

**NO
REGRETS**

STUDY SERIES

steve sonderman
terry sartori

MEN WITH NO REGRETS

Live Life on Purpose and Impact the World

Beginning the Race



steve sonderman
terry sartori

**NO
REGRETS**

STUDY SERIES

MEN WITH NO REGRETS

Live Life on Purpose and Impact the World

Beginning the Race

Introduction

Men,

I went to college to become a teacher and coach. During that time I coached High School Football. My job was to help young men become Champions on and off the field. I absolutely loved it and thought I would spend the rest of my life coaching. Then God walked into my life and upset my world by calling me to be a pastor! Needless to say, God had a bigger plan than I did. For the past 20 years I have had the privilege to be the men's pastor at Elmbrook Church in Milwaukee. I now get to be the coach of, not just 50 young men on a football team but, thousands of men who call Elmbrook home. As coach my job is to empower men to be Champions in life.

After working with men for twenty years I have a theory: Everyman wants to be a Champion in life. I have never met a man who wanted to be a loser. Who wakes up in the morning and says:

- I want to be an Absentee Father.
- I want to be an Angry Husband.
- I want to be a Fickle Friend.
- I want to be an Unproductive Employee.
- I want to be an Apathetic Follower of Christ.

No, everyone I run with wants to be a Champion. They want their shot at greatness. Who has not dreamed about: Shooting the winning shot to win the NBA Championship, Scoring the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl and Hitting a game winning home run in the World Series.

My guess is that this is why you have joined a small group. You want to be a Champion where it really matters, at home, with your friends, in the community and on the job. I want to thank you for having the courage to step off the sidelines and get into the game. For the next six weeks you are going to join up with a small group of men and look at one of my all time favorite passages of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Paul compares the Christian life to running and urges us all to "Run to Win". I want to encourage each of you to do your work, get to know the guys in your group and allow God to make you into the man He desires you to be.

Running the Race,

Steve Sonderman

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?

Run in such a way as to get the prize.

²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

- 1 Corinthians 9:24 – 27

no regrets

Contents

Introduction	2
Lesson One: Starting Blocks: Run On A Team	5-12
Lesson Two: Go for the Prize: Run to Win.....	13-26
Lesson Three: Train to Win: Run With Strength	27-42
Lesson Four: Learn to Really Live: Run with Purpose.....	43-55
Lesson Five: Protect Yourself: Run with Discipline	56-67
Lesson Six: Don't Race Alone: Run Together	68-80
Next Steps	81
No Regrets Study Series	83



Published by No Regrets Men's Ministries. Copyright © 2013, Elmbrook Church, Inc.
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing to No Regrets Men's Ministries; 777 South Barker Rd., Brookfield, WI 53045. To order additional copies of this book or other resources from No Regrets Men's Ministries, call (800) 919-9059. www.menwithnoregrets.com

LESSON I

Starting Blocks: Run On A Team

Goals for the Lesson:

To get to know the other men in your group and prepare for your journey
To talk through the Group Covenant

In the middle of the Chicago Bulls Championship run with Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen and others, there were many that thought it was all about Michael and little about the others on the team. That is when Michael Jordan said the following, “Individuals win games, but teams win Championships.” All great accomplishments in life happen as a team. You cannot win a Super Bowl by yourself, no matter how good you are. It would be suicide to try to climb Mt. Everest by yourself. You can’t get married by yourself and you certainly cannot be a Champion in life by yourself. We all need other men to become what God wants us to be. There is a certain power when men lock their arms and go in the same direction together.

The men gathering in your group today are going to be your training buddies for the next six weeks. You are going to cheer each other on, pick each other up when you fall, encourage one another to make positive decisions or decide to give up a destructive habit. These are men who are going in the same direction as you and will call you up, to the noble things in life.

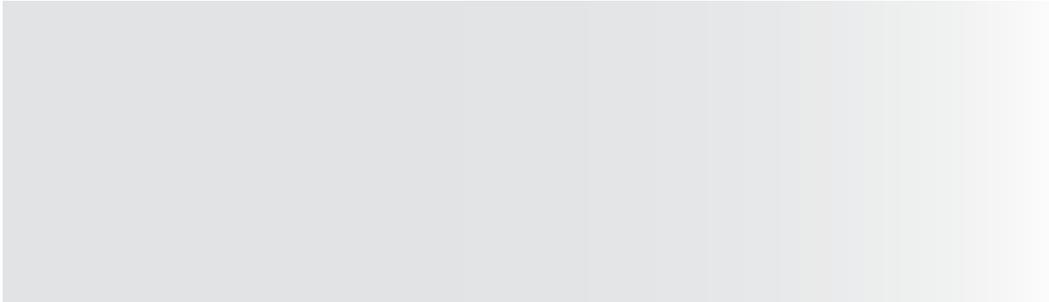
But you need to keep in mind that 5-8 men sitting around a table or family room does not make a team. It takes work to become a team and that is what you are going to start doing today, becoming a team. One of the best ways to become a team is to share your stories with one another so you know where each other is coming from. Through sharing of stories you will discover what God has been doing in each other’s lives, what wounds they have received from life and the journey that each man has traveled. Through the sharing of your stories, God will begin to take a group of individuals and make them a team, a powerful team, a Championship team. So let’s get started.

champion

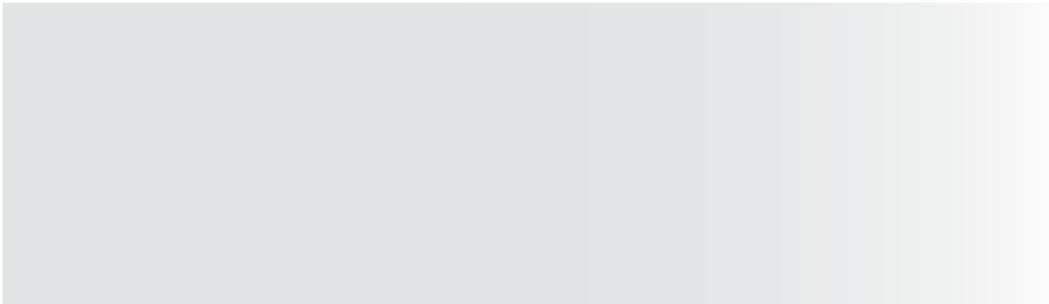
Before Class:

For the first session each man in the group will be taking some time to share his story with the other men in the group. You will have 5-10 minutes to share your story based on the size of your group. You do not have to share more than you feel comfortable with. In preparation you might want to think about the following questions and make a few notes:

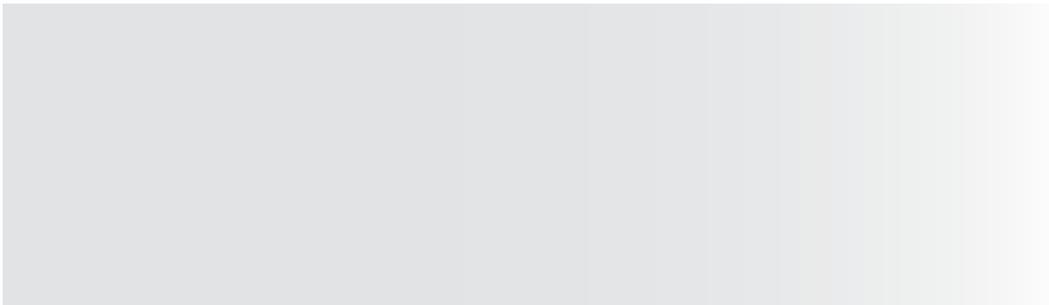
- Where did you grow up and what was life like in your family?



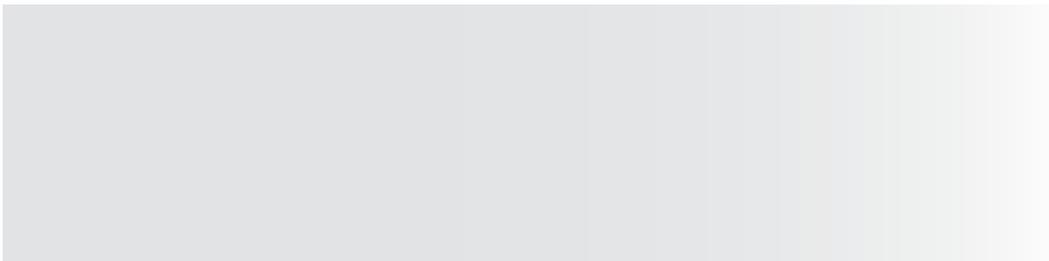
- What are some of your best (or worst) memories from high school?



- What was your favorite sports team growing up and why? Who is it now?



- What role did God have in your life while you were growing up?



- What did you do after high school? What do you do now?

- If married, where did you meet your wife and when did you get married?

- Who were or are two or three of the most influential people in your life?

- What was one of the most difficult things you have gone through as a man?
How did this affect your relationship with God?

- What do you hope to get out of the study?

champion

Start to Run - A Testimony

I am amazed at how God uses my weaknesses to His glory. I was raised in a very traditional home. My father was someone who could do anything! Build anything. Fix anything. Be anything. He was an expert outdoorsman and a crackerjack shot. He taught combat shooting to the local police department. During the day, he was president of a local financial institution. I am his complete opposite. I was blessed with a brush case of cerebral palsy. I have no fine motor coordination or depth perception. Changing the oil in my car is a 3-hour ordeal.

I was always a Christian but thought I could never measure up. God, why did you do this to me? I suffered physically during therapy and endured the taunts and jeers of junior high peers. But I learned to lean on God when things don't make sense. That seemingly pointless suffering built perseverance.

When I became an adult, I joined a Top Gun small group and I quickly learned it was a great place to grow spiritually. This was a group where men bore each other's burdens. I learned what it meant to be God's man, in a culture that says we can never measure up.

In my small group, I experienced God's love in a way I will never forget. When my lovely wife Deb got colon cancer, I was devastated. She was hospitalized for 8 days and was bed-ridden for 6 weeks. I didn't know if she would live. But the guys in small group prayed, and their prayers sustained us. Then a cooler showed up on my front porch. Every day that cooler had a hot meal in it. I never knew who made it; I just knew it came from my guys. We had so much food that we had to start sharing it with the neighbors. I learned Christ's love is like that. It affects the people around you.

In sharing my weaknesses, God reveals His strength to me and the other members of my small group. So stop being a lone ranger, trying to build your own little cocoon of security. I learned how to deal with the sin that ensnares me and holds me back from being all that God wants me to be. I now serve others in the way they did in the early church. I have developed the best friends I've ever had. I have felt the power of prayer and experienced the love of Christ. All through joining a small group.

- Dave Lisko

In Class:

Introductions: Each man should take a minute to introduce himself. Keep it brief as you will have more time to share later.

- Your name
- Your family situation (single, married, kids, no kids, etc.)
- Your job, school or how you spend your time
- Which professional sports team best describes how you are doing right now and why?
- Why do you want to be in this study?

Contact Information Sheet: The leader will pass around a sheet of paper to get your contact information so the group can stay in touch with each other. Make sure each guy has the leaders contact information in case you need to make contact with him outside the meeting time.

Walk through the Group Covenant: On the last page of this lesson you will find a Group Covenant. This would be a good time to walk through and make sure everyone is in agreement with it. Every good team has some “team rules” that make the team stronger and provide guidelines for team moral. This covenant is no different. It is not meant to be a bunch of rules, but rather some guidelines to make your group stronger and more effective. One important note before you start this exercise below, the goal in your group is for it to be a safe place where you can be honest with other guys. Therefore, one of the ground rules for you to follow is that “*what happens in your group stays in your group.*” This is vitally important!!! Everyone in the group must agree that they will not, under any circumstance, divulge what they hear in class, not even with a trusted friend or spouse. Agreed? Good! Now it’s time for your leader to tell his story.

Sharing Your Story: Each man in the group has a story to tell. From the beginning of your life, God has been working in your life, whether you realize it or not. During this time of the meeting we would like each man to take up to 10 minutes to share their story with the rest of the group.

Here are a few hints to make your time go well:

- Leaders go first.
- There are no wrong and right answers here. Every man has a story that is different than the man next to him. This is just an opportunity to tell your story and discuss what you think.

- You can share as much or as little as you want about your past, no one is going to force you to share more than you feel comfortable.
- Take the next block of time for each man to share his story.

Talk through the homework for next week: After you are done sharing, take time to look at the next lesson and make sure everyone knows what is expected of them before you meet next week. The work required will take between 15 – 30 minutes. We recommend you space it out during the week and not try to do it all the night before!

Final reminder: Having coached high school football for six years and having been on hundreds of teams over the years, I know that nothing is more important to the success of a team than chemistry. You can have the most gifted players in the world, but if they cannot get along, you will not win. It seems that every year there is one team that wins a National Championship, Super Bowl, NBA Championship or World Series, that does not have the best players, but the best team. They are a group of men or women that understand the importance of a team, of working together and putting their own interests second to the teams. It is no different when it comes to being in a small group and running the race that God has for you. The success of the next five weeks, is not dependent on the strengths of each man individually, but rather on your willingness to do the hard work of becoming a team. Let me share just a few simple reminders on what it takes to be a team:

- **Trust:** You need to trust the guy next to you, that he is doing his job, that you take him at his word and believe the best in him.
- **Vulnerability:** We believe in voluntary vulnerability, that is you will not have to share more than you feel comfortable sharing. However you will only get close as you take the masks off and allow others into your life. Hiding behind a mask is not going to move the group forward.
- **Consider Others Before Yourself:** Nothing kills a team faster than a Prima Doña who thinks it is all about him. Look for ways to put others before yourself, to listen before talking, to serve the men in your group.
- **Encouragement:** We all need it. When you encourage a man in your group, it can change their day, week and month. Look for ways to encourage the guys in your group.

Remember the old saying, it is not how you start that matters, but how you finish.

Hopefully you have had a great time in your group today and I want to encourage you to get ready to come back next week ready to go.

What Should You Bring to Class?

Bible: You should own a Bible and bring it to class. You will need it for your homework. You can purchase one at any bookstore or online at Amazon.com or christianbook.com. *If you are undecided on which version to buy, the NIV (New International Version) is our recommendation. It's the version we quote in our study. Other good translations are the NKJ (New King James), or the NASB (New American Study Bible). If purchasing a Bible is a hardship, let your leader or pastor know and have them find one for you.*

Prayer Requests for My Group:

champion

No Regrets Small Group Covenant

In order to grow in my discipleship with Christ and to build authentic Christian community, I agree to the following standards:

1. Total and Complete Confidentiality

What I hear here, see here, and say here stays here. I will say nothing that may be traced back or that could be injurious or embarrassing to my group members. My group leader will refer me to a pastor if I am contemplating harming myself or doing harm to others.

2. Share My Life

I will be as open about my life as I can. I will be vulnerable with you, letting you know who I am as a person.

3. Unconditional Love

I will love you and affirm you no matter what you have said or done in the past. I will love you as you are and for what Christ desires you to be.

4. Voluntary Accountability

I will ask the group to hold me accountable for specific areas of my life. With my permission, you can ask me about the goals I set with God, my family, personal life, and world. I expect you to lovingly not “let me off the hook.” “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17). On the basis of this verse, I ask you to please share with me any areas in my life that do not reflect Jesus, because I want to grow in personal holiness.

5. Pray for One Another

I promise to pray for those in my group regularly and lift their needs to the Lord.

6. Sensitivity to Where People Are

I understand each man in this group is at a different point in his walk with the Lord. I will accept you the way you are, but encourage you to grow in the Lord. I will seek to create a safe environment where people can be heard and loved.

7. Spiritual Growth

I will come prepared with my work completed and my verses memorized each week. I will set aside 10–15 minutes for a daily time with God. I will make every effort to be at class; it will have high priority in my schedule. If I cannot attend, I will call my leader to let him know. I will commit to being a Minister for Jesus.

I view my participation in No Regrets as a means of preparing myself for a life of ministry wherever Jesus may take me. From the beginning of the study, I will look for others to invest my life in and minister to.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

LESSON TWO

Go for the Prize: Run to Win

Goals for the Lesson:

To better understand what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus
To evaluate which “Race” you are running in life

Vince Lombardi, the great Green Bay Packer football coach won the first two Super Bowls and later had the Super Bowl Trophy named after him. In 1933 he received a scholarship to play football at Fordham University in New York. As a right guard he would be part of the famous Seven Blocks of Granite, one of the best offensive lines ever put together. It was said that as a freshman he would line up on the first play of the game, put his head up and look straight into the eyes of the opposing defensive lineman and say these words, “I came to this game ready to die!” Now that’s commitment. Just think about the poor guy on the other side of the line, what he must have been thinking!

Guys, in this lesson, we are going to look at what you are committed to. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 the Apostle Paul says these words, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” Paul is saying to us as men, run to win. Don’t run half-cocked, don’t run apathetically, don’t walk, don’t just think about running, but very forcefully he says...Run to Win.

This lesson is about winning, not in the temporal or trivial things of life, but where it really matters, in your relationship with God and becoming a Champion in life.

no
s
e
r
p
r
i
z
e

Before Class:

Evaluate your own life to determine which race you are running.
Complete the Bible study.

Day One: Personal Evaluation

Everywhere you look men are running, some after possessions, some power, some position, and some pleasure. Whatever we choose to run after will in large part determine the trajectory of our lives. In this short exercise, we would like you to look at a few things that men are running after today and do a quick evaluation of which race you are running. Someone once said, “if you want to know what is in the heart of a man, look at how he spends his time, treasure and talents, they never lie!”

Men are generally running one of four races, which is it for you?

Some are running... **The Rat Race** – the wide-open pursuit of this world at the exclusion of God. Living for self-fulfillment, self-comfort and self-preservation. It is the chasing after money, popularity, prestige, possession, position and power. You know what that race is, don't you? It is working 50 plus hours a week, coaching your kids soccer team, running your kids to cello lessons, keeping the yard and house up, trying to have a meaningful conversation with your wife, a round of golf on the weekend and back at it on Monday. The rat race leaves us exhausted with no finish line in sight as it always gets further and further away.

Do you find yourself running this race? Then take note of these words of wisdom from Mark Twain:

“The trouble with the rat-race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.”

Other guys are running... **The Relationship Race** – the wide-open pursuit of just the right woman for your life. Thinking that by finding that one person you find the ultimate joy and happiness for the rest of your life. And it is a race, doing whatever you need to do to get that person, because in her you believe there is ultimate happiness. This race could entail late nights at the club, joining one

Internet club after another, a constant life of hook ups and the guilt that comes with it. For some, it may even be wanting the temporary thrill of a relationship outside of your marriage. But in the end, you find yourself never really being satisfied by the rotating door of one person after another. It is The Relationship Race. Do you find yourself running this race?

Many men are running... **The Reputation Race** – the wide-open pursuit of looking good in front of your peers. Whether it be with the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the people you hang out with, or the things you do, you want to be accepted, loved, and to look good in front of others. I'm not sure who originally said it, but I love the quote that says, "*Too many people buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, trying to impress people they don't like.*" This is the epitome of The Reputation Race. Is this the race you are running?

Other guys are running... **The Religious Race** – the wide-open pursuit of seeking to gain God's approval and trying to merit His love and grace by your performance. This is the race I was running when growing up, I was on the performance track, trying to earn God's love by going to church, serving in the community, having near perfect attendance in Sunday School, and trying to make sure there were more positives in the plus category than negatives in the minus box. In the end I hoped, beyond hope that the pluses would out number the minuses. Sound familiar? Are you someone that is on the religious treadmill, working hard to earn your way to heaven, or have you come to the point of realizing it is not what you do at all, but only what He has done?

There is another race you can run... **The Right Race** – the one called Christianity, following Jesus with your entire being, giving over control of your lives to Him. In surrendering your life to him, He becomes the coach of your life. It is not a commitment to a denomination, to a church, to a pastor, to a set of beliefs, or to a list of rules and regulations. But rather a complete and total commitment to Jesus.

Having read a few of the races that men are running today, I want to encourage you to do an honest evaluation of your life and ask the question, "Which race am I running as a man?" The Rat Race, The Relationship Race, The Reputation Race, The Religious Race or... The Right Race?

no
s
p
r
e
s
s
o
r

In the list of races below, rank each in priority order that reflects the races you are running now in order 1 through 5:

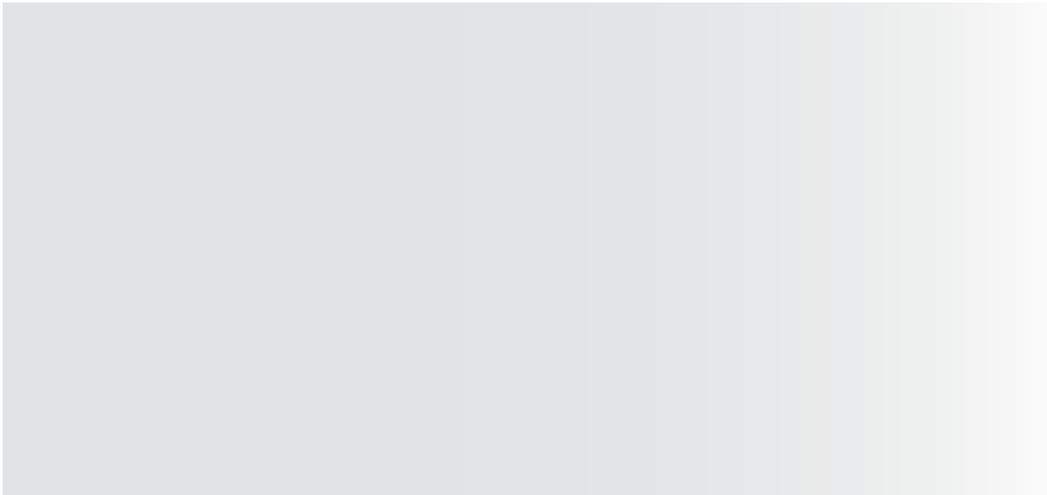
Which race am I running?	The Rat Race	Relationship Race	Reputation Race	Religious Race	Right Race
Order the Races you are running 1-5					

If you are unsure, that's OK. Tomorrow you are going to look at a passage of Scripture that explains what it means to be running... **The Right Race.**

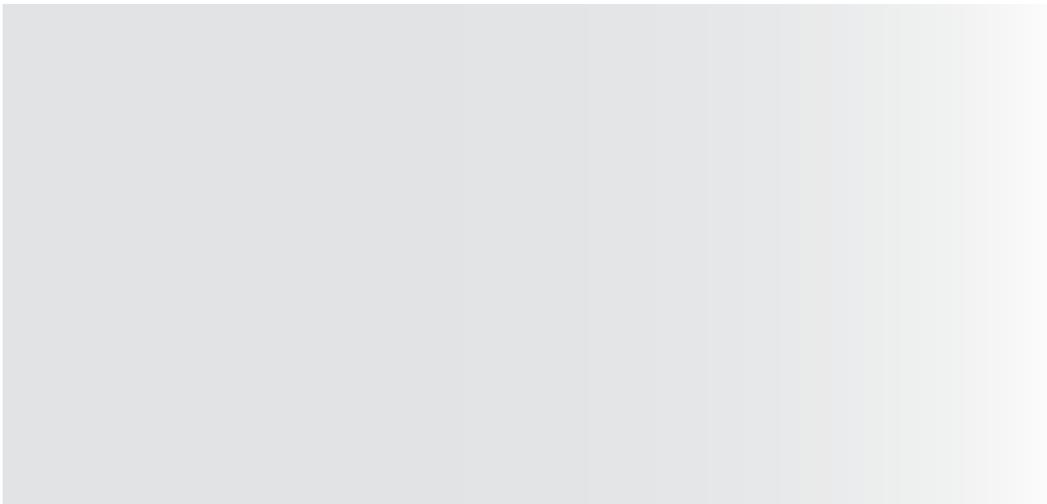
Day Two: Bible study – Matthew 4:18-22

The passage you are going to study today takes place at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In this passage, as Jesus walks along the beach, he interrupts the lives of a couple of fisherman, who just happened to be brothers. Jesus has a nagging way of doing that, doesn't He! Walking along the beaches of our lives, interrupting us when and where we least expect it, and turning our lives upside down. Read through the short Bible passage below and answer the questions that follow.

- Read Matthew 4:18-22.
What did leaving their nets and boats mean to these disciples and the family members who depended on them?

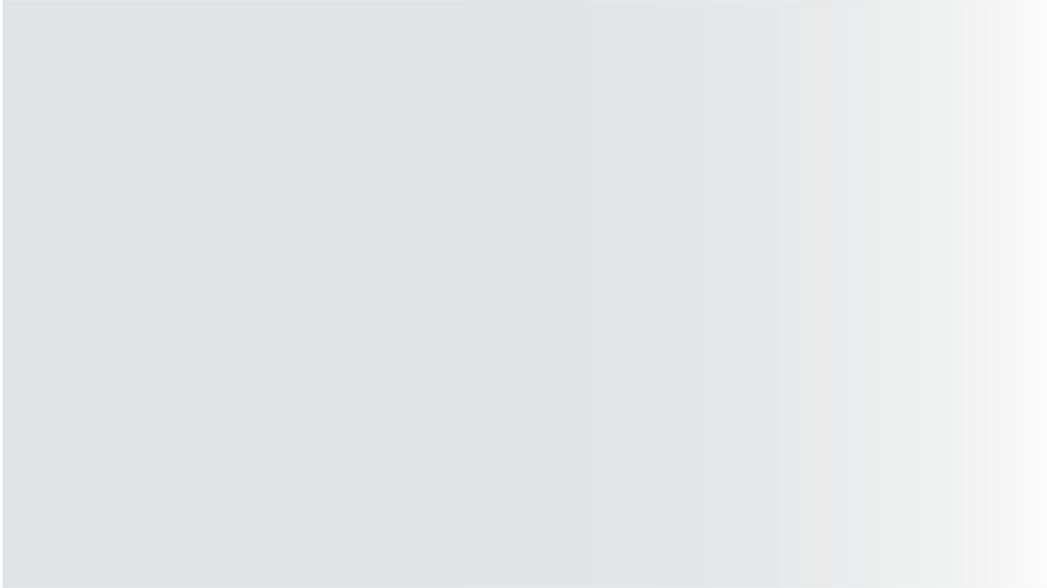


How is dropping their nets and following Christ a picture of what it means to be a Christian?

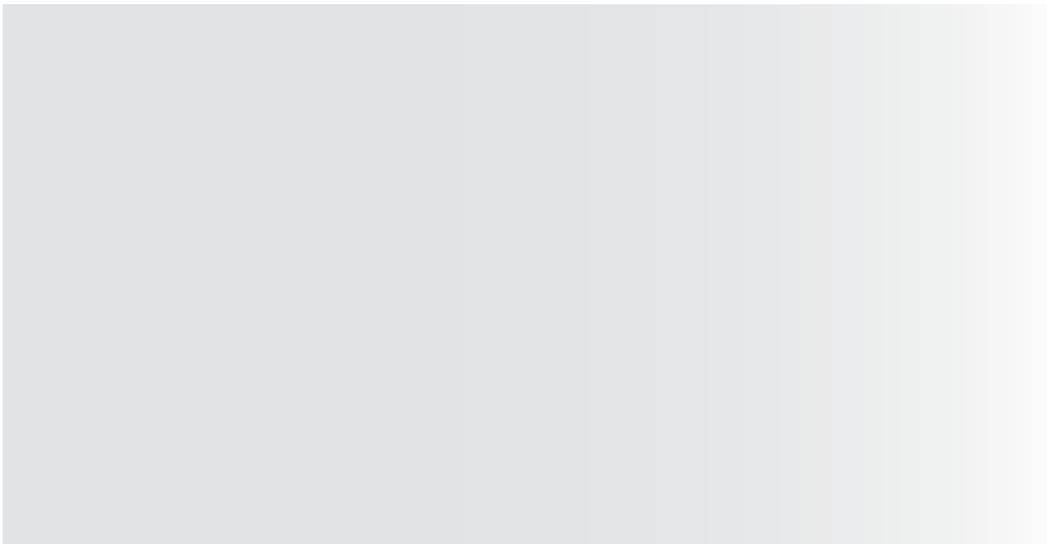


no
s
e
r
i
o
u
s
p
r
e
s
e
r
v
e

What nets might you be hanging on to that hinder you from wholeheartedly following after Christ?



Besides calling these men to follow Him, what else do we learn from this passage of Scripture as to what it means to be a Christian?



Keep in mind, these men were not on vacation up in Northern Wisconsin fishing for muskies, this was their job! They dropped their nets and followed in the face of uncertainty. Jesus asked them to give up their security, future, income, sense of significance, and fulfillment as men. And they did. They walked away from everything they knew to follow Him. So first and foremost, “The call of Jesus is a call to Jesus” - an exclusive attachment to Him.

So here's a question that needs to be asked, are you a follower of Jesus? Jesus is not calling you to a certain teaching, philosophy, dogma, denomination or church. Jesus is calling you to himself. Make sure you caught this, The question isn't if you go to church or are a good guy. It's are you are seeking to follow Jesus with all of your life?

If you are unsure whether you are a Christian or not, it is something you can do right now in the quietness of your study. The Bible says there are three things we must do:

1. A is for Acknowledge – Acknowledge we are sinners and as a result separated from God. The Bible says we are have all sinned, since to sin means “to miss the mark” of God's perfect standards. (Romans 3:23) It is like batting .250 when perfection is 1000. We need to acknowledge to God and ourselves that all the good things we have done, no matter how impressive, do not really matter to God and will not be enough to earn His favor.

2. B is for Believe – Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he came to earth, lived among us, died on the cross in our place and rose from the dead. We need to believe that Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. This is not just an intellectual belief, rather one that involves wholly following after Him. Many men have the head knowledge about God, but that knowledge has never dropped the 18 inches from their head to their heart.

3. C is for Commit – Commit our lives to Him. Just like those early disciples who dropped their nets to follow Jesus, we need to commit all that we are to all that He is. It is a complete and total surrender of our lives to Jesus.

Every month I drive down to Mitchell Field in Milwaukee to fly out and speak somewhere in the country or overseas. At the gate, I have a choice to make. I can walk down the ramp and stare at the plane and say, “*that looks like a plane, smells like a plane, sounds like a plane*”, but never actually get on the plane. As a result, I would never get to my destination! So, to get to my destination, I must commit myself to it, get on, sit down, buckle up and allow the principle of aerodynamics to overcome the law of gravity. In the same way, when I commit myself to Jesus, the law of love and grace overcomes the law of sin.

run
to
win
the
prize

If you are feeling today like you would like to commit your life to Jesus and become a follower of His, I would encourage you to pray the following prayer.

Dear God,

Sometimes I've tried to be good; sometimes I've done what I knew was wrong or unkind. I know that whatever I've done, it hasn't been good enough to please you, a good and perfect God. Jesus, I believe that you did live a perfect life, and that you died on the cross to pay the price for my sin. I believe that and want to receive the free gift of salvation. I want to turn from my old way of life and turn to you and learn to live for you. Thank you that you arose from the dead and you can now live in me. Do that! Show me what it means to live for you, and help me to live as your child.

– Only for You, Amen.

Run To Win - A Testimony

Growing up in Nigeria, where there was widespread poverty and very limited opportunities, it was common for young boys to aspire to attend college in America. So at 16, I was fortunate to get a scholarship to attend a University in America – an opportunity that was typically reserved for the wealthy and the well connected.

Immediately after graduation, I accepted a job with a very attractive compensation package with a tech company based in Austin, Texas. In turn, I felt the uncom promising need to materially show off my success. Even though I've been a Christ follower for most of my life, I constantly justified my seemingly unquenchable thirst for materialism by focusing on Bible verses that promised us – Christ followers – good things.

*Not long before making a down payment on a new BMW, I stumbled upon a book, *The Bottom Billion*, by Paul Collier. After reading it, a fascination with the extreme poverty overtook me and I constantly spent my nights and weekends reading other development economics books. Then, in 2008, I read about Amaretech, a 10-year old Ethiopian girl who woke up every day at 3:00 am to trek miles to the city market to sell firewood. Even though I had been exposed to street children and debilitating poverty, I had, overtime, become so desensitized to these issues that all I could think about was purchasing a luxury car. Amaretech's story, however, changed my worldview, and motivated me to work on eradicating extreme poverty.*

For the first time in my life, I was passionate and focused on something other than myself, and it felt great. The Bible says it is more blessed to give than to receive and I felt the truth in that passage. I researched how to start a nonprofit organization and soon after, convinced some friends to help me start Poverty Stops Here (PSH), an organization that would work to stop poverty by investing in poor communities in Africa – starting with Nigeria. Later that year, I travelled to Nigeria and identified our first partner village, through a UNICEF contact.

Since May of 2009, God has really blessed PSH and hundreds of people now believe in the organization's audacious vision of working to eradicate extreme poverty. Consequently, PSH has invested over \$120,000 in poor villages in Nigeria. People who typically walked several miles to fetch unsafe water now have access to pipe-borne water close-by. Children who were destined to a life of destitution and stark poverty now have access to an education and hope. And parents, who had lost dignity, now have access to loans that will help them improve their lives, and ultimately regain their dignity.

I believe that God, through PSH, is changing lives. And He will continue to show me how to focus on the well-being of others, rather than my initial self-gratifying ambitions, to advance His Kingdom.

– Efosa Ojomo

UNICEF
PROJECT

In Class:

The Leader Opens in Prayer: As a review from last week, the other men in the group should be able to recall each man's name, family and job situation, and the sports team he identified himself with. Then have each man share : What is the one thing that gets you really excited in life (favorite hobby, pastime, activity etc.)?

Review the Group Covenant and guidelines from last week: Discuss why the Covenant and guidelines are key to the functioning of the group; and go through the following points as a reminder or if they were not covered in week one.

- Start On Time - The group time will typically be an hour and a half, but you're welcome to stay around and talk afterwards.
- This is a Place of Refuge - Treat each other with respect. Listen respectfully, and do not belittle others for their views.
- What's Shared Here, Stays Here - If you take notes on prayer requests dealing with sensitive topics, keep them private from others.
- Allow Others to Speak Freely - No one person should dominate. This includes the leader.
- Complete Your Before Class Homework - As much as possible come prepared, so that you can share what you have learned.
- Every Man Should Participate - To learn and grow together as part of God's family, be prepared to participate in both conversation and prayer.

Discussion of Material: Turn to Matthew 4:18 – 22. Have one man read it; then discuss the passage as a group:

- What were the consequences of these men dropping their nets and following Jesus?
- What does it mean to be a follower of Christ in our world today?
- What are the biggest hindrances for men in our society today to following Christ?
- How did you rank yourself in the five races?
- What are the A-B-C's of starting... The Right Race?
- If you are ready as a group member, describe where you are in your faith journey, and if this week's study has helped in your commitment to Jesus.
 - I'm still trying to figure out what I believe.
 - I'm skeptical about the Christian Faith.
 - I'm new to the Christian Faith.
 - I have been following Christ for many years.
 - I'm somewhere in between.

Leader shares His story: Your leader will now take time to tell his faith story and group members will have time to ask any questions they might have of him. You should allow time in subsequent weeks for other men in the group to tell their faith story.

Sharing and Prayer: Each man should now turn to the back of his study guide and the prayer request section. Have everyone share one way that the other members in the group can pray for them this coming week. This will help you all to move more fully from the race you are running to... The Right Race. Write down your group's prayer requests and then take time during the week to pray for your group members.

Closing Prayer: The leader should close the meeting in prayer. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 before praying together.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

no
s
e
r
i
o
u
s
p
r
e
s
e
r
v
i
c
e

Key Principles:

We have been made by God for God and to have a relationship with God.

Christianity is not religion; it is a relationship with God.

Christ did for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The mark of a Christ follower is obedience.

Steven Lawson, in his book *Men Who Win*, tells the following story:

The year was 1968. It was my senior year in high school, and we had a pretty good football team. Despite the fact that I was the quarterback. We were undefeated and ready to play our arch rivals, who were also undefeated, in the biggest game of the year. The stage was set for a schoolboy showdown, certainly one of the most important events in our young lives.

It was Friday afternoon. We went into our gym, a big domed coliseum, to get dressed. The routine was to put on our uniforms and go into the coliseum and “get our game face on.” We’d just stare at the ceiling and visualize executing plays and how we were going to beat our opponent. There were about sixty of us in the pitch dark gym. It was so still, you could hear a pin drop. Suddenly, it was time to go to the stadium. Our coach came in and softly said, “All right, men, let’s get on the bus and go to the game.” My heart was pounding! I grabbed my helmet and shoes. We tip-toed out in our stocking feet, got on the bus, and headed to the stadium. The scene was electric. The whole community had packed the stadium.

We blew our rivals out of the water! The score was 35-0 at halftime. We didn’t even punt. Five possessions, five touchdowns. The final score was 41-6. What a blowout! After the game, everyone was elated! The student body, the parents, the band, the faculty - everybody was excited! As we came off the field and loaded the bus for the jubilant ride home, our fans were cheering and pounding us on the head! It seemed like everyone was at the gym when our bus pulled up. We got off and had to fight through the crowd again. Everybody was slapping us on the back, cheering. Everybody was singing the school fight song; the band was playing.

The locker room was complete bedlam. Everybody was boxing, jostling each other, and popping one another with towels. I slipped into the coliseum to be alone and began peeling off my jersey and pads. I replayed the whole game in my mind, savoring every play. I was replaying the first play, the second play, and so on. As I was peeling off my jersey, I looked across the coliseum and saw the figure of a body lying at midcourt. The red exit sign - the only light in the gym - was shining over the silhouette of this motionless body.

I had thought I was the only person in that pitch dark coliseum. I walked over and looked down at the figure and saw that it was a person. He had his full football uniform on - Number 29. I didn’t know if he was dead or alive. I nudged him with my foot, gently. As soon as I did, BOOM! He shot up, put his helmet on, and said, “Let’s get on the bus and go to the game!”

*I said, "The game's over." (The funny thing is, we didn't even miss ol' Number 29)
I said, "It was the biggest game of our lives! We won, 41-6! You missed the whole thing."
My friend had apparently stayed up late the night before and when he lay down, he went
to sleep. For good.*

Men, wake up and get in the game. Don't miss out on the greatest opportunity of your life: to win the race that God has set before you. Don't buy into the world's seductive message of position, prestige, and possessions. Don't sleep through the biggest game of your life. If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus and run the race He has for you, today is the day to get started. Get out of the rat race, reputation race, religious race and into...The Right Race. Nobody wants you to win more than God does. Nobody.

Learn More about How to Be a Follower of Christ?

Basic Christianity, John Stott

Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

Following Christ, Joseph Stowell

More Than a Carpenter, Josh McDowell

no
s
s
e
r
p
p
r
e
s
s
i
o
n

Prayer Requests for My Group:



LESSON THREE

Train to Win: Run With Strength

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

—1 Corinthians 9:25

Goals for the Lesson:

To see the importance of your daily time with God
To understand how to read the Bible devotionally

The NFL recently analyzed hundreds of game film to see how much playing time first-string NFL players run, block, pass, throw or tackle in a game? If you added up all the seconds they would total somewhere between 9-12 minutes. That's it, just 9 minutes of live action. Just think of the hours and hours of time preparing on the practice field, in the film room, in the weight room for just 9 minutes of action, once a week. Players can spend up to 60 hours a week for 9 minutes of action. The reason they do it, is so they have the potential to make a difference when called upon. They have 9-minute moments where all the training pays off and they change the direction of a game. Most games hinge on 3 or 4 key plays.

Let me ask you this, what are your 9-minute moments? When does God entrust you with the responsibility and privilege to influence the outcome of a game? When do you get to throw a pass, make a block or score a touchdown in your game?

Maybe it's when you sit on the edge of child's bed at night and he or she needs some all-star loving or listening to.

Maybe it could be when you intervene in a staff problem at work and some first string wisdom is needed.

Maybe your moment it is when one of your best friend's spouses leaves and legendary care is needed.

discipline

The point is this, every single day you will have 9-minute moments when you can leave your mark, make a difference, and make an impact. The question is, will you be ready? In this lesson we are going to study what it looks like to train ourselves for godliness.

In our study of 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, we come to verse 25 that says, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last forever.” The word “train” comes from the word “gumanzo” from which we get the word “gymnasium”. It brings with it the idea of sustained effort toward a goal. The goal is godliness, ordering our life around Christ and his values and way of life. What Paul is saying is that in the same way that it takes years of training to become a world class athlete, so it takes years of training to become a spiritual champion as well. Paul draws upon an event every reader would be aware of, the Isthmian Games in Corinth.

Men would go through 10 months of rigorous training on their own. Then if selected they would go on to have one month of training with a personal trainer in the city of Corinth. Any success was dependent on the intensity of the training. Paul says the same is true in the Christian life. This week we look at what it means for you and I to develop a personal spiritual workout plan.

Before Class:

Read article, Introduction to the Devotional Bible study Method.

Complete the Bible study.

Optional: Complete the *Learning to Pray Exercise*.

Day One - Read the article below, *Introduction to the Devotional Bible Study Method* by Brian Sonderman.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOTIONAL BIBLE STUDY METHOD

A common question that many people have is “how should I spend my Bible reading time?” Our goal in this section is to suggest a process of reading the Bible that can be accomplished in as little as 15-20 minutes a day. Obviously, this is a minimum standard. The more time you expose yourself to God’s Word, the more you will see His transforming work in your life.

“The Devotional Method of Bible Study involves taking a passage of the Bible, large or small, and prayerfully meditating on it until the Holy Spirit shows you a way to apply its truth to your own life in a way that is personal, practical, possible, and measurable. The goal is for you to take seriously the Word of God and ‘do what it says’. James 1:22.” “1

The Devotional Method is the most basic method and the foundation upon which all other Bible study is built. There are four steps to the Devotional Method: pray, read, reflect, and record.

1. Pray

Don’t open the Bible to read without first praying. Since the Bible is the revelation of God to the minds of men, it is vital that you begin by asking Him to share His thinking with you. After all, He’s the Author of the Book. If you want to know what He had in mind when He wrote it, ask Him. In addition, ask God to help you apply the Scripture you are studying and show you specifically what He wants you to do. You already know that God wants you to do two things: obey His Word and share it with others. In your prayer, tell God that you are ready to obey what He will show you and that you are willing to share that application with others. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

discipline

2. Read

This may sound simple, however, Howard Hendricks, notes that “too many readers are nothing but browsers. They turn pages the way they flip through channels on a TV set, looking for something to catch their interest. The Word doesn’t lend itself to that sort of approach. It requires conscious, concentrated effort.”² Read observantly. Don’t be reluctant to backtrack and re-read if your mind has drifted. Unless we discipline ourselves to read in this way, our growth toward spiritual maturity will be stunted. One way we can avoid becoming a Bible “browser” is by having a reading plan and sticking to it. On the Soul Purpose website, listed as resources under this lesson, are a number of Bible reading plans that map out ways to read through the Bible systematically. Please use one of these if you are not currently following any daily plan for reading. You may want to consider asking an accountability partner to check up on you regularly while you are in the process of establishing this discipline.

3. Reflect

Make sure you take some time to think about what you’ve read.

This is the step where you meditate on God’s Word. Rick Warren writes, *“Meditation is essentially thought digestion. You take a thought God gives you, put it in your mind, and think on it over and over again. Meditation may be compared to rumination; that’s what a cow does when it chews its cud. It eats some grass and sends it to its first stomach; then it lies down, brings the grass up, chews on it, and swallows it again. This process of digestion is repeated three times. Scriptural meditation is reading a passage in the Bible, then concentrating on it in different ways.”*³

Here are some practical ways you can meditate on a passage of Scripture.

Ask yourself nine questions when you study the new passage. It would be a good idea to memorize these questions so that you have them available every time you want to meditate on a passage. You may not have to use all of them at one time.

1. Is there a sin to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?
2. Is there a promise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the condition(s)?
3. Is there an attitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?
4. Is there a command to obey? Am I willing to do it no matter how I feel?

5. Is there an example to follow? Is it a positive example for me to copy or a negative one to avoid?
6. Is there a prayer to pray? Is there anything I need to pray back to God?
7. Is there an error to avoid? Is there any problem that I should be alert to, or beware of?
8. Is there a truth to believe? What new things can I learn about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or other biblical teachings?
9. Is there something to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

Emphasize words in the passage under study. Read through a verse aloud several times, each time emphasizing a different word, and watch how the verse comes alive.

Paraphrase the passage under study. One of the best ways to demonstrate your understanding of a passage is to paraphrase it in your own words.

Personalize the passage you are studying. Putting your name in place of the pronouns or nouns used in Scripture can do this. For example, John 3:16 would read: “For God so loved Brian that he gave his one and only Son, that if Brian believes in him Brian will not perish but have eternal life.”

Pray the verse or passage back to God. Put the passage under study into the first person singular, turn it into a prayer, and pray it back to God. Memorize a verse or passage you are studying. Memorization will allow you to continue to meditate on the passage throughout the day. Furthermore, it often takes weeks, months, or even years for God to build a quality into our lives. The memorized verse will help in that process because it will ever be with us - “in the heart.”

Which one of these methods should you use in your Bible reading? Obviously you won't use them all each time you read a passage of Scripture. But, just like you have several different screwdrivers, each having a particular usefulness, each of these Bible study tools will be useful for certain passages of Scripture. You must try a tool out though to become familiar with how it works so you can use it when the appropriate job comes up.

4. Record

Record what you see in the passage. Keep a record of your insights, questions, and applications. Start where you are, even if what you record seems pretty basic. Everyone starts at that same place. But be sure to write it down. Use an iPad, journal, or a notebook to record what you see. There are many reasons for keeping a spiritual journal, but consider especially the following five reasons:

- It provides a useful method for recording special daily insights from God's Word. Insights that go unrecorded often slip away from your memory and are lost.
- It produces an attitude of expectancy. Keeping a daily spiritual journal develops a mental attitude of expectancy that not only attunes your brain for diligent thought but also helps with consistency by producing a spirit of anticipation that today you will hear from God.
- It provides a useful check on regularity. At a glance you can tell just how consistent you are in your quiet time. Many people think they are more consistent in their devotions than they really are; the daily spiritual journal will keep you honest.
- It provides a useful review. One of the blessings in keeping a daily journal is that in a few minutes each week you can review the "best" of your devotional reading for the week and month. This review further helps cement the Word of God in your mind.
- It provides an easy appraisal of spiritual growth. By the time you have kept a spiritual journal for three months, you will be amazed at your growth. Without this kind of record you may not realize that you are growing in grace and knowledge and in wisdom and stature with God.

As we noted above, one item that you should record is an application. Unfortunately, application is often the most neglected stage in the process of Bible reading. Howard Hendricks has noted, "The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life."⁴ Thus, the ultimate goal of all Bible reading is to allow the truth of God's Word to do something to you. The process of relating the Word of God to life is called application.

Here are four principles to keep in mind as you write down an application:

1. Your application should be **Personal** – you should write it in the first person singular. When you write out an application, use the personal pronouns “I,” “me,” “my,” and “mine” throughout. However, remember that your application needs to come from principles in the passage, and not just some subjective encounter with the text.
2. Your application should be **Practical** – it should be something you can do. Plan a definite course of action, which you intend to take. Design a personal project that will encourage you to be a “doer of the Word.” Make your applications as specific as possible. Broad generalities can make you feel helpless and produce little action.
3. Your application should be **Possible** – it should be something you know you can accomplish; otherwise you will get discouraged.
4. Your application should be **Measurable** – you must set up some sort of follow-up to check up on your success in doing it. It has to be measurable so you will know that you have done it. Often this will mean establishing a time limit. It is important that you also tell someone about it - someone who will occasionally check up on your progress in an encouraging way (like your accountability partner/group).

Remember to record applications for future use as well as present needs. If you find an application that does not apply to you at present, write it down anyway, for two reasons. First, the application might be needed in the future when another situation comes into your life. Second, it might help you minister to someone else who is in that situation. Ask yourself, “How can I use this passage to help someone else.”

1 Rick Warren, *12 Dynamic Bible Study Methods*, Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1981, p. 29.

2 Howard Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, Chicago: Moody, 1991, p. 40.

3 Warren, *12 Dynamic Bible Study Methods*, pp. 33-34.

4 Hendricks, *Living By The Book*, p. 284.

Day Two: Bible study on Mark 1:35-39

In your time today you are going to have a chance to practice what you read about yesterday. The passage you are going to study is from a day in the life of Jesus. This is the type of Bible reading you can build into your daily schedule.

Date: _____ Passage: _____

1. **Pray** – Begin your time with a short prayer.
2. **Read** – Take time to read the passage slowly.
3. **Reflect** – You do not have to do all of these during one reflection time.
 - Ask yourself nine questions.

1. Is there a sin to confess?
2. Is there a promise to claim?
3. Is there an attitude to change?
4. Is there a command to obey?
5. Is there an example to follow?
6. Is there a prayer to pray?
7. Is there an error to avoid?
8. Is there a truth to believe?
9. Is there something to praise God for?

- Emphasize words in the passage under study.
- Paraphrase the passage under study.
- Personalize the passage you are studying.
- Pray the verse or passage back to God.
- Memorize a verse or passage you are studying.

4. Record (insights, questions, and applications)

- Make your application Personal, Practical, Possible, and Measurable.

Insights:

--	--

Questions:

--	--

Applications:

--	--

discipline

Day Three: Optional – Learning to Pray

When we are reading God's Word, it is God talking to us. When we pray, we are our talking to God. Prayer is the talking part of our relationship with God. As men, we are often times intimidated by prayer. We don't know where to start. I have found it very helpful to use a simple acronym to help structure my prayers. I am not bound to it, but it is helpful to get me started. The ACTS prayer pattern I use is described below.

A is for Adoration – Spend time worshiping and praising God for who He is. It is taking our hearts, minds, and eyes and fixing them on the nature and character of God. For example, you could take one attribute of God and praise Him for it, or you could take a Psalm or hymn of praise and read it and pray it.

C is for Confession – This is the part of prayer where we confess our sins to God. Normally, we can be very general in this area of prayer. I encourage you to be very specific and honest with God about the areas where you are falling short. As part of confession, claim God's forgiveness in your life. (1 John 1:9)

T is for Thanksgiving – Express gratitude for what God is doing in your life. It may be for spiritual blessings (the Cross, the Word, the Church, etc.). It may be relational blessings (family, friends, children, spouse, etc.). It may be for material blessings (your home, food, job, etc.) as well as other things.

S is for Supplication – Bring your requests to God as it says in our memory verse. You can pray for our ministry requests (people we are seeking to share the gospel with, people we are leading in our Sunday school class, etc.). You can pray for various people in your life (family members, neighbors, missionaries, etc.). You can pray for personal issues (character flaws you are seeking to change, decisions you need to make, relationships you need to heal, etc.). You can pray for events in the world and for world leaders.

Personal Prayer Time is one thing to read about it and another to do it.
Take the time to use this guide as a time of personal prayer.

Adoration – Read a Psalm such as 66, 95, 96, 99, 100. Then begin by praying,
“God I worship you and praise you because you are...”

Confession – Read 1 John 1:9. Then silently pray these words:

“I need your forgiveness for the sin of....

Please give me your strength to forsake that sin, to make restitution by....

To accept your forgiveness and the new life you give me.”

Thanksgiving – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Psalm 100:4; 103:2; 105:2 or 106:1.

Then begin by praying, “I praise you and thank you for....”

- Answered Prayer . . .
- Spiritual Blessings . . .
- Relational Blessings . . .
- Material Blessings . . .
- For . . .

Supplication – Read Philippians 4:6-7. Now you can pray for:

- Other People - family, friends, world leaders, missionaries,
- For You - areas I want to grow in, my work, decisions I need to make, etc.

– Idea taken from Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the
beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end, Amen.*

discipline

Train To Win - A Testimony

It is written “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”, meaning I must submit to God’s ways to learn God’s law. When God declared in Isaiah 55:8-9 “for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways He is telling me I need to submit and learn about him by reading the bible.

God speaks to me through the Scripture and it is the foundation of our relationship. The gospel of John states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. Knowledge of the Word combined with a deep Love of Christ is the foundation of discipleship and the church. Jesus commanded us to seek our daily bread so that we will be strengthened by the armor of Christ.

By reading the word daily I experienced a great deepening in my relationship with Christ that could not have come any other way. God Himself teaches me through His written Word. God is teaching me the difference between the enemy’s ways and His ways so that I can be transformed. Wisdom is the right understanding and correct application of God’s ways. Knowing Scripture is the basis of discernment. Reading Scripture every day is not the ultimate goal, I have learned reading Scripture and spending quality time with God daily is the bare minimum requirement to experience an ever-deepening relationship with Christ.

– John Schlevensky

In Class:

The Leader Opens in Prayer:

Getting to Know One Another: It is important to continue to spend some time getting to know one another, so here are a couple of questions to help the process.

- If you could invite three people to a dinner party who would you invite and why?
- When you look back at your life, when have you grown the most as a Christ follower?

Discussion of Material:

- What are the similarities between training for an athletic event and training to be like Christ?

Discussion of Bible study:

- Discuss what you found helpful from the article on Devotional Bible study.
- As a group, make a list of some reasons why we are to read the Bible regularly.
- What are some of the hindrances to regularly reading the Word?
- What insights did you have from your study of Mark 1:35-39?
- Why do you think Jesus found it so necessary to get away from the disciples and crowds to be with the Father?
- If anyone had a chance to work through the prayer exercise, let them share how it went for them.
- What does a daily time with the Lord look like? What must you do to get started and to build this into your daily schedule? How can you help each other to do this?

Sharing and Prayer Time:

Have each man share how the other men in the group can pray for him this week, especially as it relates to having a daily devotional time with the Lord. Make sure to write down all the requests in the back of the booklet, so you remember what to pray for during the week. The leader or someone else that volunteers should close the time in prayer.

discipline

Key Principles:

Spiritual training takes discipline and is the preparation we need to win our 9-minute moments.

God shares His heart, purposes, promises, perspective and principles for living in the Word.

Prayer demonstrates our dependence on God. If we don't pray, we are living independently of God.

A number of years ago I was asked to do the chapel service for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers before they played the Packers here in Milwaukee. If there ever was a team that needed a chapel service it was the Bucs as they were bottom dwellers at the time. When I walked into the Hyatt for the service, I noticed that there were a number of very large men in nice suits, carrying 3-inch binders everywhere they went. Whether it was to the team breakfast, or team meetings, in the lobby or even to the chapel, they all had this big black binder under their arms. After the chapel was over, coach Sam Wyche came up and we talked for a while. After telling me about the ministry in which he was involved, I asked him a question, "Coach, tell me about those big black binders. What are they?" He said, "Those binders are their playbooks. Everything they need to know to play professional football is in that book. Every secondary call, every pass route, every blitz scheme, every play we run on offense, defense and special teams is in that book." He went on to say, "Everything a player needs to know between noon and 3:00pm is in that book." I then asked, "What happens if they lose that book?" He said, "Son, you do not want to know. That player will get fined more than you make." (I told him as a pastor, that would not be hard).

As I left that day, I thought this is exactly what the Bible is to the disciples of Jesus. All of God's promises and purposes for our lives are in the Book. All of the principles for living out our lives in this world are in the Book. His perspective on our circumstances, relationships, ministry, and work is in the Book. Every day when we get up, it is game time, and all we need to know to be successful in His eyes is in the Book. How well do you know it? I have found over the years that many men are "under" the Word, listening to others on podcasts, CDs or a sermon, but are not "in" the Word.

In this lesson you have been introduced to the concept of building spiritual muscle. Spiritual muscle builds by learning to read, study, and incorporate the Bible into your life and then talk to God through prayer. I hope you have been encouraged and challenged this week to continue to “run the race” that God has for you.

*“The Word of God hidden in
the heart is a stubborn voice
to suppress.”*

– Billy Graham

discipline

Want to Talk More to God Through Prayer?

Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind, Tremper Longman III

Too Busy Not to Pray, Bill Hybels

The Life You've Always Wanted, John Ortberg

Prayer Requests for My Group:



LESSON FOUR

Learn to Really Live: Run with Purpose

“Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.”

- 1 Corinthians 9: 26

Goals for the Lesson:

To understand what it means to live with a sense of purpose

To seek to become like Jesus in everything you do

The story is told of a young boy who grew up on a farm and dreamed of the day when he could drive dad's tractor in the fields. Finally his 14th birthday came and he jumped out of bed and ran to his parent's room to wake up his dad and ask if they could go to the barn so he could drive the tractor. Dad pulled the tractor out and the boy climbed up, started it up and asked dad if he had any suggestions. His dad said that if he wanted to go straight, he should fix his eyes on something on the other side and go straight for it. The boy set his sights on the other side of the field and off he went. He got to the other side, turned around and came back, jumped off and ran up to his father, proud as could be. When they looked across the field, they saw a trail that was as crooked as could be. The little boy had gone all over the field. With tears in his eyes he looked at his father and asked, "Dad, I did what you said, why is the track so crooked?" The father asked, "What did you keep your eyes on?" "Dad", the boy said, "I did exactly what you told me to do, I kept my eyes on that cow on the other side of the field, and wherever it went I went!"

Men, that is exactly what many of us are doing, we have our eyes on the "cows" of power, prestige, position, pleasure, and we are chasing them all over. The problem is that when we get to the end of our lives we are going to look back, just like that young boy, and see a life that was lived with no purpose, no impact or no significance. Paul in the verse above says, "I don't want to run aimlessly, or beat the air, I want to...run with purpose." Don't we all? Life is too short to be chasing cows. This week we will look at what it actually means to live life fully awake so that we can run ours with purpose.

alive

The Bible is full of men who had a sense of mission, focus, and purpose:

- Nehemiah said, “I will rebuild the walls.”
- Moses said, “I will lead the people to the promised land.”
- Paul was an apostle to the gentiles.
- Abraham was a blessing to many nations.
- Barnabas established the Church in Corinth.
- Caleb in Joshua 14, at age 80 said, “Give me this mountain.”

Paul in this passage gives us the picture of a boxer who has had his bell rung and he is seeing stars, in a daze staggering around the ring, not landing any blows. It is “Motion without Meaning”. Unfortunately that is what many of our lives are – “Motion without Meaning”. Paul says if we are going to run the race, then we are going to run with direction, aim, purpose and control. Our every move is counted and calculated. I don’t know about you, but this is the type of life I want to live, so let’s get started.

Before Class:

Complete the Bible study on God's Purposes for your Life.
A Time of Personal Reflection.

Days One & Two - Complete the Bible study: God's Purposes for your Life.

God's over-riding purpose for each of us as men is to have a personal relationship with Him. But after that, what? For this study you will look up the following verses and see what they have to say about God's purposes for your life.

- Look up the verses and then make a few notes about what it says to you.
Because there are so many verses, look up half the first day and half the second.

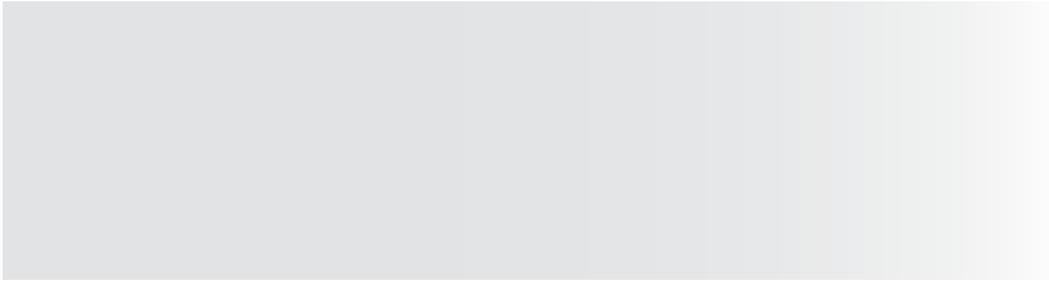
2 Peter 3:18

2 Corinthians 3:18

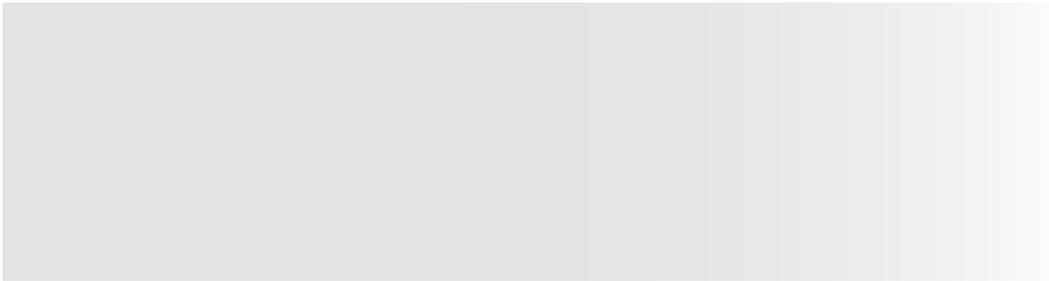
Philippians 3:7-14

alive

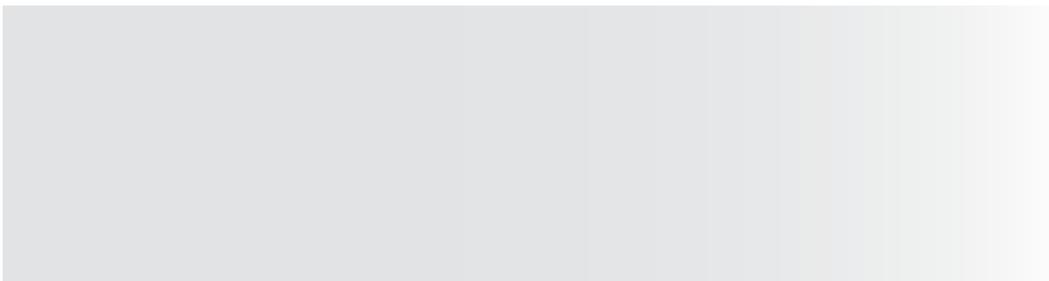
John 4:23



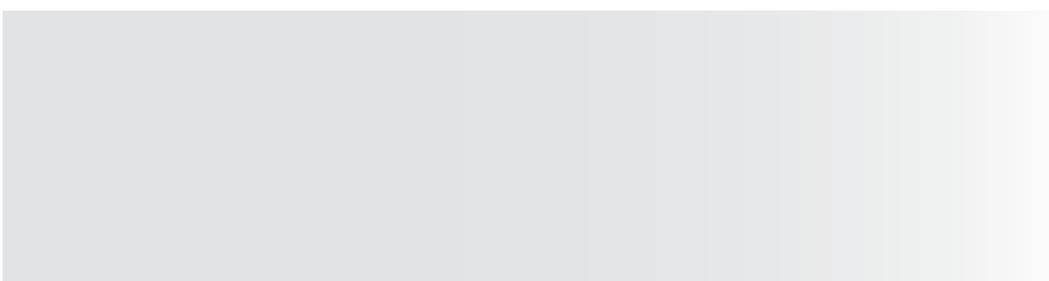
1 Corinthians 12:7



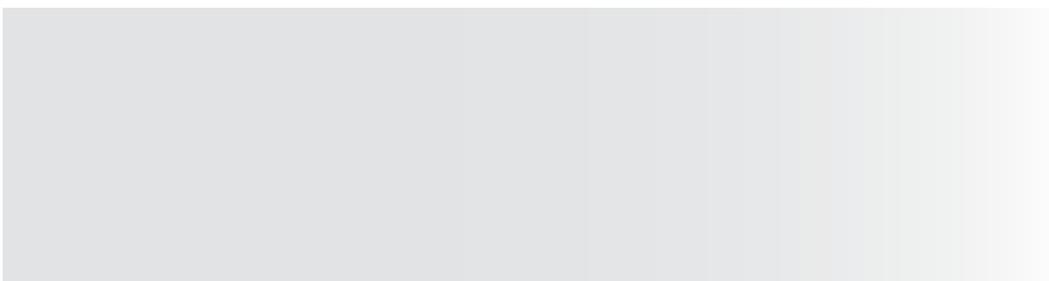
1 Corinthians 10:31



Colossians 3:23



Micah 6:8



Matthew 22:37-40

--	--

Matthew 28:19-20

--	--

Romans 12:1-2

--	--

Ephesians 2:10

--	--

alive

• What are some of the main principles you derived from these passages?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In John Piper's Book, *Desiring God*, he says, *"The proper understanding of everything in life begins with God. No one will ever understand the necessity of conversion that does not know why God created us. He created us 'in his image' so that we would image forth his glory in the world. We were made to be prisms refracting the light of God's glory in all of life. Why God should want to give us a share in shining with his glory is a great mystery? Call it grace, or mercy or love - it is an unspeakable wonder. Once we were not. Then we existed for the glory of God."*

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

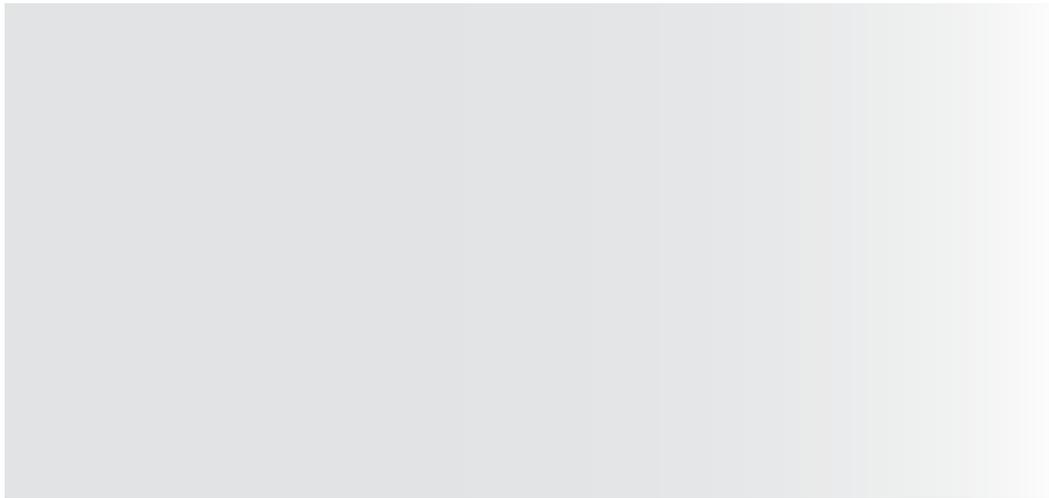
- Ephesians 2:10

alive

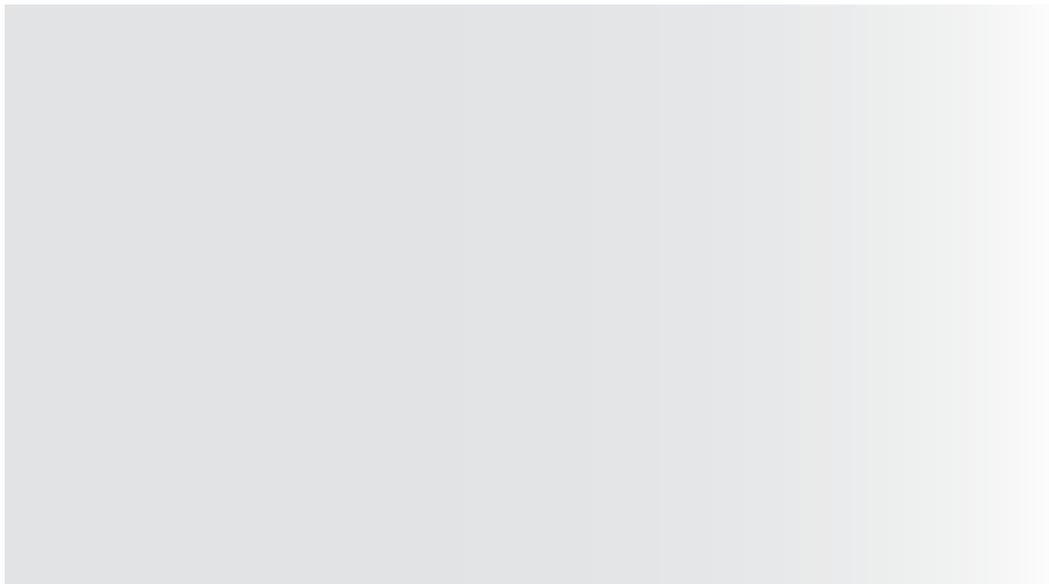
Day Three: A Time of Personal Reflection

Every man, no matter what his age, color, nationality or place in life has four questions he must be able to answer. Today we would like you to take a few minutes to reflect on the verses you read the last couple of days and answer the four questions below. If you are not sure, that is ok. This study is intended to help you answer those questions by the end of your time together.

- **What is going to be at the Center of your life?** What am I going to live for? Money, family, career, hobby sports, or Christ?



- **What is going to be the Character of your Life?** What am I going to demonstrate to the world I live in? Am I making visible the invisible Christ, or am I going to reflect modern culture?



- **What will be the Contribution of your Life?** Each of us has been uniquely made and gifted to make a contribution in the world. Am I using my time, talents and treasures to further God's kingdom or have I hidden them?

- **What will be my Communication?** What will I say to the world with my words and life? What will I say to those who are hurting, broken and in pain? What will I say to those without Christ?

alive

Run with Purpose - A Testimony

As I write this I am in my early sixties. I graduated from high school in 1969. Our class was labeled; "The class of sex, drugs, and wine, the class of 1969" and I was well steeped in the culture. During my sophomore year in college, my girlfriend – at the time - was discipling me. At age 19 I committed my life to following Christ. Unfortunately my discipling ended at that point. So while I had given my heart to following Christ's principles, I hadn't given my thought life to Him and I hadn't given Him my language. Therefore to the casual observer, I didn't look or behave much differently than the rest of the world around me.

When I reached my late thirties the hypocrisy of believing one thing in my heart and behaving in another haunted me. I knew that I was supposed to lead my family by emulating good Christian principles but I felt ill equipped to do so. That motivated me to join a men's small group bible study at our church with 11 other men I had never met before. I am not exaggerating that it transformed my life. I learned that most of them struggled with the same sins that I did- sexual lust, selfishness, and materialism. By holding each other accountable, over time, we rendered those sins into submission. That process continues today as, together, we test our lifestyle against Christ's principles.

As we journeyed together we learned and exercised the spiritual disciplines of regular Scripture reading and memorization as well as prayer. I learned that I was uniquely gifted by God to do good works that He had prepared in advance for me to do and that my mission was to be right where God had placed me (Eph 2:8-10). I started managing people at work as a servant leader, according to God's principles (Mk 10:45), rather than as an autocrat as I had before. Today the staff I am responsible for tell me they will follow me where ever I lead because they know I have their best interests in mind, that it's not about me. Looking back over these many years of following Christ, I realize that God has an outrageous journey planned for each one of us. The sooner in life we engage His plan for us the sooner we experience the great blessing of walking with Him.

– Rob Adams

In Class:

The Leader Opens in Prayer:

Spend time as a group sharing and in prayer:

Remember that you only have to share what you feel comfortable sharing, but you are encouraged to share more than last week.

- Each man share with the group a time in your life when you felt as though you were doing exactly what God made you to be and do.
- Each man share what they think their family and friends would say is the driving force in their life.
- Each man share how the other guys can pray for him this coming week.

Group discussion of what you learned this week:

- As a group make a list of the benefits of having a purpose for living.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- With these benefits in mind, what then does it mean to live life with a sense of purpose?
- Discuss as a group how you go about making God's purposes for your life, your purposes for your life.
- Share with the group the verse that was most meaningful to you from your Bible study this week and why. How does one practically:
 - Become more like Jesus?
 - Bring Glory to God at work?
 - Serve God in your life?

alive

Key Principles:

God has created every man for a purpose.

Every man has a role to play in God's redemptive plan for the world.

Knowing God's purpose for your life will give you a sense of direction, keep you focused

and prepare you for God's final audit of your life.

The Academy Award-winning movie, Braveheart, told the story of the Scottish freedom fighter William Wallace. Toward the end of the film, Wallace is in chains, awaiting his execution. On the strength of his passion and determination, he had led all of Scotland to revolt against their English oppressors. Time and again, his will and determination had bonded the spirits of the people into a force for national identity, pride, and freedom. But now he had been betrayed, handed over to his enemies, and sentenced to death. In the scene, a young woman urges the imprisoned Wallace to do whatever he can - regardless of its impact on his life mission or personal convictions - to stay the hand of his enemies, in order that his life might be spared. His response communicates one of the deepest truths of human existence: "Every man dies," he said. "Not every man really lives."

Men, you were made for a purpose. You were made to really live. When you begin to understand God's purposes for your life, you will really live.

"The Glory of God is human beings fully alive."

- Iranius

Want to Learn to Live with More Purpose?

The Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren

A Purposeful Life, James Emery White

Prayer Requests for My Group:



alive

LESSON FIVE

Protect Yourself: Run with Discipline

Goals for the Lesson:

To understand that we are tempted by the evil one every day

To recognize where you are most vulnerable to temptation

To begin to put in place some guard rails to protect yourself

The movie Chariots of Fire depicted Eric Liddell and his quest for the Olympic Gold medal. Early in the movie he is running a race in the Scottish Highlands. Many Scots had turned out to see the great “Flying Scott.”

As the runners make the first turn Liddell trips and falls, flat on his face. The crowd gasps and groans, as the race appears lost for Liddell. It is a moment of decision for him. To everyone’s amazement, he gets back up and re-enters the race. Far behind the pack, Liddell runs as fast as he can, gradually overtaking one runner after another. Finally he captures the lead and flies down the home stretch and breaks the finish line. Exhausted, bent over gasping for air, victorious. He fell down, got up and finished. That, my friend’s, is the message of grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though we all fall down, He allows us to get up, re-enter the race and finished the race...victoriously!

I have news for you, Satan wants nothing more than to trip you up, have you fall and never get up again. He wants to neutralize you, and take you right out of the race. In our passage today, 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says this, “No I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the price.” In a very similar verse the writer of the book of Hebrews says this in 12:1, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” In this lesson we are going to look closely at the subject of temptation, what trips us up as men and how we can develop safe guards in our lives to stay holy and pure.

Before Class:

Complete the Bible study.

Read the short excerpt by Steve Farrar.

Day One – Complete the Bible study

For our Bible study today you are going to look at several passages in the Bible that deal with the subject of temptation. We want to encourage you to read the passage and then answer a couple of questions regarding that passage.

- Read James 1:12 -15

What is the pattern you see in this passage?

How have you seen yourself in this passage?

- Read Matthew 4:1-11

What was the purpose of Satan's tempting Jesus? What is Satan's purpose for tempting us?

prayer

This temptation took place in a very real place. Where do you find yourself being tempted the most (time, place, situation)? How does being aware of this help you deal with it?

How did Jesus handle the temptation? What does this look like for us?

- Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

What is it that God does for us when we go through temptations?

In what way does this verse encourage you?

Day Two – Read a short excerpt from Steve Farrar’s book, *Point Man*.

Steve Farrar, in his book wonderful book, *Point Man*, devotes a chapter to “*A One-Woman Kind of Man*.” Basically, he’s saying, “*This is what it takes to be faithful*.” If you’re single, bear with this discussion - these suggestions are applicable to being a faithful man of God, and may help you in future relationships. Read the following and come prepared to discuss it at your next meeting. He says a One-Woman kind of man is:

A One-Woman Kind of Man is Committed with His Eyes

We cannot help but notice attractive females – they are everywhere! There is a difference, however, between seeing and lusting after her. We need to discipline our eyes. Job in the Old Testament said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” Job 31:1 Job is making a commitment to a special kind of blind love. He is not making a commitment to never notice an attractive female. But he is making a commitment to not lust or fantasize about her. CS Lewis said it this way, “*If you look upon ham and eggs and lust, you have already committed breakfast in your heart*.” This eye discipline is seen in a number of ways:

- Not undressing a women walking down the hall or street.
- Will avoid certain kinds of magazines, television programs and Internet sites.
- In this age of easy to access images, we may need to set concrete boundaries to help us follow through with the commitment to visual purity. This may be through Internet filters, honest accountability with other guys or simply placing your computer in the high-traffic area of your house.

A One-Woman Kind of Man is Committed with His Mind

The major battlefield in spiritual warfare is the mind. Paul tells us to “*Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) Keep in mind that you cannot prevent wrong thoughts from coming into your mind, that’s temptation, it is not wrong. What you do with those thoughts is key. Do you allow yourself to lust and fantasize or do you take them captive to Christ? In that microsecond you have a choice to make! So how do we take a thought captive to Christ? Not an easy task, but it starts with “*being transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:2). This does not happen overnight, but if we put in good things – like God’s Word, positive conversation, prayer, reading Christian authors, and worship music - there will be no room for the bad. We will develop a new pattern of thinking. Years ago someone said it this way:

- Sow a thought, reap an act;
- Sow an Act, reap a habit;
- Sow a habit, reap a character;
- Sow a character; reap a destiny.

Prayer

A One-Woman Kind of Man is Faithful with His Lips

A man committed to his wife is no flirt. He doesn't kid around about being interested in someone else. He doesn't joke about or speak freely about being interested in other women or getting together with another women. Marriage is sacred; Marriage is holy. It's nothing to joke about or be loose about.

A One-Woman Kind of Man is Faithful with His Hands

When a small boy, my mother would often tell me to keep my hands to myself, usually because I had just assaulted one of my brothers! This is also good advice for a man that wants to be a one-women kind of man. A one-woman kind of man is careful how he touches the opposite sex. What seems like harmless or even polite contact to one person can be taken as pointed affection to another. Err on the side of conservatism. When you're not with your wife, avoid the "harmless" touch, even a polite hug. Steve Farrar says he wants to be a one-woman man, therefore he figures "*that means hugging one woman.*" Think of how special that will make your wife feel.

A One-Woman Kind of Man is Committed with His Feet

First Corinthians 6:18 says it flat out: "*Flee from sexual immorality.*" This applies to persons, movies, magazines, the web, anything that pulls us in that direction. Flee! It may mean just not turning on the TV when you're alone. Same with your computer. If that girl at work is starting to show an interest in you, use a different hallway. Flee! Proverbs 4:23 says, "*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*" The writer of Proverbs says we are to establish guard rails in our lives that will help us avoid sin. Ask yourself, where are you most vulnerable to sin? What guard rails do you need to establish in your life?

Run with Discipline - A Testimony

In 1992, I had the privilege to attend the first Promise Keepers stadium event in Boulder, CO. I was still immature in my Christian faith and felt that I would learn something there to move forward more quickly. It was a huge blessing, as I was challenged in multiple ways to get more serious about what God was leading me to be. I returned home enlightened, but not sure what to do next. Then I learned that Steve Sonderman was launching a new men's Bible study series called Top Gun. Though I was intimidated at the thought of a two-year commitment including lots of homework and expected accountability with 11 other guys I didn't know, it was God's timing all the way. Since then, it has been an absolute joy to lead my own Top Gun, Soul Purpose and No Regrets groups year after year ever since. It never gets old because the dynamics of the lessons and the mentoring that are included re-challenge me to keep growing in wisdom and application, as well as nurturing great friendships that wouldn't have happened any other way. Early in Top Gun, I made a crucial decision to take the assignments seriously, including incorporating all the spiritual disciplines that I was being taught. Many were awkward at first, but as they became habits, I came to increasingly appreciate them as they bore fruit in my life (e.g. daily Bible reading, intercessory prayer, journaling, fasting, tithing, serving, etc.).

The most important of these is daily Bible reading. It is incredible how much I have learned about God and His will from reading through the Bible day by day on a yearly basis for the last 20 years. I have utilized different translations and different reading guides as the years have passed, so that each year is fresh and can teach me something new. I do not wish to come across as prideful in the least, only to challenge you to pursue the same journey so that you can increase your confidence in your faith and apply it with greater consistency. The spiritual disciplines are not rules or burdens, but wise habits that are designed to draw you closer to the Lord and His will for your life. I encourage you to try them one at a time and see for yourself. Yet, if the only one that sticks is daily Bible reading, you will never regret it.

Part of spiritual discipline is also setting up guardrails in areas that you are weak. We all need those, and I was no exception. One is lust. Whenever my mind wanders in that area, I have decided in advance what to do. If it is a glance, I look the other way versus the second look that leads to no good. If it is a thought, I picture pulling a shade down in front of the image. Another is gambling. I once backed into a parking spot so that no one would see the fish on my bumper. Now I drive past. Spiritual disciplines are a wise decision followed by action.

I wish you all success on your own spiritual journeys. Godspeed!

- Ed Newman

er
n
o

In Class:

The Leader Opens in Prayer:

Sharing and Prayer Time:

- Someone in the group read Hebrews 12:1-3 aloud. As you feel comfortable, share what hinders and entangles you from running the race the way God would want. Tell the men how they can pray for you. Make sure to use the prayer journal in the back of the study to keep track of your prayer requests.
- Have someone in the group pray for the men.

Discussion of James 1:12 – 15: This passage has a great deal to say about how temptation works, who we are tempted by and the progression it takes in our hearts and minds.

- What are the main lessons learned in this passage? As a group come up with a short list.

1.

2.

3.

Discussion of Matthew 4 and the temptation of Jesus:

- What did Satan tempt Jesus with and how is that seen today?
- How did Jesus handle the temptations?
- Have someone read Psalm 119:9-11. How can the Word of God be helpful in times of temptation?
- What other resources are available to you as a follower of Christ to help you in times of temptation?

Discussion of the Steve Farrar reading: Share with one another what was most helpful to you from the Steve Farrar reading. What are the guardrails you need to establish in your life?

Discussion of God's Forgiveness: Each of us as men are going to stumble and fall, fumble the ball and make mistakes in life. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus provides forgiveness for when we do sin.

- Read the following passages as a group. What do they teach us about God's forgiveness?
 - Colossians 2:13-15
 - Psalm 103:12
 - Ephesians 4:32
 - 1 John 1:9
- Do you find it hard to accept God's forgiveness in your life? Take time to share if you need to confess and ask forgiveness for any sin areas in your life. The leader should then pray for the group about this.
- As a group walk through the Sexual Purity Card, found below of this lesson. Discuss it, and then sign it together. When finished have someone pray for the group that each man would seek to live a holy life before God.

A Commitment to Sexual Purity

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

– Ephesians 5:3

Today, by the grace of God I commit my eyes, mind, heart and body to sexual purity. As man of God living in a sex saturated society, I understand that the battle is Real and that the evil one will do anything he can to sabotage us. To be pure means I will be radical in my actions and thoughts to stop any sexual gratification that comes to me from outside my marriage. I will guard my life by committing to the following:

- Building a strong healthy marriage where my wife is honored and cherished.
- Be completely open with a small group of men, regarding my private thoughts and struggles.
- Put in place guardrails to protect my eyes, mind, and heart.
- Walk daily in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and to allow Him to be Lord of my entire life.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

pure

Guidelines for Sexual Purity

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

– Proverbs 4:23

1. Guard Your Eyes – Your eyes are connected to your heart. Heart adultery is connected to eye adultery. Work at training your eyes to immediately ‘bounce’ away from the ‘sexual’, like the jerk of your hand away from a hot stove. What are the most obvious and prolific sources of sensual images apart from your wife? Where do you look most often? Where are you the weakest?

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.”

– Job 31:1

2. Guard Your Minds – The mind is the line of scrimmage in the Christian life, and whoever controls the line of scrimmage wins the game. In times of war the first casualty is the truth. Protect yourself from thinking or fantasizing about other women. Remember, you cannot prevent wrong thoughts from coming to your mind, but what you do with that thought in the next microsecond will determine whether that thought will turn into sin. Begin to fill your mind with wholesome thoughts as you memorize Scripture.

Take every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

– II Cor 10:5

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

– Romans 12:2

3. Exercise Extreme Caution with Other Women – It often starts innocently with a look, touch or word. It then can accelerate into an emotional relationship which builds momentum toward disaster and despair. If you are exposed to a woman in your life who prompts your mind to impure thoughts, then take a hike, Mike. Play the Dweeb. Do everything possible to stay clear of that woman.

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

– 1 Corinthians 6:18

4. Commit to a “Band of Brothers” – If men are going to help you in this area, we need to tell them of our struggles. Each of us needs men in our lives who love us enough to challenge us in the private areas of our thoughts. It also means we have to listen to what they are saying and take appropriate action. Some potential accountability questions:

1. Are there any women filling your thoughts during the day other than your wife?
2. Are you looking forward to being with any woman other than your wife?
3. Have you been viewing any images that are impure?
4. What situations are leading you into times of impure thoughts?

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

– **Proverbs 27:17**

5. A Strong Relationship with Your Father – Our relationship with our Heavenly Father is the strongest defense we have. Build into your life consistent times of prayer, Bible study, journaling, worship and solitude. May we fall more and more in love with Jesus as the days go on and, as a result, develop a healthy “fear of the Lord.”

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

– **Matthew 22:37**

6. Honor and Cherish Your Wife – Intentionally work at developing your love relationship with your wife. Our wives thirst for an emotional, spiritual, and sexual oneness that meets the craving in their soul to be connected, protected, cared for, and cherished. Begin by taking your wife out weekly on a date. Work at touching her soul with your ears and share your soul with her. If you are sexually thirsty, quench it at home rather than with someone else’s wife.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

– **Ephesians 5:25**

7. Know God’s Forgiveness in Your Life – There are times when we stumble. The good news is that God has provided a way for us to experience His grace and forgiveness in our lives. In I John 1:9, it says “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” When you stumble, confess it immediately and repent of it. Know that there is no sin too big for God to forgive, nor is there anything we can do to separate us from the love of God.

Romans 8:37-39; Psalm 103:11-12; Acts 3:19



Key Principles:

The Christian life is not a playground but a battleground.
God is not the one that tempts us, Satan does.
One of the greatest resources in fighting temptation is self-awareness.
Jesus threw the book at Satan and so should we.
God's forgiveness is greater than any sin.

The story is told in Haiti of a certain man who wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted to buy it very badly, but he was a poor man and didn't have the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house to the man for \$1,000. But the reduced price came with a stipulation. The owner would sell the house, but he would keep ownership of a large nail protruding from over the front door.

Several years later, the original owner decided he wanted to buy the house back. Understandably, the new owner was unwilling to sell. As a result, the original owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog in the street, and hung it from the nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable, and the family was forced to sell to the owner of the nail.

The Haitian pastor concluded the story: *"If we leave the devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it."*

Men, do you have a nail, a secret sin that you hang on to? Maybe it's pride, materialism, lust, apathy, or un-checked anger. Whatever it is, the evil one will use it to drag you down, to hinder you from running the race God has prepared for you. Paul said in our passage today that he disciplines his body and mind so that he will not be disqualified, but rather finish the race. Guys, let's fight the things that tempt us. Let's finish the race and finish it strong!

Want to Run a Disciplined Race?

Point Man, Steve Farrar

Temptations Men Face, Tom Eisenman

Prayer Requests for My Group:



pure

LESSON 6

Don't Race Alone: Run Together

Goals for the Lesson:

To help every man see the need to be connected to other men for their life
To understand that God created man for community, not isolation

Men, there is nothing like being a part of a small community of believers. Nothing like being able to go to a place where you belong, where you are accepted for who you are, where your story can be told and your hopes and dreams shared. There is something very powerful that happens when a small group of men gather to open their hearts, share their struggles and seek Almighty God together. Whether you realize it or not you were created by God, to live in relationship to God, and with His people. Part of bearing the image of Him, is we were made for community.

I can still remember the first men's small group I went to almost 30 years ago. I had just started working at a large church (Elmbrook church) and a friend asked if I would like to join his men's small group. I have to admit, I was scared stiff! What do you do in a men's small group, I thought. Do they chant? Do they all sit around and share their feelings, cry and sing Kumbaya? Or are they going to spend the night talking about the Packers, Badgers, Bucks and Brewers, which I would have enjoyed, but just did not have the time to do that for two hours! After driving up to the condo complex and sitting in my car for what seemed like an eternity debating with myself whether to go in or not, I finally got the courage to go in and knock on the door. That night I meet five new men. We spent the first hour working through the second chapter of Mark and then shared some prayer requests and prayed for one another. I left unscathed! No group hug, no tears, no singing, no emotionfest, just a bunch of guys trying to follow Christ as we navigated the choppy waters of being working men, newly married with young kids.

As for my life, I will always be connected to a small group of men for as long as I live. From that night forward I have been in a small group of men who have encouraged me when I took a step of faith or said no to sin. They have provided me with wise counsel when I have faced a life altering decision and untold comfort when walking through hard times. They have held me accountable for my thoughts, motives, speech and actions, and challenged me to become more like Christ in all that I do. Men, together is better than alone. Hopefully over the past few weeks you have tasted just a little bit of that. In this final lesson, you will discuss even further what that can look like and what your group can do next now that you are done with this study.

Before Class:

Complete the Bible study.

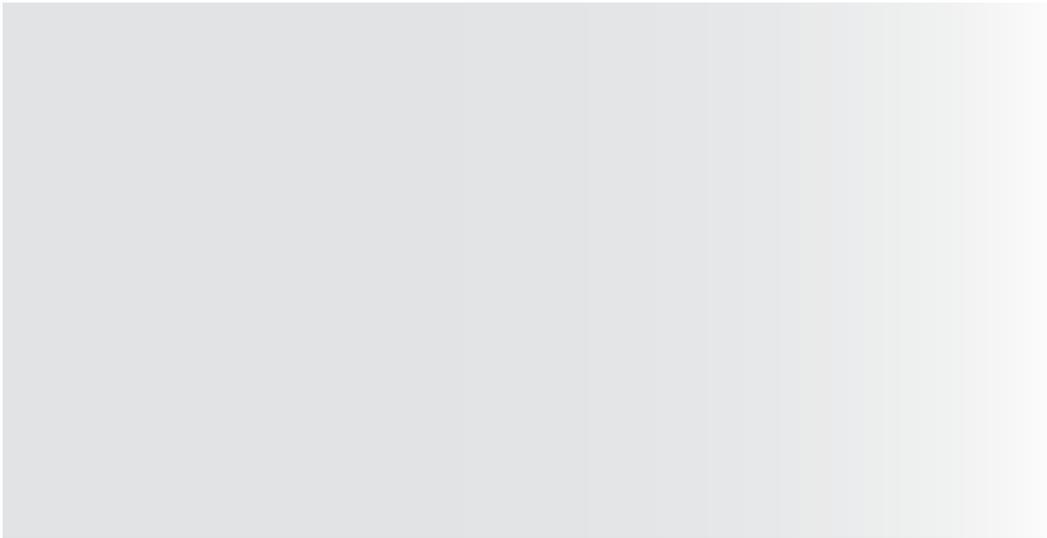
Read Article on Accountability.

Consider your options moving forward now that this study is over.

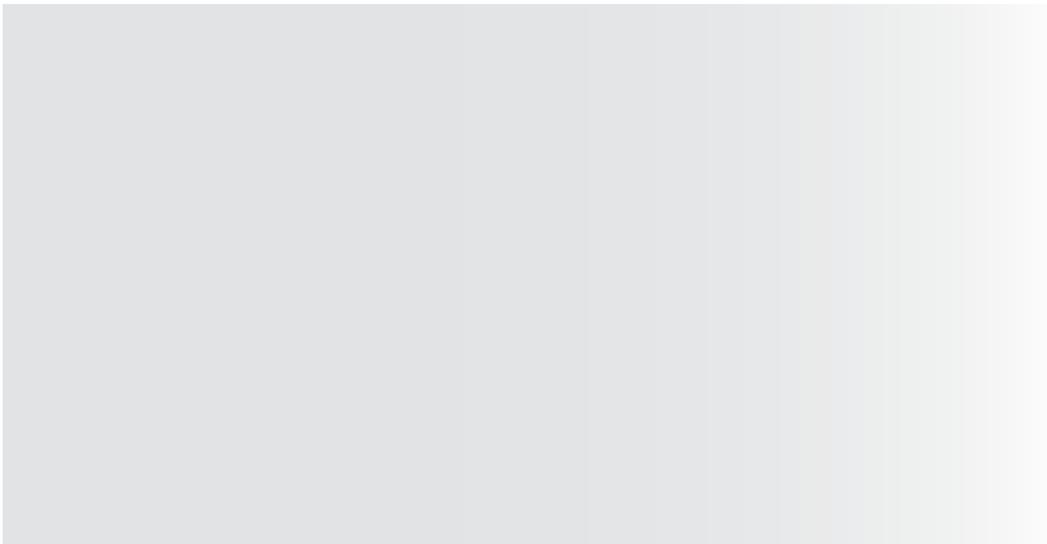
Day One: Complete the Bible study – Becoming a Band of Brothers.

- Read the following Bible verses and make a few notes about how they communicate that it is important to be connected to men in a men's small Bible study group.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12



Hebrews 10:24-25

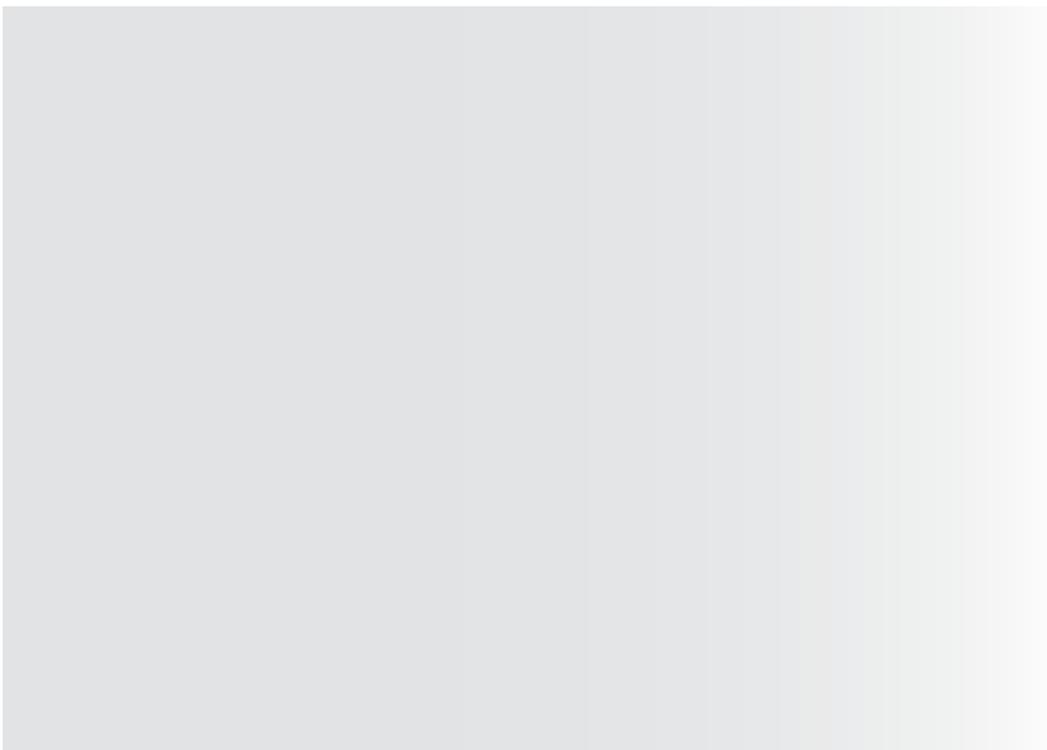


community

Acts 2:42-47



Proverbs 27:17



Day Two: Read and review the article, *Accountability: Who's Got Your Back?* by Steve Sonderman

Wednesday morning will start like every other Wednesday has for the past twenty years. I'll get up early, drive to my office in the dark, and meet with two long-time friends, Rob and Mike. When I walk into the room I am not a pastor, writer, speaker, or leader of a national men's ministry. Rather, I am just a man who is seeking to become more like Jesus and follow hard after Jesus. For the next hour and a half we will talk, laugh, cry, open the Word, pray, encourage one another, ask the tough questions, and bear one another's burdens. Our motto has been "*Become friends and change the world.*" We have made a commitment to be available to one another 24/7, to walk through the valley of the shadow of death together and to spur one another on to good deeds. Oh yes, and one more thing...to be accountable to one another for our thoughts, motives, speech and behavior. While many consider accountability a nasty word, I have found it instrumental in my growth as a father, husband, friend and Christ-follower.

At the first Promise Keepers Conference I attended in 1993, I heard Howard Hendricks say, "*A man not in an accountable relationship is a moral accident waiting to happen.*" Those words have rung in my ears all these years and have been a guide to all we have done in our ministry to men here at Elmbrook Church.

While there are many ways to define accountability, the one we use is "*giving others the freedom to help you order your private and public lives.*" Over the years I have learned that for accountability to work correctly there are certain key components that must be present:

Relationship – Accountability with one or more men will only work when a mutual relationship has been developed. I know that Rob and Mike love me and want the best for me, and as a result I allow them into my life.

Trust – For accountability to work, you have to trust the other people to keep what you share confidential. Without that there can be no accountability. For 15 years I helped lead the chapel services for the Milwaukee Brewers. There was a sign above the door that said, "*What you see here and hear here stays here.*" We tell our groups to imagine that sign above the door to their meeting room. Trust takes time and you cannot rush the process.

Community

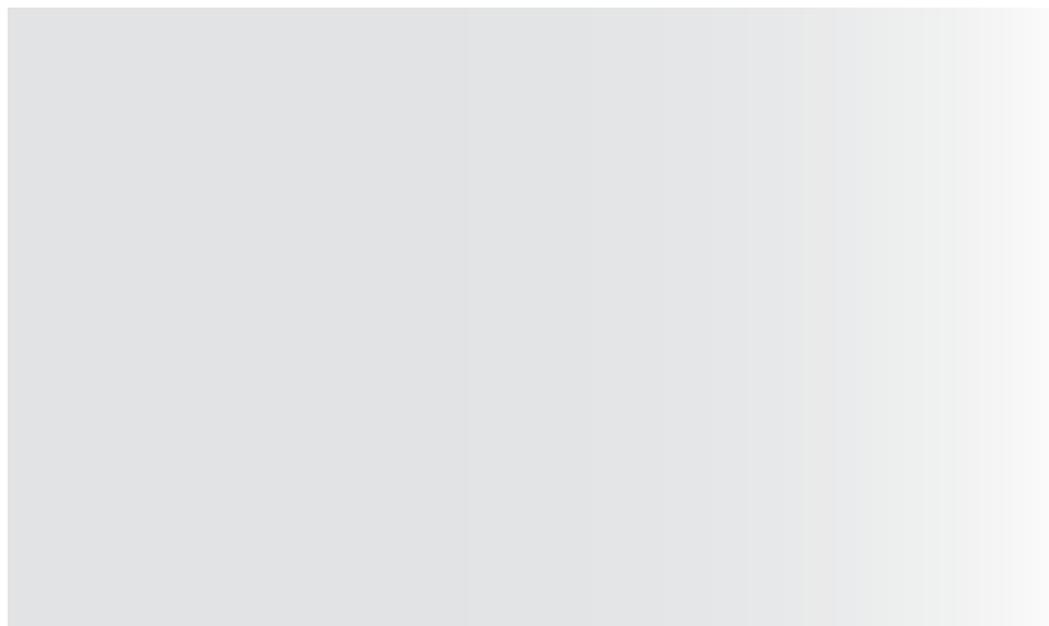
Honesty – Most men are afraid to share what is really going on in their lives because they think they are the only one struggling. As a result, men hide the truth and try to portray an image of someone they aren't. I encourage our leaders to take the risk and share the skeletons in their closet and as they do, the other men will normally follow. Honesty and authenticity are contagious and vital.

Voluntary – Accountability cannot be forced, but rather I need to give them permission to ask me the hard questions in the areas I want to and need to grow. For example, I have a tendency to be passive in my relationships with my two sons, and so I have asked them to ask me what I have done during the last week to build those relationships. I have set aside my Thursday lunch time to drive downtown and take one of them to lunch. They have permission to ask me each week if I have done that.

Encouragement – With asking the tough questions each week comes the necessity of encouragement. When one of us takes a step of faith we cheer them on. When one of us says no to sin we cheer them on.

Keep the end in mind – The goal of accountability is not behavior modification, nor is to check it off a list, but rather as Paul says, *“to walk in a manner worthy of Christ.”* So whether it is asking tough questions, providing wise counsel, encouraging each other when down, or just being available, I have found it to be integral to my walk with Jesus. My prayer for each one of you is that will find a few guys you can trust to hold you accountable as well.

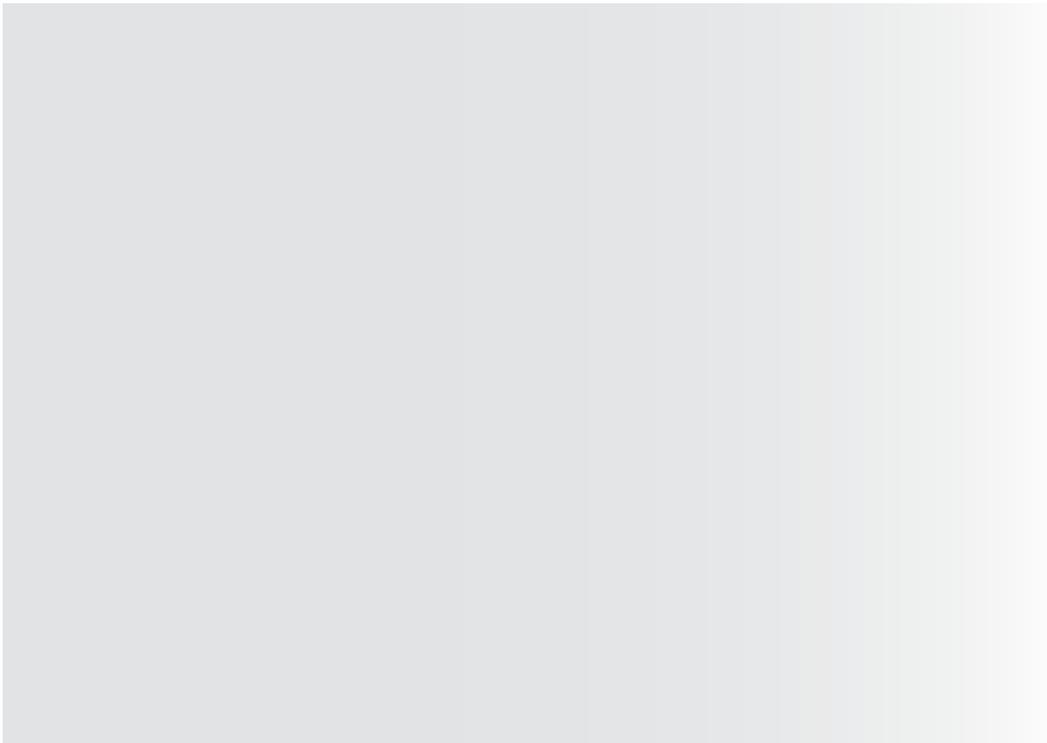
- What are your pre-conceived ideas as to what accountability is and is not?



- Has there ever been a time in your life when you were accountable and how did it work?



- How would you define accountability?



community

Run Together - A Testimony

The positive changes that have been so readily seen in me by my outward mannerisms towards others pale in comparison to the things that can only be seen by God himself. Without my group life partnerships I would not have become the man I am today. I joined my first group long ago as a spiritual “infant.” Through that group I developed the daily habits of the study of God’s Word and prayer and found out that the other guys in my group were having many of the same struggles as I in what it meant to walk the narrow path. We learned the concepts of reaching other people who may not have ever been exposed to the caring and compassionate nature of Jesus as well as the false truth that the world presents to so many. I found out that many of my habits and mannerisms were my personal idols keeping me from a true relationship with God and that I realized His help in reprioritizing my life around him. My study partners and I also found that we could become leaders in our homes and in our daily lives as we structured our lives around the mandates set down by our Savior Jesus. We recognized the need for personal accountability as we revealed the failings and temptations we had in our daily walk. Holding one another up in personal prayer gave us the confidence to know that there were living examples of the church body that really cared about what we were going through as individuals. Looking back I could not imagine what my life would be like without being a part of a group of believing friends.

Today, I am now in my fourth life group where I continue to serve Jesus by helping other men come to know Him better. Many of the hardships and struggles I had known years before have subsided with the help of continued study and prayer but most of all I am amazed to see my newest friends grow as they too learn of what it means to be a follower of Christ. We talk about our lives as it relates to what we have read during the past week and share our victories as well as our difficulties in ridding the sinful habits out of our thoughts and actions. Without the continued ability to meet with my “brothers” all realize that left to ourselves there would be no one to help keep us on the path of growth and development.

I know now that I won’t ever spend much of my time away from the small group dynamic as it helps to keep us not only accountable to other men but also continually introduces me to new friends. I eagerly anticipate whom the Spirit places with me and where we will go together.

- Mike Andrews

In Class:

The Leader Opens in Prayer:

Sharing and Prayer:

- Each man share what was the most meaningful and helpful part of being in this study over the past six weeks. Maybe where you have been challenged, convicted, encouraged, etc.
- Each man share where they want to continue to grow as a Christ Follower?
- One or two men pray for the group.

Discussion of the week's study:

- From your study this week, make a list as a group, of the benefits of being in a men's small group?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

- From your study, what would be three or four key components of a healthy group?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

- Share with one another your thoughts and questions on the accountability article.
- Why is it so hard for men to be in an accountable relationship?
- What would accountability look like in this group?

Discussion of Accountability Questions: How would you feel if these seven questions became a part of your normal small group experience?

1. Have you been with a woman this week in such a way that was inappropriate or could have looked to others like you were using poor judgment?
2. Have you been completely above reproach in all your financial dealings this week?
3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material this week?
4. Have you spent time in prayer and in the Scriptures this week?
5. Have you fulfilled your calling this week?
6. Have you taken time to be with your family this week?
7. Have you just lied to me?

(These questions were taken from a talk given by Chuck Swindoll at a Promise Keepers Conference.)

Discussion of “What is Next”: As you know you signed up for a six-week experience and I’m sure it’s been worth your time and effort. Our prayer from the beginning was that you would learn and grow through this small group study. That you would be better equipped to run the race of life and to be a Champion where it really matters, in your relationship with God, and others.

- Take time now in your group to discuss whether you would like to stay together and continue the experience of being a men’s small group.
 - When would we want to meet? Day and time?
 - Where do we want to meet?
 - Do we want to invite any other men to join us?
 - What will we do in our group time?
 - What will we study?

- Take time now in your group to watch the Video message, *Men With No Regrets*. To access the Video message, go to www.menwithnoregrets.com, select No Regrets Study Series tab and then click on Small Group Member Resources. Then enter Password: NRSS (uppercase letters). There are a number of great resources out there for men, should you continue to meet together. Here is just a short list of them:

The No Regrets Study Series – This disciple-making program is designed to model, teach, and encourage practical application of biblical principles that build a foundation for living life in Christ. Men learn what it means to be a real disciple of Jesus, how to follow after Jesus how to pray for others, encourage one-another, forgive one-another and love one-another. Men prepare to find their Kingdom purpose becoming empowered to serve as the “hands and feet” of Jesus at home, in church, on the job and out in the community where out live. This program is a series of (8) 8-week bible studies that a typical small group of men complete over a two-year period. (Year One: Books 1-4; Year Two: Books 5-8)

Point Man by Steve Farrar – One of the best books ever written for men. It examines, what it means to love your wife, grow your children and follow hard after Jesus as a man.

The Disciplines of a Godly Man by Kent Hughes – Another classic book for men’s small groups. It looks at twelve areas of a man’s life and how we can become the man God wants us to be.

Key Principles:

Isolation is not masculinity, it is stupidity.

Every man has been made for community by God, and will never reach their potential unless they are in community with other men.

It is impossible to say you are committed to Christ and not be committed to what He is committed to and that is His people.

A small group is a place to be encouraged, comforted and challenged.

Individualism, Isolation and Privatization. These are destructive words, painful words. They have an empty sound to them, don't they? They leave hollowness in our chest. Deep down at our core, every man needs a man friend. Deep down at our core, every man needs a brother to lock arms with. Deep down at our core, every man needs a soul mate. Real men stand together. Together is better than alone. Real men need one another. Isolation is not masculinity, it is stupidity. I am convinced to my core, that I would not be doing what I am doing today without the small group of men that have walked with me for the past twenty years.

Since we started with a running story it is only fitting that I share one of my all time favorite stories with you to close. The year was 1976 and the Special Olympics were being held in Seattle. There were nine contestants, all physically or mentally challenged, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. They all turned around and went back. Every single one of them.

One girl with Downs Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "*This will make it better.*" All nine kids linked arms and walked across the finish line together. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves.

What truly matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course. Men, together is better than alone! We are all going to fall down, fumble the ball and scrape our knees in life, that is a given! What is not a given, is whether you will give your life to a small group of men, who stop what they are doing, and go back on the track and help pick you up?

Will you be one of those guys? Our hope and prayer is that as a result of this study you have been encouraged and equipped to more effectively run the race that God has for you. So let's get on the track, set our eyes on Jesus, and start running and not finish till He calls us home.

“Those who are serious about living a pure and effective life before the Lord will find more strength when accompanied by true brothers.”

– Steve Sonderman

Want to Learn More About Running Together?

Brothers, Geoff Gorsuch (How to start and run a men's small group)

Locking Arms, Stu Weber

Tender Warrior, Stu Weber

Character Counts, Rod Handley

The Accountable Man, Tom Eisenman

community

Prayer Requests for My Group:



Congratulations! You've finished the Beginning The Race study!

You've got your teammates.

You've started the race.

You're running strong.

So now is not the time to slow down, take a breather or rest on your laurels. Your group has been formed with a strong foundation focusing on three key areas:

- God's Word - Seeking God's truth through the Bible
- Relationships - Accountability with your teammates
- Works of Service - Discovering how God can use you as you serve together

This is just the first step on the race of your lifetime. The next step in your training routine is to start the No Regrets Study Series together. Book One is called *Becoming a Full-Devoted Follower of Christ*. You can pick up your books online at www.menwithnoregrets.com. You'll begin with an 8-week study in basic discipleship. The entire series will include 8 books of similar length, which will train you to become a more fully-devoted follower of Christ and a leader in service to God.

Who do you know who needs to be in a group like yours? If you have a friend or coworker who knows about God and could join you, consider asking them to join your group as you begin the No Regrets Study Series.

no regrets



No Regrets Study Series

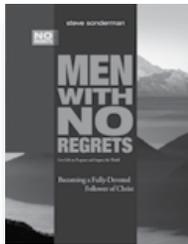
NO REGRETS STUDY SERIES

Change the Course of Your Life.

Not just another light-on-content, men's small group study, this disciple making program is designed to model, teach, and encourage practical application of biblical principles that build a foundation for living life in Christ. Men learn what it means to be a real disciple of Jesus, how to follow after Jesus, how to pray for others, encourage one-another, forgive one-another and love one-another. They will prepare to find their Kingdom purpose becoming empowered to serve as the "hands and feet" of Jesus at home, in church, on the job and in the community where they live. This program is a series of (8) 8-week bible studies that a typical small group of men complete over a two-year period. (Year One: Books 1-4; Year Two: Books 5-8)

Book 1:

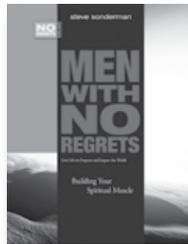
Becoming a Fully-Devoted Follower of Christ



Discover how to follow after Jesus and find your Kingdom purpose.

Book 2:

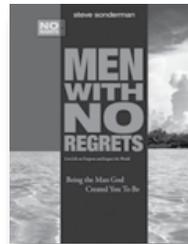
Building Your Spiritual Muscle



Explore the spiritual disciplines God uses to train and work out His team.

Book 3:

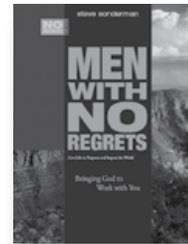
Being the Man God Created You to Be



Learn how God defines masculinity and become the man He created you to be.

Book 4:

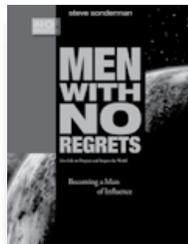
Bringing God to Work with You



Study how to keep your integrity, find balance and serve others on the job.

Book 5:

Becoming a Man of Influence



Identify your spiritual gifts and create change as a servant leader.

Book 6:

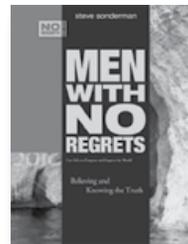
Building a Home, Not Just a House



Explore practical tools for growing your marriage and parenting your children.

Book 7:

Believing and Knowing the Truth



Solidify your faith as you learn the reasons why-to-believe what-you-believe.

Book 8:

Beginning Your Mission with God



Prepare to understand God's plans to use you to expand and train His team.

www.menwithnoregrets.com • 800-919-9059

No Regrets Men's Ministries • 777 S. Barker Road • Brookfield, WI 53045



BRING THE CONFERENCE
TO YOUR CHURCH
MENWITHNOREGRET.COM



**NO
REGRETS
CONFERENCE**

one day, multiple sites
one purpose

Jumpstart your annual ministry to men on the first Saturday of every February with the No Regrets Conference. It's a national day of ministry reaching out to men right in their local church. Host the event via live streaming and join with thousands of men from around the country, gathering on one day to bring glory to God.

EMPOWERING MEN TO LIVE



INTRODUCING
NO
REGRETS
STUDY SERIES

for the other
364 days

Not just another light-on-content, men's small group study, this disciple making program is designed to model, teach, and encourage practical application of biblical principles that build a foundation for living life in Christ. This program is a series of (8) 8-week bible studies that a typical small group of men complete over a two-year period.

WITH PURPOSE AND NO REGRETS

MENWITHNOREGRET.COM

Live Life on Purpose and Impact the World!

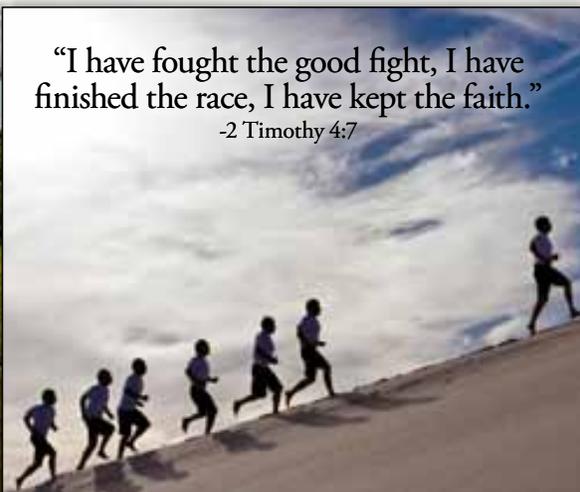
Any serious minded man wants to live like a champion and make a difference in the world they live in. When they die, they want to have left their mark in the world, left some type of legacy, some type of lasting impression on their family, church, workplace and world. This is a given, the real question is how do we become the man we want to become and the man God wants us to be?

How Do We Become a Champion in Life?

This 6-week bible study is going to walk you through one of my absolute favorite Bible passages of all times, I Corinthians 9:24-27. In it, we are going to discover God's game plan for our lives and His training program to help us get there. You will discover what it means to live with a sense of purpose and to impact the world you live in.

"I have fought the good fight, I have
finished the race, I have kept the faith."

-2 Timothy 4:7



**NO
REGRETS**

STUDY SERIES

www.menwithnoregrets.com