Martha or a Mary? Why?
4. Walt talked about picking a datum. What's yours right now, honestly? What should it be?

5. What's one thing you need to say no to, or step down from, in this season of your life?

Chapter 17: The Body You Were Given

> *Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies **as** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service.*
>
> Romans 12:1 (SLB)

The Roof in August

Lonnie Price had been in the heating and air trade for twenty-eight years, the last twelve of them at the same company as Cole. He was forty-nine, a big, easygoing man who could carry a hundred-pound condenser up a ladder by himself and liked to remind the younger guys of it.

Lonnie hadn't been to a doctor in about ten years. He didn't see the point. He felt fine, mostly. He ran on energy drinks in the morning, fast food at lunch, and whatever was in the fridge at night. He slept about five hours, usually with the television on. He'd gained forty pounds since his wedding and joked that it was all muscle.

For a few weeks that summer, he'd been getting a tightness in his chest when he climbed ladders. He figured it was heartburn. His wife, Denise, begged him to get it checked. He said he'd go after the busy season.

On a Tuesday in August, Lonnie and Cole were on the flat roof of a strip mall replacing a rooftop unit. It was 107 degrees, and the roof surface was much hotter. Around two in the afternoon, Lonnie sat down on an upside-down bucket and said, "Give me a minute." His face was gray and covered in sweat. He was rubbing his left arm.

Cole called 911. Then he called the office to send someone to open the roof hatch from inside for the paramedics. He sat with Lonnie, kept him talking, and prayed out loud, which surprised both of them.

Lonnie had a major blockage in one of the main arteries of his heart. The cardiologist put in a stent and told him he was lucky. "Another half hour on that roof," she said, "and we'd be having a different conversation, or your wife would be having it without you."

Cole visited him in the hospital the next day. Lonnie looked small in the bed, with wires and tubes running everywhere. "I always figured I'd take care of it later," Lonnie said. "Denise kept telling me. I kept telling her I was fine." He shook his head. "My dad died of a heart attack at fifty-four. I'm forty-nine. I knew that, and I still didn't go."

Why a Christian Man Should Care About His Body

Some Christian men think caring about their bodies is vanity. Others think it's a distraction from more spiritual things. But the Bible doesn't separate body and soul the way we often do. God made your body. Jesus took on a human body. He rose from the dead in a body. And one day He'll raise yours.

> *For You, You created my kidneys; You wove me together in the womb of my mother. I will give thanks to You, because in awesome ways I am distinguished; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it exceedingly.* (Psalm 139:13-14)

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul urges us to present our bodies as a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. Your body is the tool God gave you to serve Him, love your family, and do your work. Taking care of it isn't vanity. It's stewardship.

That doesn't mean you need to look like a fitness model. It means taking care of what God gave you so you can do what God has called you to do, for as long as He gives you to do it.

Excuses Men Make

Men are famous for ignoring their health. We don't go to the doctor. We ignore pain. We push through. We joke about it. Some of that comes from good things, like toughness and not wanting to complain. But much of it comes from pride, fear, and plain neglect.

Here are some of the things men tell themselves:

- "I feel fine." Many serious problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and some cancers, often cause few or no symptoms until they're advanced.
- "I don't have time." You'll make time for the heart attack.
- "I don't want to know." Not knowing doesn't make it go away. It just takes away your chance to fix it early.
- "It's probably nothing." Maybe. But chest pain, blood where it shouldn't be, a lump, or a change that won't go away is worth a doctor's look.
- "My family needs me working." Your family needs you alive.

Lonnie told himself every one of those things. He nearly made Denise a widow at forty-seven.

Godliness Matters More, and the Body Still Matters

Paul gave young Timothy some perspective on exercise.

> *for bodily training is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, holding promise of the life that **is** now and of that which is coming.* (1 Timothy 4:8)

Paul isn't saying physical training is worthless. He's saying it is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, in this life and the one to come. That's the right balance. Don't make your body an idol, chasing a perfect physique while your soul starves. But don't neglect it either. Both matter. One just matters more.

Sleep Is a Gift

Many men brag about how little they sleep. "I'll sleep when I'm dead," they say, and some of them are speeding up the day. God designed your body to need sleep, and refusing it isn't strength. It's a kind of pride, as if you're the one holding up the world.

> ***It is** in vain for you who rise early to get up, who delay sitting down, who eat the bread of toils; so He gives to His beloved sleep.* (Psalm 127:2)

Sleep is a gift from God, and taking it is an act of trust. When you lie down at night, you're admitting that you're not God, and that He doesn't need you awake to keep things running. Remember Elijah from Chapter 9. Before God gave him a new job, He gave him sleep and a meal.

What You Put In

Scripture warns against gluttony and drunkenness in the same breath.

> *Do not be among drunkards of wine, among gluttons of flesh for themselves; for a drunkard and a glutton will become poor, and drowsiness will clothe **with** rags.* (Proverbs 23:20-21)

Food is a good gift. Jesus ate with people constantly, and the Bible is full of feasts. But many men use food the way others use alcohol: to numb stress, boredom, or pain. We eat too much, too fast, of things that aren't good for us, and we wash it down with sugar and caffeine. Over years, it takes a toll.

You don't need a perfect diet. But you probably need to eat more real food, drink more water, and cut back on fast food, sugary drinks, and energy drinks. And if you drink alcohol, keep it moderate, or give it up entirely if it has any hold on you.

Taking Care of the Temple

Here's a simple, practical plan for a man who wants to take better care of his body. Talk with your doctor before you start anything big, especially if you have health problems.

- **Get a checkup.** See a doctor once a year. Know your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. Ask what screenings are right for your age and family history, and get them done.
- **Know your family history.** If heart disease, diabetes, or cancer runs in your family, tell your doctor. Lonnie's father's heart attack was a warning he ignored.
- **Move every day.** Walk, lift, ride, swim, or work in the yard. Thirty minutes a day is a good start.
- **Protect your sleep.** Aim for seven or eight hours. Keep the phone and the television out of the bedroom. Get checked if you snore loudly or wake up exhausted.
- **Eat like you plan to live.** More vegetables, fruit, lean protein, and water. Less sugar, fried food, and processed food.
- **Don't ignore warning signs.** Chest pain, shortness of breath, numbness, sudden changes, or anything that doesn't go away. Call your doctor, or 911 if it's an emergency.
- **Take care of your mind too.** Stress, anxiety, and depression affect the body. Get help when you need it.

The Outer Man and the Inner Man

Every one of us is getting older. Knees wear out. Backs ache. Eyes get weaker. Some men struggle with injuries or illnesses that will never fully heal. Taking care of your body can slow some of that down, but it can't stop it. And that's where the Christian has a hope nobody else has.

> *Therefore we do not lose heart; but even if our outer man is being brought to decay, yet the inner **man** is being renewed day by day.* (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Your body is wearing out, but if you belong to Christ, the inner man is being renewed day by day. And one day, your body will be made new too. Paul says that Jesus will transform the body of our humiliation so

that it may be conformed to the body of His glory (Philippians 3:21). Every bad knee, every scar, and every worn-out heart will be made new.

That hope doesn't make us careless with our bodies now. It makes us grateful for them, and it frees us from fear as they age.

Lonnie's Walks

Lonnie went to cardiac rehab three times a week for three months. He switched from energy drinks to black coffee and water. Denise started packing his lunch, and he stopped complaining about it after the first week. He lost thirty pounds in a year. Every night after dinner, he and Denise walk two miles around their neighborhood. Lonnie says those walks have been good for his heart in more ways than one. They talk more now than they have in twenty years.

He also started coming to Walt's on Saturdays. The first morning, he told the men his story. Then he looked around the shop and said, "How many of you have been to a doctor in the last year?" About half raised their hands. Lonnie pointed at the other half. "Make the appointment this week. Don't wait for a roof in August."

Getting Older With Purpose

Some men reading this chapter are past sixty. Your body isn't what it used to be, and you know it. Maybe you're retired, or close to it. Maybe you've buried friends or a wife. The world often tells older men they're done. God doesn't.

The psalmist says the righteous will still bear fruit in old age and be full of sap and fresh (Psalm 92:12-14). Caleb was eighty-five years old when he asked Joshua for a hill country full of giants, because he was still as strong for battle as on the day Moses sent him out as a spy, forty-five years earlier (Joshua 14:7-12). Walt was in his seventies when God used his garage to change a dozen lives.

Taking care of your body as you age isn't about vanity. It's about staying able to serve. Keep moving. Keep your doctor's appointments. Keep your mind sharp by reading and learning. Stay connected to people, because isolation hits older men especially hard.

And keep investing in younger men. You have something they desperately need: decades of experience walking with God through good times and bad. Don't keep it to yourself. Your best years of influence may still be ahead of you.

A Prayer for Your Body

> *Lord, You formed me and made me, and Your works are wonderful. Forgive me for neglecting the body You gave me, and for the times I've been too proud or too afraid to take care of it. Help me rest, eat, move, and see the doctor when I need to. Thank You that even though my outer man is wearing out, my inner man is being renewed day by day. Let me serve You with all my strength for as long as You give me breath. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

If you haven't had a checkup in the past year, make the appointment this week. Not someday. This week. Write down your family's health history and take it with you. Choose one habit to start, like a daily walk or a set bedtime, and one to cut back, like energy drinks or late-night snacking. Do both every day for the next month.

Pass It On

Ask the men in your life when they last saw a doctor. Make it a challenge: everybody in your group gets a checkup this year. If a friend is trying to get healthier, offer to walk, lift, or ride with him a couple of times a week.

Talk It Over

1. When did you last see a doctor for a checkup? What's kept you from going?
2. Read Romans 12:1 and Psalm 139:13-14. How should knowing that God made your body shape the way you treat it?
3. Read 1 Timothy 4:8. How do you keep the right balance between caring for your body and caring for your soul?
4. Which of the excuses men make about their health have you used?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Philippians 3:21. How does the hope of a new body help you face getting older?

Chapter 18: When Nobody Is Watching

> *He who walks in integrity walks **in** security, and he who perverts his ways will become known.*
>
> Proverbs 10:9 (SLB)

The Quota

In the spring, the heating and air company Cole worked for was bought by an investment group that owned dozens of service companies across the country. The new owners kept the name on the trucks, but everything else changed. There were new software systems, new uniforms, and new sales targets for every technician.

Trent Molina was the service manager who had to make the targets work. He was thirty-five, sharp, and ambitious, and he'd been promoted fast. He was also a Christian. He'd grown up in church and taught a middle school class on Wednesday nights.

The pressure came down from regional management every Monday morning. Each technician was expected to generate a certain number of "replacement opportunities" per week. Trent's bonus, and maybe his job, depended on hitting those numbers.

At a team meeting in May, Trent passed around a sheet of "talking points" from corporate. Most of it was ordinary sales advice. But one section made Cole's stomach turn. It suggested telling customers with older furnaces that their heat exchangers "may be compromised" and could leak carbon monoxide, even when the technician hadn't found a crack. "You're not saying it's cracked," the sheet said. "You're saying it might be. Let the customer decide."

Cole stayed after the meeting. "Trent, I can't say that to people. You know what that does to an eighty-year-old widow? She'll spend nine thousand dollars she doesn't have because she's scared she'll die in her sleep."

Trent rubbed his eyes. "I know. I hate it too. But if our numbers don't come up, they'll bring in somebody who will say it. At least I'm trying to keep it reasonable."

Cole thought about that all week. On Saturday, he told Walt about it. He wasn't surprised when, two weeks later, Trent himself showed up at the shop. Cole had invited him, not expecting him to come.

Trent was honest. "I've been telling myself it's not really lying. It's just sales. Everybody does it. If I don't, somebody worse will." He shook his head. "Then last Wednesday, one of my middle school boys asked me what integrity means. I gave him a good answer. Then I went home and couldn't sleep."

Walt picked up a micrometer from the bench and handed it to Trent. "You know what this is for?"

"Measuring things really precisely."

“Right. Down to a ten-thousandth of an inch. In my shop, if a part was off by a few thousandths, nobody could see it with their eyes. It looked perfect. But it wouldn’t fit. The machine would shake itself apart.” Walt took the micrometer back. “Integrity’s like that. Most of what’s wrong with a man’s character, nobody can see. Until it doesn’t fit, and things start shaking.”

When I worked through my amends list in a 12-step program, one of the hardest was an old schoolmate I had wronged in junior high. Part of me wanted to leave it buried, since nobody else knew. Making it right taught me that integrity means cleaning up old wreckage even when no one is forcing you. And making amends does not guarantee forgiveness. That part I leave with God.

What Integrity Means

The word “integrity” comes from the same root as “integer,” a whole number. A man of integrity is whole. He’s the same man on Sunday and Monday, at home and at work, in public and in private. What he says matches what he does. What you see is what he is.

The opposite of integrity isn’t just lying. It’s being divided. Saying one thing and doing another. Having a public life and a secret life. Cutting corners when nobody’s looking.

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. He who walks in integrity walks in security. A man with nothing to hide sleeps well at night. He doesn’t have to remember which story he told to whom. He doesn’t have to worry about getting caught. But he who perverts his ways will become known. Sooner or later, it always comes to light.

> *The integrity of **the** upright guides them, and the crookedness of **the** treacherous destroys them.* (Proverbs 11:3)

Little Things

Most men don’t destroy their integrity in one big moment. They wear it away a little at a time. A padded expense report. A “sick day” on a sunny Friday. A little lie to a customer. A tax deduction that isn’t quite legitimate. Hours you billed but didn’t work. A promise you didn’t keep. A job you said was done right that you knew wasn’t.

Jesus said the little things reveal the big things.

> *The one **who is** faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and the one **who is** unrighteous in very little is unrighteous also in much.* (Luke 16:10)

If you’ll fudge on a fifty-dollar invoice, you’ll fudge on a fifty-thousand-dollar contract. If you’ll lie to your boss about why you were late, you’ll lie to your wife about where you were. Character isn’t built in the big moments. It’s revealed there. It’s built in the small ones.

A Man They Couldn’t Catch

Daniel served as a top official under foreign kings for most of his life. When his enemies wanted to bring him down, they went looking for dirt.

> *Then the overseers and the satraps were seeking to find an occasion against Daniel from the side of the kingdom; and they were not able to find any occasion or corruption, because he **was** trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him.* (Daniel 6:4)

Think about that. A team of jealous politicians combed through Daniel's life and his work looking for anything they could use against him, and they came up empty. The only thing they could attack was his faithfulness to God.

That's the kind of man God calls us to be. Not perfect, but trustworthy. Not sinless, but honest. A man whose enemies have to make things up, because there's nothing real to find.

Let Your Yes Be Yes

Jesus kept it simple.

> *But let your word be 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no'; and what is more than these is from the evil **one**.* (Matthew 5:37)

In Jesus' day, people used complicated oaths to make some promises binding and others not. Jesus said a man of God shouldn't need any of that. Just tell the truth, and do what you say. If your word is good, you don't need to swear to it.

The Secret Thought Life

Integrity isn't just about what other people see. It goes all the way down into the private world of a man's thoughts.

Every man has a thought life nobody else sees. In that private room, some men entertain fantasies about women other than their wives. Some nurse resentment and replay arguments, winning them in their heads. Some envy other men's success, money, or lives. Some daydream about revenge. Some imagine themselves as the hero of every story. Nobody else knows. But God does.

> *Look, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden **part** You make me know wisdom.* (Psalm 51:6)

David wrote that after his adultery with Bathsheba. He'd learned that God wants truth on the inside, not just good behavior on the outside. The sin that eventually wrecked David's life started in his thoughts, long before he sent for Bathsheba.

Paul tells us what to do with our thoughts.

> *demolishing reasonings and every high thing lifting itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive into the obedience of Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5)

You can't always stop a thought from showing up. But you can choose what you do with it. You can take it captive, like a soldier taking a prisoner, and bring it before Christ. Ask, "Is this true? Is it pure? Would I be comfortable if Jesus saw this?" And then replace it with something better.

A good prayer to pray every day is the one David prayed at the end of Psalm 19.

> *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

Making It Right

What if you've already compromised? What if there are things in your past, or present, that wouldn't stand up to the plumb line?

Zacchaeus was a tax collector who had gotten rich by cheating people. When Jesus came to his house, everything changed. And the first thing Zacchaeus did was make things right.

> *And Zacchaeus, having stood, said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, the half of my possessions I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore fourfold."* (Luke 19:8)

Real repentance doesn't just say sorry. Where it's possible, it makes restitution. It pays back what was taken, corrects what was false, and goes to the people who were wronged.

I know how hard that is. When I worked through the steps of my recovery, I had to make a list of people I had wronged and go to them. I didn't think I could do it. I was scared, and my pride was fighting me the whole way. But I prayed for the strength and peace to follow through.

One person on my list was an old schoolmate. We'd been friends for a few years, until sometime in junior high I tried to pick a fight with him just to look tough in front of my friends. He didn't fight back, and at the time I thought that made me something special. More than thirty years later, he found me on social media and sent a friend request, and to my surprise, I accepted. When I wrote my list, his name was on it. Nervously, I reached out and apologized. Funny enough, he didn't even remember the incident. He just remembered us being friends. He told me he'd been going through a hard time at home back then. We talked about it briefly, and I believe reconnecting with someone from that period actually helped him. None of that would have happened if I hadn't humbled myself and reached out.

Making things right is rarely as bad as we fear. And it nearly always does more good than we expect.

You Need Someone Who Can See

Integrity is hard to keep alone. Every man has blind spots, and every man is tempted to go easy on himself. That's why God gives us brothers.

> *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)

Sin is deceitful. It lies to you. It tells you that you deserve it, nobody will know, and it's not that bad. You need another man in your life who can ask you hard questions and who has your permission to tell you the truth.

Here are a few questions accountability partners have used for generations. Pick a man you trust, and give each other permission to ask them every week:

- Have you been honest in your work and your money this week?

- Have you been with anyone, or looked at anything, that would have made your wife uncomfortable?
- How have you treated your wife and kids?
- How has your time with God been?
- Have you just lied to me in any of your answers?

That last question is the one that matters most.

Trent's Choice

Trent stopped using the talking points. He told his technicians to tell customers the truth, and only the truth, about their equipment. Then he wrote an email to regional management explaining why, and he copied the company's legal department. He told Walt he figured it might cost him his job.

It didn't, at least not right away. His numbers dipped for a couple of months. Then something unexpected happened. Customers started requesting the company by name. Word had gotten around that their technicians were honest. Repeat business climbed. By fall, Trent's branch was outperforming two others that were still using the scare tactics.

Trent told his middle school boys the whole story on a Wednesday night. One of them asked, "What if it had cost you your job?"

"Then it would've been worth it," Trent said. "A job you can lose. Your integrity, once it's gone, is a lot harder to get back."

Integrity Online

The internet has created new ways for a man to live a divided life. Anonymous accounts where he says things he'd never say under his own name. Private browsing. Hidden apps. Deleted messages. A second identity his wife and friends know nothing about.

And new tools have made it easier than ever to cut corners. A man can have software write his reports and claim them as his own work, fake a review for his business, or doctor a photo for an insurance claim. Most of it feels small and victimless. Much of it is simply lying with better technology.

The plumb line doesn't change because the tools did. If you wouldn't do it under your own name, with your wife reading over your shoulder, don't do it at all. A good test is to ask, "If this showed up on a screen in front of my church, would I be ashamed?" Nothing done in secret stays secret forever. Jesus said nothing is covered up that will not be revealed (Luke 12:2).

Live one life. Use one name. Keep no secret accounts. Let your wife have your passwords. Use the new tools honestly, and say so when you use them. Integrity in the digital world looks a lot like integrity in the real one: being the same man everywhere.

A Prayer for Integrity

> *Lord, You desire truth in the inward parts. You see my work, my money, my words, and my thoughts, even the ones no one else sees. Make me a whole man, the same on Monday as on Sunday, the same online as in person. Show me anything I need to make right, and give me the courage to do it. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, my rock and my redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

Ask God to search your life for anything that's crooked: in your work, your money, your words, and your thoughts. Write down anything He brings to mind. If you owe someone money, an apology, or the truth, make a plan to make it right this month. Choose one man to be your accountability partner, and ask him to meet with you weekly.

Pass It On

Be the accountability partner another man needs. Offer it humbly, not as a judge but as a brother: "I need someone to keep me honest. Would you be willing to do that for me, and let me do it for you?"

Talk It Over

1. What does it mean to be a man of integrity? Who's the most honest man you've ever known?
2. Read Luke 16:10. What "little things" are most tempting for you to compromise on?
3. Read Daniel 6:4. What would your enemies find if they went looking through your life?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 and Psalm 19:14. What thoughts do you most need to take captive?
5. Is there someone you need to make things right with? What's keeping you from doing it?

Chapter 19: Home From the Fight

> *The God who girds me **with** strength, and He has made my way blameless; **He** makes my feet like the does, and on my high places He makes me stand; **He** trains my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze.*
>
> Psalm 18:32-34 (SLB)

Fourth of July

Travis Boone was thirty-three and had been out of the Army for five years. He'd served eight years in the infantry, with two deployments to Afghanistan, and left as a staff sergeant. Now he installed heating and air systems with Cole's company. He was the hardest worker on the crew. He was never late, never complained, and never talked about the Army unless someone asked, and even then he said as little as possible.

On the Fourth of July, Cole and Jen invited a few families from work over for a barbecue. Travis came with his wife, Kelsey, and their two little girls. Everything was fine until dusk, when a neighbor two houses down set off a string of heavy fireworks without warning. At the first loud crack, Travis was on the ground behind Cole's truck before anyone else had even turned their head. His face was white. His breathing was ragged. Kelsey knelt next to him and put her hand on his back, talking quietly. She'd done this before.

A minute later, Travis stood up, brushed off his jeans, and laughed it off. "Old habits," he said. Then he went and sat in his truck by himself for the rest of the night.

Walt was there that evening. He didn't say anything at the time. But on Monday, he called Travis and asked if he'd help him move a heavy drill press in his shop on Saturday morning. There was no drill press that needed moving. Walt just wanted him there.

After the other men left that Saturday, Walt poured two cups of coffee and sat down across from Travis.

"I was in Vietnam in 1971," Walt said. "I was nineteen. I came home and never talked about it with anybody but my wife, and not much with her. For about ten years I drank too much and slept with a light on. Nobody at church knew. I didn't know there was anybody to tell." He looked at Travis. "I'm not going to ask you what you did over there. That's yours. But I'll tell you what I wish somebody had told me. You're not crazy, and you're not alone, and you don't have to carry it by yourself."

Travis was quiet for a long time. Then he told Walt about the nightmares. About drinking himself to sleep. About how he hadn't been able to sit with his back to a door in five years. About a decision he'd made on a mountainside in Kunar Province that still woke him up at night. And about his buddy from his unit, a man who'd carried him off a hillside once, who had taken his own life the year before.

"I keep thinking it should've been me," Travis said. "He had more to live for. And I don't know how to be a husband or a dad. Kelsey deserves better. I don't feel anything anymore except angry or nothing at all."

Walt didn't try to fix it. He just said, "Thank you for telling me. Now let's find you some men who've been where you've been."

What They Carry Home

Most of us will never know what it's like to serve in combat. But many men in our churches, workplaces, and neighborhoods carry wounds from military service that nobody can see. Some served in combat. Some didn't, and carry other burdens from their service. All of them made a sacrifice most Americans never have to make.

The transition home can be one of the hardest parts of military life. Here are some of the struggles many veterans and service members face:

- **Post-traumatic stress.** After trauma, the body and mind can stay on high alert long after the danger is gone. Nightmares, flashbacks, jumpiness at loud noises, trouble sleeping, irritability, and avoiding reminders are common signs. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a real condition, and it can be treated.
- **Moral injury.** Some wounds aren't from fear but from guilt or betrayal. A man may carry shame over something he did, saw, or failed to prevent, or anger at leaders who let him down. That kind of wound goes straight to the soul.
- **Traumatic brain injury.** Blasts and blows to the head can cause injuries that affect memory, mood, focus, and headaches, sometimes for years.
- **Loss of purpose and brotherhood.** In the military, a man knows his mission, his rank, and his place, and he lives every day with brothers who would die for him. Civilian life can feel small, lonely, and pointless by comparison.
- **Anger and numbness.** Many veterans describe feeling only two things: angry or nothing.
- **Alcohol and other escapes.** Many men self-medicate the pain, the sleeplessness, and the memories.
- **Physical pain.** Years of carrying heavy loads, injuries, and wounds leave many veterans with chronic pain.
- **Strain at home.** Marriages and families often struggle, both during long separations and after a man comes home changed.
- **Suicide.** The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reported that in 2024 there were 6,488 suicides among veterans, an average of 17.7 every day. Every one of those men and women had a name and a family.

The Bible Respects the Warrior

The Bible doesn't pretend war is pretty, and it doesn't treat soldiers as villains. Some of the greatest men in Scripture were warriors. David was a fighting man from his youth. He wrote the words at the top of this chapter, praising God who girded him with strength and trained his hands for war.

When soldiers came to John the Baptist and asked what they should do to show repentance, he didn't tell them to quit the army. He told them not to extort anyone or accuse anyone falsely, and to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). And one of the strongest statements of faith Jesus ever praised came from a Roman centurion, a career military officer. Jesus marveled at him and said He hadn't found such great faith in all of Israel (Matthew 8:10).

If you've served, God sees your service. And He sees what it cost you.

A Warrior Who Wept

David also knew what war does to a man's soul. Many of his psalms come from seasons when he was hunted, betrayed, grieving, or surrounded by enemies. He lost friends in battle. He wept over men who died, including his closest friend, Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17-27). God Himself told David that he had shed much blood and made great wars, and that for this reason another man would build the temple (1 Chronicles 22:8).

And that warrior wrote the most famous words of comfort in the Bible.

> *Even when I walk in a valley of deep darkness, I will not fear evil, for You **are** with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* (Psalm 23:4)

David didn't say God would keep him out of the valley. He said God would be with him in it. If you're a veteran walking through a dark valley, you are not walking it alone.

Healing for the Soul

For the man carrying moral injury, guilt over something he did or failed to do, the gospel speaks directly to that wound.

Some things done in war were right and necessary. Some were tragic but not sinful. Some may have been wrong. A wise pastor or Christian counselor, especially one who understands military life, can help a man sort through those things honestly. But whatever is truly guilt, Jesus died to carry.

> *My sin I made known to You, and my iniquity I did not cover; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You, You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.* (Psalm 32:5)

David wrote that after carrying unconfessed sin for a long time. He said that while he kept silent, his bones wore out (Psalm 32:3). Many veterans know exactly what he meant. And the answer was the same for David as it is for you: bring it into the light, confess it to God, and receive His forgiveness. There is no sin so heavy that the cross can't carry it. Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And for wounds that aren't guilt but grief, betrayal, or terror, God offers healing too. Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would come to bind up the brokenhearted and give them a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit (Isaiah 61:1-3). Jesus read that passage in His hometown synagogue and said it was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:16-21).

Tools and Help for Veterans and Their Families

Faith and fellowship are vital, but so is good professional help. Many veterans don't know how much help is available, much of it free. Here are some places to start. I checked these numbers against the official sources when I wrote this book. Check them again before you rely on them, because numbers and programs change.

- **Veterans Crisis Line:** Dial 988 and then press 1, text 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net. Responders are available day and night, and the help is confidential. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.
- **Vet Centers:** The VA's Vet Centers offer free, confidential readjustment counseling for veterans, service members, and their families, in a relaxed, non-medical setting. Their call center at 1-877-927-8387 is open 24 hours a day.
- **Military OneSource:** For service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and their families, call 800-342-9647, any hour of any day. Eligible callers can connect to free resources and confidential counseling.
- **VA health care and benefits:** Many veterans qualify for health care, mental health treatment, and disability benefits. Start at VA.gov, or get free help with paperwork and claims from a county veterans service officer or an accredited veterans service organization.
- **Learning about PTSD:** The VA's National Center for PTSD has information for veterans and families at ptsd.va.gov.
- **Your doctor and a counselor:** Proven treatments for PTSD exist. Ask for a counselor who has experience working with veterans.
- **A church that understands:** Some churches have veterans' groups or ministries. If yours doesn't, ask your pastor about starting one.

How the Rest of Us Can Help

If you haven't served, you can still be a real friend to the veterans in your life. Here's how.

- **Thank them, and then go further.** "Thank you for your service" is a good start. Follow it with an invitation to coffee, a project, or your dinner table.
- **Don't pry.** Never ask a combat veteran if he killed anyone. Let him tell you what he wants to tell you, when he's ready. Listen without flinching.
- **Don't compare or fix.** You don't have to understand everything he went through. You just have to care.
- **Watch for warning signs.** Isolation, heavy drinking, reckless behavior, giving things away, and talking about being a burden or not being around. Ask directly about suicide, as we talked about in Chapter 9, and don't leave him alone if the answer is yes.
- **Be thoughtful about loud events.** Fireworks, gunfire at a range, and crowds can be hard for some veterans. Give a heads-up, or offer a quiet place.
- **Help with practical things.** Ride along to a first VA appointment. Help with paperwork. Watch the kids so he and his wife can get away.
- **Remember the families.** Military wives, husbands, and kids carry their own burdens, through deployments and after. Families who've lost someone in service carry grief that never fully goes away. Remember the anniversaries.
- **Give him a mission.** Many veterans thrive when they have a job to do and men to do it with. Invite him to serve alongside you.

Travis's New Unit

Walt drove Travis to the nearest Vet Center the next week and sat in the waiting room for an hour. Travis started seeing a counselor there, a Marine veteran who understood more than Travis expected. He got connected with VA health care for his back and his sleep. He cut way back on drinking, and eventually quit. He and Kelsey started marriage counseling.

A few months later, Walt introduced Travis to three other veterans from different churches in town: a retired Navy chief, a young Marine just out of the service, and an Air Force veteran from the Gulf War. The four of them started meeting every other Thursday night at a diner. They talk, they pray, and they don't have to explain anything to each other.

On the next Fourth of July, Cole called the neighbor ahead of time, and the neighbor agreed to save his fireworks for a different night. Travis and his family came to the barbecue again. When it got dark, Travis sat in a lawn chair with one daughter on each knee. He told Cole later that it was the first Fourth of July in five years that he'd enjoyed.

"I lost one unit," he said. "God gave me another one."

A Word to Veterans Who Are Doing Well

Some veterans reading this chapter are doing fine. You came home, found your footing, built a family and a career, and made peace with what you carried. Thank God for that. But I want to ask something of you.

There are younger veterans in your town and your church who are where you used to be. They're angry or numb, drinking too much, sleeping too little, and sure that nobody understands. Civilians can help them, but you can reach them in a way civilians never will. You speak their language. You know what it's like to lose the brotherhood and the mission. You know what it took to find your way back.

Make yourself available. Go to the Fourth of July barbecue and sit next to the young guy by himself. Start a small group for veterans at your church. Volunteer with a veterans' organization. Ride along to a VA appointment. Tell your story when the time is right, including the hard parts and how God met you there.

Many veterans say that what they missed most after service was having a mission and men who would die for them. The church can offer both: the greatest mission in the world, and brothers who've been bought by the same blood. You can help a younger veteran find his new unit.

A Prayer for Those Who Served

> *Lord, thank You for the men and women who have served our country, and for the sacrifices they and their families have made. For every veteran carrying wounds no one can see, be near. Heal the memories that won't let them sleep. Lift the guilt that Jesus has already carried. Break the hold of anger, numbness, and every hiding place. Give them brothers who understand, and a new mission in Your kingdom. Protect them from the dark, and bring them home in every way. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

If you're a veteran or service member who's struggling, make one call this week: the Veterans Crisis Line, a Vet Center, Military OneSource, or the VA. If you're in crisis, dial 988 and press 1 now. If you haven't served, write down the names of veterans in your life and your church, and pray for each one by name this week.

Pass It On

Invite a veteran to coffee or to work on a project with you. Don't ask about combat. Just be a friend. Save the crisis line in your phone so you'll have it if he ever needs it. If your church doesn't have a way to welcome veterans and their families, talk to your pastor about starting one.

Talk It Over

1. Who are the veterans in your life? What do you know about what they carry?
2. Read Psalm 18:32-34 and Matthew 8:10. How does the Bible view men who serve as warriors?
3. What's the difference between post-traumatic stress and moral injury? Why does the gospel matter for both?
4. Read Psalm 23:4. What does it mean that God walks with us through the valley instead of keeping us out of it?
5. Which of the ways to help a veteran could you or your group put into practice this month?

Chapter 20: When Life Breaks

> *For the momentary lightness of our affliction is producing for us, excessively to excess, an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things being seen but at the things not being seen; for the things being seen **are** temporary, but the things not being seen **are** eternal.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (SLB)

The Diagnosis

In November, Walt Kessler stopped making coffee on Saturdays.

He didn't explain at first. He just texted the men that the shop would be closed for a couple of weeks. Cole knew something was wrong. Walt hadn't missed a Saturday in all the months Cole had been coming. So on Tuesday evening, Cole drove over with a pie Jen had made.

Walt answered the door looking thinner than Cole remembered. They sat at the same kitchen table where they'd had their first cup of coffee, the night of the cracked igniter. Walt told him plainly. He had cancer. The doctors had found it late. They could treat it, and treatment might give him a year or two, maybe more. But they couldn't cure it.

Cole didn't know what to say. He'd never been good at this. He stared at the pie.

Walt smiled a little. "You don't have to say anything, son. I've been on your side of this table." He looked over at a photograph on the wall: a younger Walt and a dark-haired woman laughing on a fishing dock. "June got sick about six years ago. I took care of her for four years. Toward the end she couldn't feed herself or remember my name some days. I did everything I knew to do, and she died anyway, two years ago this March."

"I'm sorry, Walt."

"I was angry at God for a long time," Walt said. "I'll be honest with you. I'd been faithful. She'd been faithful. Forty-seven years. And she suffered like that." He turned his coffee cup slowly on the table. "I yelled at Him. Out in that shop, at two in the morning. I told Him exactly what I thought."

"What happened?"

"He took it," Walt said. "He didn't strike me dead. He didn't answer all my questions either. But He stayed. Night after night, He stayed. And a few months after the funeral, I was out there, and I realized I wasn't yelling anymore. I was just talking to Him. And I knew He'd been there the whole time, holding me up when I couldn't stand." He looked at Cole. "That's the only reason I'm not scared now. I've already been through the worst thing I could imagine, and He didn't let go."

The shop opened again two weeks later. Walt was slower and tired more easily. But the coffee was hot, and the men came. More men than ever, in fact. Word had gotten around.

Every Man Gets His Turn

Sooner or later, every man walks into suffering he didn't choose and can't fix. A diagnosis. A death. A child who walks away from the faith. A divorce he didn't want. A business that fails. An accident that changes everything in a second. Chronic pain that never lets up. A prodigal son who won't come home.

Jesus never promised that following Him would keep us from suffering. He promised the opposite.

> *These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33)

In the world, you will have tribulation. That's a promise. But so is the rest of that verse: take courage, I have overcome the world.

Many men, especially men raised in church, carry a quiet expectation that if they do the right things, God will protect them from the worst things. When suffering comes anyway, it can shake their faith to the foundation. "I did everything right. Why is this happening?"

That's an honest question. And the Bible doesn't run away from it.

Honest Prayers

One of the most surprising things about the Bible is how honest it lets people be with God. Job lost his children, his wealth, and his health in what seemed like a single day. He sat in ashes and argued with God for chapters. David wrote psalm after psalm asking where God was.

> *How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will I set counsels in my soul,* ***with*** *sorrow in my heart by day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?* (Psalm 13:1-2)

Four times in two verses, David asks, "How long?" He doesn't pretend everything is fine. He doesn't use religious language to cover his pain. He tells God exactly how he feels.

But notice how the psalm ends. In the last two verses, David says, "And I, in Your steadfast love I have trusted; let my heart rejoice in Your salvation" (Psalm 13:5). His circumstances hadn't changed. His focus had. He brought his pain to God, and in the bringing, he found that God's love was still there.

God can handle your anger, your doubts, and your questions. What He wants is for you to bring them to Him instead of walking away from Him. Walt yelling in his shop at two in the morning was still prayer. It was a man refusing to let go of God, even while he was furious with Him.

Jesus Wept

When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, Jesus came to the tomb four days later. He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. And yet, when He saw Mary weeping and the people with her weeping, He was deeply moved and troubled. Then the Bible gives us its shortest verse: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Why would Jesus weep when He knew the happy ending was minutes away? Because death is an enemy, and grief is real. Jesus didn't rush past the pain of His friends. He entered into it with them.

That tells us something important about God in our suffering. He isn't standing at a distance, watching coldly. He weeps with those who weep. Hebrews 4:15 says we have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. Jesus knows suffering from the inside. He was betrayed, abandoned, beaten, and crucified. Whatever you're going through, He's been there.

God Is Working, Even Here

One of the most quoted verses in the Bible is also one of the most misunderstood.

> *And we know that to those who love God all things work together for good, to those who are called according to **His** purpose.* (Romans 8:28)

That verse doesn't say all things are good. Cancer isn't good. Death isn't good. Divorce isn't good. Abuse isn't good. What it says is that God works all things together for good for those who love Him. He's the master craftsman who can take even the broken pieces and use them in something beautiful.

And the next verse tells us what that "good" is: to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). God's main goal isn't to make you comfortable. It's to make you like Jesus. Suffering, in God's hands, becomes one of His most powerful tools for that.

Paul knew that firsthand. He begged God three times to take away what he called a thorn in his flesh. God said no.

> *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in distresses, on behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Some of the strongest men of God I've known are men who have suffered. Their faith has been tested in the fire, and it held, not because they were strong, but because God was.

This Is Not the End

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul calls our affliction momentary and light. That's not because he didn't suffer. He was beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, and imprisoned. He calls it light because he'd weighed it against eternity, and eternity won.

Christians grieve. But Paul says we don't grieve like those who have no hope.

> *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.*
> (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

Paul goes on to describe the day when Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ will rise first, and believers who are alive will be caught away together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). I believe that day, which many call the rapture, will come before the time of tribulation the Bible describes, and that it could come at any time. Paul ends the

passage by saying, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). That’s the point. However you understand the timing, Christ is coming back for His people, and the separation of death is temporary.

And on the other side of all of it is a promise for every man who belongs to Jesus.

> *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away.*
> (Revelation 21:4)

That’s where this story ends. Not in a hospital room. Not at a graveside. With God Himself wiping away every tear.

Walking Through It

If you’re in a season of suffering right now, here are a few things that help:

- **Be honest with God.** Tell Him how you really feel. Read the psalms out loud. Pray Psalm 13 if you need to.
- **Don’t isolate.** Let other men carry you. This is when you need your brothers most.
- **Take the next step.** You don’t have to see the whole road. Just do the next right thing today.
- **Get help for grief.** Grief groups, counselors, and pastors can walk with you. There’s no prize for suffering alone.
- **Watch for the dark room.** Grief and suffering can slide into depression. If you start to feel hopeless or think about ending your life, call or text 988 and tell someone right away.
- **Remember the end of the story.** Read Revelation 21 and 22. Remind yourself that this isn’t the end.

And if you’re walking beside a man who’s suffering, don’t try to explain it. Don’t quote Romans 8:28 at a funeral. Show up. Sit with him. Bring food. Mow his lawn. Remember the anniversary of his loss and call him on that day. Your presence will say more than your words.

Walt’s Shop

Walt’s treatments took a lot out of him. Some Saturdays, he sat in a chair in the corner of the shop with a blanket over his knees while the men made the coffee and swept up. Cole took over opening the shop. Marcus set up a schedule so someone drove Walt to every appointment. Rick Sorensen and Hank Lindgren built a ramp to his back door before he needed it. Travis sat with him through two long chemotherapy sessions and told him more about the war than he’d ever told anybody.

One Saturday, Brent Harlan asked Walt how he could be so calm.

“I’m not calm every day,” Walt said. “Some days I’m scared, and some days I’m mad. But I know where I’m going. And I’ve got the best seat in the house to watch what God’s doing in all of you.” He looked around the shop at the men. “A year and a half ago, it was me and a coffee pot and a couple of old-timers. Look at this place now. If God had to let me get sick for some of you to learn how to take care of each other, I’m all right with that.”

Nobody said anything. A few men looked at the floor and wiped their eyes.

When Your Child Walks Away

One of the hardest kinds of suffering a father can face is a child who walks away. Away from the family, away from the faith, sometimes into addiction or a life that breaks your heart. Many godly men carry this grief quietly for years.

If that's you, here are a few things to hold on to.

God knows this pain from the inside. The whole Bible is the story of a Father whose children walked away from Him. He knows what it is to love someone who doesn't love Him back.

It may not be your fault, and it may not be the end. Good fathers sometimes have children who wander, and fathers who failed sometimes see their children come home. Own whatever you need to own, apologize where you need to, and then leave the rest with God.

Keep the door open. The father in Luke 15 didn't chase his son into the far country, and he didn't lower his standards. But he kept watching the road, and when the boy came home, he ran.

Keep praying, and keep loving. Your son or daughter may not want your advice right now, but they probably still want to know you love them. Send the birthday card. Make the phone call. Show up when you're invited.

And find other men who have walked this road. You're not the only father in your church carrying this. Talk about it. Pray together. Hope together.

A Prayer in Suffering

> *Lord, I don't understand what You're doing, and some days I'm angry and afraid. How long? But I'm bringing it to You instead of running away. You are near to the broken of heart. Your grace is sufficient for me, and Your power is perfected in my weakness. Hold me up when I can't stand. Use even this to make me more like Jesus. And keep my eyes on the day when You will wipe away every tear. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Your Move

If you're suffering right now, read Psalm 13 out loud this week and then write your own version of it, as honest as you need it to be. Tell one man what you're going through. If you're not in a hard season right now, write down the names of three people you know who are, and do one practical thing for each of them this week.

Pass It On

Think of a man who has lost a wife, a child, a parent, a marriage, or his health in the last year. Most people stop checking in after the first few weeks. Call him this week. Ask how he's really doing, and listen. Put the anniversary of his loss on your calendar and call him that day too.

Talk It Over

1. What's the hardest season of suffering you've walked through? Where was God in it?
2. Read Psalm 13. Why do you think God lets people pray so honestly in the Bible?
3. Read Romans 8:28-29. What does that verse promise, and what doesn't it promise?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How have you seen God's strength show up in your weakness?
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 and Revelation 21:4. How does the hope of Christ's return change the way a Christian grieves?

Part Five: One Man at a Time

Chapter 21: How a Man Really Changes

> *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 (SLB)

A Year Later

It was January again, and cold. A year since the cracked igniter, a year since the coffee at Walt's kitchen table and the night Cole sat in his driveway with the engine off.

A lot had changed. Cole charged his phone in the kitchen now and read his Bible most mornings before work. He and Jen had a date night twice a month, and she'd told him more than once that she felt like she had her husband back. He'd taken Ethan to Walt's shop so many Saturdays that the boy now ran the lathe better than Cole did. Cole had prayed out loud with a dying man on a roof, brought soup to a lonely one, and sat at a kitchen table while a man admitted he wanted to die. He hardly recognized the man he'd been a year before.

And then, in December, the old thing came back.

It was the same battle he'd told Josh about in the van more than a year earlier. Cole had said back then that he'd never really dealt with it. He'd just outrun it. Now, with Walt sick, work slammed by the cold, and his own father in the early stages of memory loss, he was tired and scared and stretched thin. One night, alone in the living room after midnight, he picked up his phone, and he didn't put it down. Then it happened again three nights later.

He felt sick. He felt like a fraud. All year he'd been the one encouraging other men, and here he was, right back where he'd been at twenty-five. He thought about quitting Walt's, quitting church, quitting all of it. What was the point of trying if this was who he really was?

On Saturday, after the other men left, Cole told Walt. He expected disappointment. Walt, wrapped in a blanket in his chair in the corner, listened all the way through.

Then the old man laughed, gently. "Son, did you think you were done?"

Cole didn't know what to say.

"I'm seventy-five years old and dying," Walt said, "and God's still working on me. Last week I was short with the nurse for no reason, and I had to go back and apologize. You don't stop needing grace just because you've had a good year." He leaned forward. "Here's what's different. A year ago, you'd have hidden this. You'd have outrun it again. Today you're sitting here telling me. That's not a man going backward. That's a man who's changing. Now go tell Jen."

That night, for the first time in seventeen years of marriage, Cole told his wife the whole truth: about December, and about the years before he'd ever met her. It was the hardest conversation of his life. Jen

cried. She was hurt, and she said so. But she didn't leave the room. At the end of it, she took his hand and said, "I'd rather have a husband who tells me the truth and is fighting than one who's pretending."

In my recovery, daily Bible study and translating the Steadfast Literal Bible have been strong anchors. Where I had to work harder was being honest with other men instead of managing my growth alone. Change stuck when I stopped relying on willpower and practiced daily habits in Scripture, prayer and honest fellowship.

Change Is a Process

If you've read this far, you've probably found more than one place where your life is out of plumb. Maybe you've made some real changes. And if you're like most men, you've also had moments like Cole's, when the old man comes roaring back and you wonder if anything has really changed at all.

So let's talk about how a man actually changes. Not on paper, but in real life.

First, understand this: change is a process, not an event. The Bible calls it sanctification, which means being made holy, more like Jesus, over time. When you trusted Christ, God declared you righteous in an instant. You were forgiven, adopted, and made new. But living that new life out takes the rest of your life.

> *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of **the** Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from **the** Lord, **the** Spirit.*
> (2 Corinthians 3:18)

"Being transformed" is in the present tense. It's ongoing. From glory to glory, one degree at a time. You won't be finished until you see Jesus face to face. Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter: He who began a good work in you will complete it. God started it, and God will finish it. Your job isn't to finish it yourself. It's to keep cooperating with Him.

Who Does the Work?

Here's a question that confuses many men. If God is the one who changes me, what's my part? And if I have a part, am I trying to earn something?

Paul answers that in one sentence.

> *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the **One** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*
> (Philippians 2:12-13)

Work out your salvation, not work for it. You already have it. Now live it out. And you can, because God is the one working in you, giving you both the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.

It's like a sailboat. The sailor can't make the wind blow. But he has to raise the sails, hold the rudder, and trim the lines. When he does his part, the wind does what he never could. Your part is to raise the sails. God's Spirit supplies the wind.

Jesus put it another way.

> *I am the vine; you **are** the branches. The **one** remaining in Me and I in him, this **one** bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything.* (John 15:5)

A branch doesn't strain to produce grapes. It stays connected to the vine, and the fruit grows. Your main job is to stay connected to Jesus. When you do, change happens, often slower than you want, but deeper than you'd expect.

Raising the Sails

So what does staying connected look like day to day? Christians through the centuries have found that God usually changes people through some simple, ordinary practices. None of them earn God's love. All of them put you in the place where His grace does its work.

- **God's Word.** Read it daily, even if it's only a chapter. Memorize some of it. Let it be the plumb line you hold up to your life.
- **Prayer.** Talk with God every day, honestly and simply. Start your morning with Him and end your day with Him.
- **Church.** Worship with God's people every week. Sit under the teaching of His Word. Take the Lord's Supper. Let others know you.
- **Brothers.** Walk closely with a few other men who know the truth about you and will tell you the truth about yourself.
- **Confession.** Keep short accounts with God and with people. When you sin, bring it into the light quickly.
- **Service.** Use your gifts to serve others. Nothing gets a man's eyes off himself like serving.
- **Rest.** Build rest into your week. A tired man is a vulnerable man.

Paul told Timothy to train himself for godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). The word he used is the root of our word "gymnasium." Spiritual growth takes training, the same way physical strength does. You don't get strong by lifting once. You get strong by showing up again and again.

Putting Off and Putting On

Paul gives a simple picture of how change works.

> *Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his practices, and having put on the new **man**, who is being renewed in knowledge according to **the** image of the One who created him* (Colossians 3:9-10)

Change isn't just stopping bad things. It's putting off the old and putting on the new. Many men try to quit sin by gritting their teeth. That rarely works for long. The better way is to replace it. Replace lying with telling the truth. Replace anger with gentleness. Replace hours on the phone with time with your family. Replace lust with gratitude for your wife. Replace bitterness with forgiveness. An empty space won't stay empty. Fill it with something better.

When You Fall

Every man who's serious about following Jesus will fall. The question isn't whether you'll fall. It's what you'll do next.

> *for a righteous **one** will fall seven **times** and rise, and wicked **ones** will stumble in evil.*
> (Proverbs 24:16)

The difference between a righteous man and a wicked man isn't that one never falls. It's that the righteous man gets back up. Seven times, if he has to. Seventy times seven, if he has to.

Peter is the great example. He swore he would die for Jesus. A few hours later, he denied Him three times. After Jesus rose, He met Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, cooked him breakfast, and asked him three times whether he loved Him. Three denials, three chances to say yes. Then Jesus gave him a job: feed My sheep (John 21:15-17). Jesus didn't throw Peter away after his worst failure. He restored him and put him to work.

I've lived that. 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.

Surrender, Every Day

If there's one word that sums up how a man changes, it's surrender. Not once, but every day.

My recovery taught me that. Admitting I had a problem wasn't enough. 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. There are good days, bad days, and days when old temptations come back.

Jesus said that anyone who wants to follow Him must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Daily. Every morning, you get to hand Him the keys again.

Cole's Next Step

Cole didn't quit Walt's or church. He did the hard things he'd been telling other men to do. He put a filter on his phone and gave Jen the password. He asked Josh, the young apprentice he'd helped a year earlier, to be his accountability partner, and Josh was honored. He started seeing a Christian counselor about the stress he'd been carrying with his father and with Walt.

“Funny thing,” he told the men at the shop a few weeks later. “I spent a year thinking I was helping all of you get straightened out. Turns out God was using all of you to straighten me out too.”

Walt, from his chair in the corner, raised his coffee mug. “Now you’re getting it,” he said.

A Simple Rhythm for Your Week

Many men find it helpful to write down a simple rhythm for their week, a short list of practices they want to build their lives around. Christians through the centuries have called this a rule of life. It’s not a set of laws. It’s more like a trellis, a frame that helps a growing plant climb in the right direction.

Here’s a sample. Make it your own, and keep it simple enough that you’ll actually do it.

When	Practice
Every morning	Bible and prayer before the phone, even if it’s only fifteen minutes.
Every day	Ten minutes of full attention for my wife. Time with each of my kids.
Every evening	Phone in the kitchen. Thank God for the day. Confess anything I need to.
Every week	Worship with my church. Meet with my brothers. One date with my wife. A day of rest.
Every week	One act of service nobody asked me to do.
Every month	Check my budget with my wife. Take my one man to coffee.
Every year	Physical checkup. Plumb Line Check (Appendix A). A retreat or quiet day with God.

Post it somewhere you’ll see it. Share it with your wife and your accountability partner. When you miss a day, and you will, don’t throw the whole thing out. Just start again the next morning.

A Prayer for Growth

> *Father, thank You that You began a good work in me, and You will finish it. I’m not where I want to be, but by Your grace I’m not where I was. Keep me connected to Jesus like a branch to the vine. Help me raise the sails every day and trust Your Spirit to move me. When I fall, help me get back up quickly and run back to You. I surrender my life to You again today. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Your Move

Look back at what you wrote down in Chapter 1 about where your life was out of plumb. What has changed since then? What hasn’t? Thank God for any progress, however small. Then choose one of the “raising the sails” practices you’ve been neglecting and do it every day for the next thirty days. If you’ve fallen recently, tell someone this week and get back up.

Pass It On

Share your progress, and your failures, with another man. Men need to hear that the Christian life isn't a straight line up. Tell him where God has changed you and where you're still fighting. Your honesty might be the thing that keeps him from quitting.

Talk It Over

1. What has changed in your life since you started reading this book? What hasn't changed yet?
2. Read Philippians 2:12-13. How do God's work and your work fit together?
3. Read John 15:5. What does it look like in your daily life to stay connected to the vine?
4. Which "raising the sails" practice is strongest in your life? Which is weakest?
5. Read Proverbs 24:16 and John 21:15-17. What do you do when you fall? How does Jesus' restoration of Peter encourage you?

Chapter 22: Your Turn

> *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 (SLB)

The Plumb Bob

By April, Walt didn't come out to the shop much anymore. The treatments had stopped working, and the doctors had started using words like "comfort" and "months." Hospice nurses came to the house three times a week. The men from the shop took turns sitting with him in the evenings.

One evening, when it was Cole's turn, Walt asked him to go out to the shop and bring something back. "On the ceiling joist, over the lathe," he said. "You know the one."

Cole came back with the brass plumb bob, still on its string. Walt held it in his thin hands and turned it over slowly. In the lamplight, Cole could see tiny marks from a cutting tool on its surface.

"I made this on that lathe forty-four years ago," Walt said. "I was thirty-one and a mess. Drinking too much, angry all the time, my marriage hanging by a thread. An old man at our church, Earl Hobbs, started having me over to his garage on Saturday mornings. He didn't preach at me. He just let me work beside him, and he asked me hard questions, and he told me about Jesus like he actually knew Him." Walt smiled. "Earl's the one who taught me to turn metal. This was the first thing I ever made that came out right. He hung it up in my shop the day I opened it and said, 'Every time you look at this, remember that the line doesn't lie, and remember somebody hung it for you.'"

He held it out to Cole. "I want you to have it. And I want you to keep the coffee going."

Cole tried to say something, and couldn't.

"You're not ready," Walt said, reading his face. "I know. I wasn't either. Earl told me nobody ever is. You don't have to be a preacher or a Bible scholar. You just have to open the door, pour the coffee, and love the next man who walks in. God will do the rest. He always has."

Walt died in May, on a Tuesday morning, with his son and daughter beside him. More than two hundred people came to the funeral. Many of them were men. Brent Harlan, the greeter who'd discovered he didn't know God, read Scripture. Dale Hutchins, the mechanic who'd once written goodbye letters, served as a pallbearer, along with Rick, Hank, Travis, and Cole. Marcus played guitar. Josh and Kayla brought their newborn son, whom they'd named Walter.

Three weeks later, on a hot afternoon in June, Cole was on a service call at a small rental house on the edge of town. The tenant was a kid named Danny Ortiz, twenty-two, who'd just started as an apprentice at a different heating and air company. He'd grown up without a dad and had moved to town alone. His air conditioner had died, and he was embarrassed because he couldn't figure out how to fix it himself.

Cole fixed it. A bad capacitor. Twenty minutes. On his way out, he noticed Danny standing in the kitchen, looking like a man who hadn't talked to anybody in a while.

Cole stopped. He pulled a card out of his shirt pocket and wrote on the back.

"I have coffee in my garage Saturday mornings at seven," he said. "A few men come by. No sermon, no sign-up sheet. You're welcome if you want."

That night, Cole hung the brass plumb bob from a ceiling joist in his own garage. He watched it swing and settle, perfectly still, a few inches above the concrete.

Starting With You, Not Ending There

This book has been about building men up one man at a time, starting with you. We've held your life up against God's plumb line: your faith, your work, your phone, your eyes, your hiding places, your anger, your fears, your pride, your money, your marriage, your kids, your friendships, your time, your body, your integrity, your wounds, and your suffering. If you've been honest, you've found plenty that's out of true. So have I. So does every man.

But if God has been straightening some things in you as you've read, I want you to hear this. It was never meant to stop with you.

Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. Paul was writing to Timothy, a younger man he'd poured his life into. In one sentence he describes four generations: Paul taught Timothy, Timothy was to commit those things to faithful men, and those men would teach others also. That's how the gospel has spread for two thousand years. Not mainly through big events or famous preachers, but through one man investing in another, who invests in another.

Somebody did that for you, or you wouldn't be reading this book. Now it's your turn.

Jesus' Plan Was Men

When Jesus left the earth, He didn't leave behind a building, a program, or a book He'd written. He left behind eleven men He'd spent three years with. And He gave them one job.

> *Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you; and look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age. Amen.* (Matthew 28:19-20)

"Make disciples" is the command. A disciple is a learner and a follower. Making disciples isn't just getting men to pray a prayer or come to church. It's teaching them to observe all things Jesus commanded. That takes time, and it happens best up close, one life at a time.

Paul described what that looked like for him.

> *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)

Paul didn't just share the gospel. He imparted his own soul, his very life. That's what Earl did for Walt, what Walt did for Cole, and what Cole is about to do for Danny. It's what the men in my life did for me.

Someone Saw Something in Me

I know what one man's investment can do, because men did it for me. I've told you about the pastor who sat with me at my lowest, and my friend of more than forty years. Let me tell you about one more.

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. And it's yours.

Barnabas

If you want a model for this, look at a man named Barnabas. His given name was Joses, but the apostles called him Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36).

When Saul of Tarsus, the man who had been hunting Christians, was converted, the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of him. They didn't believe he was real. Barnabas took him by the hand and brought him to the apostles and vouched for him (Acts 9:26-27). Later, Barnabas went looking for Saul and brought him to Antioch to teach (Acts 11:25-26). That man became the apostle Paul.

Years later, a young man named John Mark quit on Paul and Barnabas in the middle of a mission trip. Paul didn't want to take him again. Barnabas did, and gave him a second chance (Acts 15:36-39). Mark went on to write one of the four Gospels, and near the end of Paul's life, Paul asked for him by name because he was useful for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

Barnabas never wrote a book of the Bible. But two men he believed in, when nobody else would, wrote a large part of the New Testament. Never underestimate what God can do through one man who decides to encourage another.

Older Men and Younger Men

God's design is for men of different generations to walk together. Paul told Titus that the older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance, and that he should exhort the younger men to be sensible too, with Titus himself as a pattern of good works (Titus 2:2, 6-7).

If you're an older man, the younger men around you need you more than they know. They need to see what faithfulness looks like over forty years. They need to hear your stories, including your failures. Don't assume you have nothing to offer. Walt was a retired machinist with bad knees and a coffee pot, and God used him to change a dozen lives.

If you're a younger man, look for an older man to learn from. Ask him to coffee. Ask him questions. Most older men would be honored to be asked. And don't wait until you're old to start investing in men younger than you. There's always someone a few steps behind you.

How to Start

You don't need a title, a degree, or a program. You need a few simple things.

- **Pray for one man.** Ask God to show you who. It might be a coworker, a neighbor, a younger man at church, your son, or a customer at a kitchen table.
- **Notice him.** Learn his name. Ask how he's doing, and mean it. Most men are waiting for someone to notice.
- **Invite him.** To coffee, to lunch, to work on a project, to your table, to church. Make it simple and specific.
- **Show up again.** One conversation is a start. Real change happens over months and years of showing up.
- **Share your life.** Tell him your story, the good and the bad. Let him see how you live, not just hear what you say.
- **Open the Bible together.** You don't have to be an expert. Read a passage and ask, "What does this say? What does it mean? What should we do about it?" You could even read this book together, one chapter a week.
- **Point him to Jesus.** You're not the answer to his problems. Jesus is. Your job is to walk beside him and keep pointing.
- **Send him out.** When he's growing, encourage him to find a man of his own. That's how the line keeps going.

If you want to go further and help your church reach and build men, I wrote a companion book for that, *Built Together*. This book is about becoming the man God is building. That one is about how to walk with other men and how a church can build men together. But you don't need a program to start. You just need one man.

The Line Keeps Going

Walt's plumb bob now hangs in Cole's garage. Someday, God willing, Cole will hand it to another man, who will hang it in his own shop and open his own door. That's how it works. Earl to Walt. Walt to Cole. Cole to Danny. And on down the line, one man at a time, until Jesus comes back.

So here's my last question for you, and it's the most important one in this book. Who's your one man?

Pray about it tonight. Then, this week, pour the coffee, open the door, and invite him in.

Excuses We Make

When it comes to investing in another man, most of us have reasons why we can't. Here are the most common ones, and what I'd say to each.

“I’m not qualified.” Neither were the twelve disciples. They were fishermen and tax collectors. What qualified them was that they’d been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). If you know Jesus and you’re walking with Him, you have something to give.

“My own life is still a mess.” Everyone’s is, in some way. You don’t need to be finished to help another man take his next step. In fact, your honesty about your struggles may be the very thing that helps him. Walt was dying, and he still had plenty to give.

“I don’t have time.” You probably have time for coffee once a week. Start there. Investing in another man isn’t one more program. It’s sharing the life you’re already living.

“I don’t know what to say.” Ask questions and listen. Open the Bible together. Use this book. Most men don’t need a lecture. They need a friend who cares enough to ask.

“He won’t want to.” Maybe not. But many men are waiting for someone to ask. You won’t know unless you do. And if he says no, ask someone else.

Every one of those excuses was true of somebody God used. They’re true of me too. God doesn’t call the qualified. He qualifies the men He calls.

A Prayer for Your One Man

> *Lord Jesus, You told us to make disciples, and You promised to be with us always. Thank You for the men who invested in me. Now show me my one man. Open my eyes to notice him, give me the courage to invite him, and the faithfulness to keep showing up. Let me share not only the gospel but my own life. Use me to pass on what I’ve received, so that he can pass it on to others also. In Jesus’ name, amen.*

Your Move

Write down the names of three men God might be putting in your path. Pray for each one by name every day this week. Then choose one and take a specific step toward him: a text, a call, an invitation. Write down the date you’ll follow up.

Pass It On

This whole chapter is Pass It On. But here’s one more step. Give this book to a man who needs it, and offer to read it with him, one chapter a week, over coffee. Ask him the Talk It Over questions, and answer them honestly yourself. Then, when you’re done, ask him who his one man is.

Talk It Over

1. Who invested in you? What difference did it make in your life?
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:2. Trace the four generations in that verse. Where are you in that chain?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8. What’s the difference between sharing the gospel and sharing your life? Why do men need both?

4. What can you learn from Barnabas about encouraging other men?

5. Who is your one man? What's your first step toward him this week?

A Closing Word: Hang Your Line

> *therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Look, I **am He who** has laid in Zion a stone, a stone of testing, a precious corner of a foundation, firmly founded; the one who believes will not hurry. And I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of falsehood, and waters will overflow the hiding place."*
>
> Isaiah 28:16-17 (SLB)

Every builder knows that the first course of block or the first wall of framing sets the line for everything that goes on top of it. If the first one is out of plumb, every course above it leans a little more. But if it's true, you can build as high as you want.

God says He has laid a foundation for His people, a stone of testing, a precious corner of a foundation, and that He will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line. The New Testament tells us who that cornerstone is. It's Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:6). Every life built on Him can be straightened, no matter how far it has leaned. Every life built on anything else will lean sooner or later.

I don't know where this book finds you. Maybe you're like Cole in the driveway that first night, busy and empty and just starting to notice the lean. Maybe you're like Brent, who found out he knew about God but didn't know Him. Maybe you're Josh or Rick or Dale, fighting something in the dark. Maybe you're a Walt, with gray hair and bad knees and a lifetime of lessons that some younger man desperately needs to hear.

Wherever you are, here's what I'd ask you to do.

First, settle the foundation. If you've never personally trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, go back to Chapter 2 and do it today. Nothing else in this book will hold up without Him.

Second, hang the line. Keep holding your life up against God's Word. Not once, but every day. Read it. Pray it. Let it show you where you're out of true, and let Him straighten you.

Third, don't build alone. Find a few men who will walk with you, tell you the truth, and pick you up when you fall.

Fourth, reach back. Find your one man. Open the door, pour the coffee, and tell him what God has done for you.

I've been the man who needed help, and I've seen what one caring man can do. Never underestimate what God can do when one man chooses to stand beside another.

If this book has helped you, or if you trusted Christ while reading it, I'd be glad to hear from you at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

Appendix A: The Plumb Line Check

Use this page at the start of the book, again when you finish, and once or twice a year after that. For each area, rate where you stand today from 1 (way out of plumb) to 5 (true to the line). Then write one step you'll take. Don't try to fix everything at once. Pick the one or two areas where God is pressing on you most.

Area	Key question	1 to 5	My next step
Faith (Ch. 2)	Do I know Jesus, or just know about Him?		
Identity and work (Ch. 3)	Is my worth built on my job, or on Christ?		
Phone and screens (Ch. 4)	Who's holding who?		
Sexual purity (Ch. 5)	Have I made a covenant for my eyes?		
Hiding places (Ch. 6)	What do I reach for when life hurts?		
Anger (Ch. 7)	Is anyone in my home afraid of me?		
Fear and worry (Ch. 8)	Am I carrying tomorrow on today's strength?		
Dark thoughts (Ch. 9)	Have I told someone the truth about how I'm doing?		
Pride (Ch. 10)	When did I last ask for help?		
Money (Ch. 11)	What does my bank statement say I love?		
Manhood (Ch. 12)	Do I use my strength to serve or to be served?		
Marriage (Ch. 13)	Does my wife feel loved and known?		
Fatherhood (Ch. 14)	Am I present for my kids?		
Friendship (Ch. 15)	Who would I call at 2:00 a.m.?		
Time (Ch. 16)	What is my datum?		
Health (Ch. 17)	When did I last see a doctor?		
Integrity (Ch. 18)	Is there anything I'm hiding?		

Area	Key question	1 to 5	My next step
Suffering (Ch. 20)	Am I bringing my pain to God or running from Him?		
Growth (Ch. 21)	Am I raising the sails every day?		
My one man (Ch. 22)	Who am I walking with?		

Appendix B: Where to Get Help

The numbers below are for the United States. I checked each one against the official source on November 6, 2026. Phone numbers and programs change, so check them again before you rely on them, and save the ones you need in your phone today.

In an Emergency

- If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call **911**.

Suicide and Crisis

- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988, or chat online through 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.
- **Veterans Crisis Line:** Dial 988 and then press 1, text 838255, or chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

Veterans, Service Members, and Their Families

- **Vet Centers:** Free, confidential readjustment counseling for veterans, service members, and their families. Call center: 1-877-927-8387, 24 hours a day.
- **Military OneSource:** 800-342-9647, any hour of any day. Eligible callers can connect to free resources and confidential counseling.
- **VA health care and benefits:** VA.gov. A county veterans service officer or an accredited veterans service organization can help with claims at no cost.
- **PTSD information:** The VA's National Center for PTSD, ptsd.va.gov.

Addiction

- **SAMHSA National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP (4357). Free, confidential treatment referral and information, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English and Spanish.
- **Christ-centered recovery groups:** Celebrate Recovery and similar groups meet in many churches. Ask your pastor or search for a group near you.
- **Medical help:** Stopping alcohol or some drugs suddenly can be dangerous. See a doctor first.

Gambling

- **National Problem Gambling Helpline:** 1-800-MY-RESET (1-800-697-3738).

Counseling

- Ask your pastor for the names of licensed Christian counselors in your area. Many churches keep a list. Your doctor can also refer you.

Abuse or Danger at Home

- If anyone in your home is in danger, call 911. Then talk with your pastor and a licensed counselor. If a child may be at risk, report it to the authorities as the law requires.

Appendix C: Walking With One Man

Here's a simple twelve-week plan for meeting with one man, using this book. Meet once a week for about an hour, over coffee, a meal, or a project. Read the chapters before you meet. Use the Talk It Over questions, share your Moves, and pray for each other. After twelve weeks, keep going with the rest of the book, or pick a book of the Bible and read it together a chapter at a time.

Week	Read	Focus
1	Start Here and Chapter 1	Where am I out of plumb?
2	Chapter 2	Do I really know Jesus?
3	Chapter 3	Who am I, apart from my work?
4	Chapter 4	Taking back my attention
5	Chapters 5 and 6	Bringing secrets into the light
6	Chapters 7 and 8	Anger and fear
7	Chapters 9 and 10	The dark room and going it alone
8	Chapters 11 and 12	Money and manhood
9	Chapters 13 and 14	Home: wife and kids
10	Chapters 15 and 16	Friends and time
11	Chapters 17 to 20	Body, integrity, service, suffering
12	Chapters 21 and 22	How I'll keep growing, and who my one man is

Questions for Any Week

When you're not sure what to talk about, these questions always work:

1. How are you really doing?
2. Where have you seen God at work this week?
3. Where are you struggling?
4. What is God teaching you in His Word?
5. How can I pray for you?
6. Have you been honest with me today?

Appendix D: Sources

I kept statistics in this book to a few that I could check against the original source. Here they are.

- **Chapter 9, suicide among men:** U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide data page, cdc.gov/suicide/facts/data.html (page dated March 26, 2025). The page states that the suicide rate among males in 2023 was approximately four times higher than among females, and that males make up nearly 80 percent of suicides.
- **Chapter 15, loneliness:** Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (2023), page 4. The advisory reports that about one in two adults in America reported experiencing loneliness in recent years, and that the mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.
- **Chapter 19, veteran suicide:** U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *2026 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, mentalhealth.va.gov. The report states that in 2024 there were 6,488 suicides among veterans, on average 17.7 per day.
- **Helplines in Chapters 6, 9, 11, and 19 and Appendix B:** 988lifeline.org, veteranscrisisline.net, vetcenter.va.gov, va.gov, militaryonesource.mil, samhsa.gov, and ncpgambling.org, checked November 6, 2026.

About This Book

Plumb Line is a book for ordinary men who want their lives to line up with God's Word, starting with their own.

A plumb line is a weight on a string. It hangs perfectly straight every time, and it shows a builder what's true. God's Word does the same for a man's life. This book holds a man's life up against that line, one area at a time, and shows how Jesus Christ straightens what has leaned.

Each chapter opens with a short scene from the life of an ordinary man: a heating and air technician who's busy and empty, a churchgoer who discovers he doesn't know God, a laid-off manager, a young husband fighting pornography, a contractor hiding his drinking, a combat veteran who can't sit with his back to a door, and more. Their stories cross paths over one year in an old machinist's garage shop on Saturday mornings. Then the chapter speaks plainly from Scripture about the problem, with true stories from the author's own life, including his recovery from alcohol.

The book covers the problems men face today: phones and screens, work and identity in a changing economy, pornography, addiction, anger, anxiety, depression and suicide, pride, money and sports betting, the loud voices about manhood online, marriage, fatherhood, loneliness, time, health, integrity, military service and the return home, and suffering. Every chapter ends with one step to take this week, one way to help another man, and questions for a friend or a group.

It is a companion to *Built Together*. This book builds the man. That one helps him build others.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.