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GOD'S CHALLENGE FOR TODAY'S MAN

September 2013

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STAND FIRM

Volume 18, Number 9
September 2013

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Stand Firm: God's Challenge for Today's Man (ISSN 1085-7966; Item 005075233) is a Christian men's devotional magazine published monthly by LifeWay Press®, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President, LifeWay Christian Resources. © 2013 LifeWay Press®. All rights reserved.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICING

Annual individual subscription, \$24.95. Please allow 6–8 weeks for arrival of first issue. Bulk shipments mailed quarterly to one address when ordered with other literature, \$4.80 each quarter plus shipping.

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editorial



AN ENCOURAGING WORD

LEADING MEN

This is a very special issue of *Stand Firm*. This month you will have the opportunity to hear from two of the most incredible men I know. Kenny Luck, co-founder of EveryMan Ministries and Men's Pastor at Saddleback Church, shares about *Sleeping Giant: No Movement of God Without Men of God*. Brian Doyle, founder of Iron Sharpens Iron, also writes about standing firm at home and the importance of ministry *through* men versus ministry *to* men. Both of these guys know that God intends for men to be equipped to lead their families and their churches. You will also meet Vance Brown and hear about his incredible journey of recovery, repentance, and restoration. LifeWay Men wants to equip you as a man to lead. We are here to help churches strengthen families beginning with you—the man! There are so many opportunities to engage other men through Sunday School, small groups, events, and leadership training in your local church. Find a church that intentionally recruits, trains, and activates men, and get involved. Take a look at all we are doing through LifeWay Men in our ministry update, “Making Disciples of Men.” Also subscribe to our blog, lifeway.com/leadingmen and follow us on Twitter (@LifeWayMen) and Facebook to stay up-to-date on the latest news in ministry to men!

Jason Ellerbrook
Men's Ministry Leader, LifeWay Men
www.lifeway.com/men

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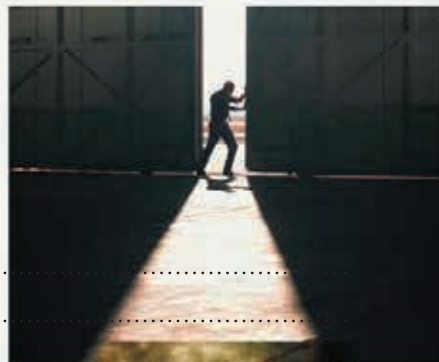
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photos: Thinkstock



"Be alert, stand firm in the faith, act like a man, be strong."—1 Corinthians 16:13



fyi

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PUT YOUR SMARTPHONE TO BED WITHOUT YOU

Swedish researchers found that using electronic devices too much before bedtime can make it hard to wind down and sleep. There were also links to stress overload, depression, and insomnia in the study. If you want a good night's sleep, take a break from your computer and mobile devices.

source: lifehack.org



About Seven in 10 Americans Are Very or Moderately Religious

According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2012, 69 percent of American adults are very or moderately religious, based on self-reports of the importance of religion in their daily lives and attendance at religious services. Within that group, 40 percent are very religious, meaning that they attend religious services regularly and they say religion is important in their daily lives.

source: gallup.com

photos: Thinkstock

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Stand Firm EQUIPS MEN DAILY
TO BE GODLY LEADERS IN
THEIR HOMES, CHURCHES,
AND COMMUNITIES.



SPREAD THE WORD! PASS *STAND FIRM* ALONG TO A FRIEND.

A LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING MYTH: YOU'LL LOSE MUSCLE MASS

This myth is actually partly true—but for the majority of men there's no need to worry. If you're particularly bulky and don't practice any aerobic exercises like swimming, cycling, or even hiking, then starting to run can slim you down. However, running doesn't "eat muscle" or break it down as fuel. To get to that level of catabolic activity, you'd need to combine a diet almost entirely void of protein with a high mileage, high intensity running schedule. Like any extreme form of exercise, that combination would certainly reduce your overall muscle mass.

source: artofmanliness.com

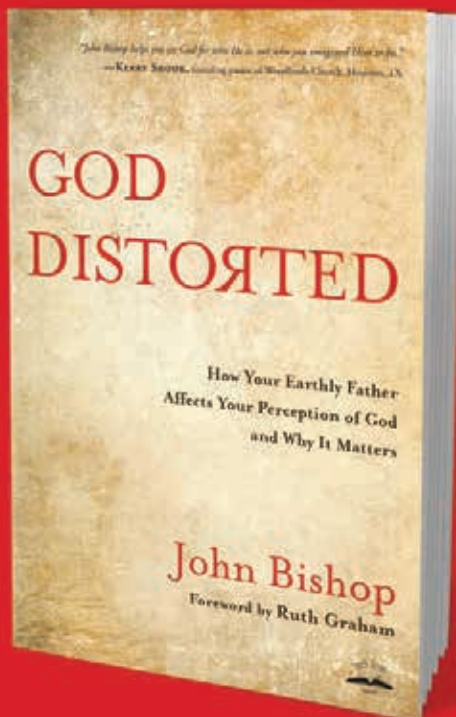
Understand God's Perfection

God is not a bigger version of your earthly father. Pastor John Bishop explores the fathers who have loved us, the fathers who have failed us, and the Heavenly Father who will never leave us.

"John has given to all of us practical tools to help us identify our 'stuff,' examine it, deal with it, and then get rid of it."

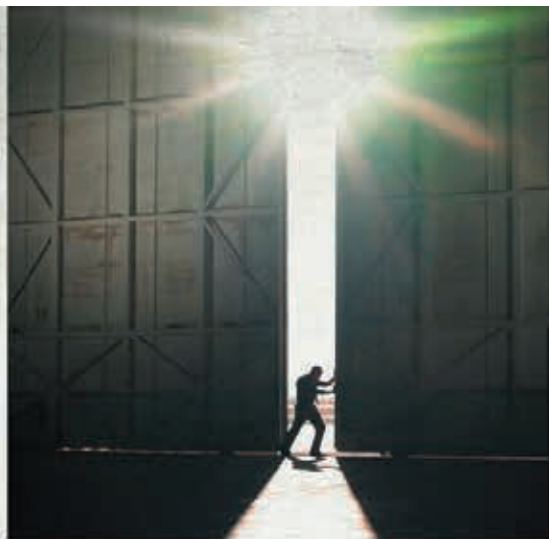
—from the Foreword by Ruth Graham

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profile



SLEEPING GIANT : BY KENNY LUCK

No movement of God without men of God

SLEEPING GIANT

by Kenny Luck

EVERYBODY BENEFITS WHEN MEN COME ALIVE

Since broken male culture exports so much pain and suffering, any church that targets and transforms the identities and expressions of men becomes immediately relevant to a watching and skeptical world. Stopping suffering resonates with people deeply. It is unequivocal evidence to both the critic and skeptic that something has happened, and while they may not like that the source is God, they cannot condemn the result. Imagine the reaction to a church that offers to its women, its sons, its daughters, and its community men who bring health and hope publicly, privately, and in numbers. We might have to stretch our thinking when it comes to this kind of movement because it seems so implausible. But God does not. That's because God sees the sleeping hero in the soul of every man. God sees every man like a stick of dynamite with an incredible blast zone of influence that can be harnessed for a witness to His glory in this hour of history. Smart churches seeing this connection will "get in" on this resonating revival.

The Power of Neglect

Acceptance. Affirmation. Validation. Every man seeks it, wants it, craves it, and attaches to those who provide it. Give millions of men who feel unvalidated, unneeded, and undervalued an outlet or context to get validated, and you've got a powerful recipe for an explosive movement. Throughout recorded history, revolutions and uprisings of all kinds have been spawned by the power of neglect lying just underneath the surfaces of nations, nationalities, and names of guys named Vladimir, Adolf, and Osama who recognize and exploit that power for evil. Other men with names like Abraham (Lincoln), Martin (Luther & King), Billy (Graham), and "Coach" (Wooden) had divine visions rooted in the same power, but used the dynamic for good and for God. The common denominator is the deep-rooted desire burning in the hearts of men to be someone great and to do something great. In the New Testament we see this in Jesus' own disciples jockeying for significance as they feel a "movement" coming on led by the wise and powerful leader from Nazareth. Jesus wisely doesn't discourage this masculine need or downplay the desire for validation or greatness; He simply reframes it, redefines it, and redeploys these desires for the Kingdom. There are no standards to conform to or measure up to, only a strong, personal calling to authentic manhood that He knows is there inside men and is just waiting to be tapped.

Greatness Through Service

"Jesus called them over and said to them, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and their men of high positions exercise power over them. But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many'" (Mark 10:42-45).

For better or for worse, giving men the opportunity to be great produces sacrificial disciples as well as suicide bombers. Purpose, transcendence, meaning, legacy, and eternity wrapped in a strong purpose will always attract men. Causes like this enable men to win the identities, energies, and expressions of whole cultures in large numbers. Causes that are perceived to be weaker will be bled dry of their men by other movements, philosophies, and cultural phenomena that are strong.

When the church does not recognize both the power of validation among men and its evil twin called the power of neglect, it has effectively forfeited its men to other cultural movements, Christian and non-Christian, that do recognize and resource this need in men. When men are inspired and involved, the Kingdom advances and everyone is blessed. **SF**

(Adapted from *Sleeping Giant: No Movement of God Without Men of God*, B&H Books, 2012.)

SLEEPING GIANT: BY KENNY LUCK



Hardwood

"I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh, so they may follow My statutes, keep My ordinances, and practice them" (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

When budgeting for your next home improvement project using wood, consider the costs (per board foot):

Poplar – \$2.55
Cherry – \$4.80
Curly Maple – \$6.00
Mahogany – \$10.60
Wenge – \$21.85
Cocobolo – \$50.00
Ebony – \$80.00

A Hard Heart

Petrified wood is really the fossilized remains of vegetation that was once living. Over time, the organic substance of the wood decomposes, and a stone mold forms in its place, preserved exactly in the shape of the wood. It's literally wood that has become stone over time.

In Ezekiel's day, God's people—and His covenant with them—were a lot like pieces of petrified wood. The parts of their hearts that had been alive for God had slowly ebbed away, and their soft, living hearts had been replaced by hearts of stone—cold, unmoving, unloving, dead. And it was because of their corruption and their idol worship.

A Soft Heart

With every act of devotion to our "little g" god, we replace the organic, living material in our hearts with cold, hard stone. We create the idol, but it ends up devouring us. What makes your heart beat faster? What does your bank account say you are more devoted to than anything else? What do you spend your time on? These things reveal what you worship.

Fortunately, God has a remedy for petrified hearts. As we repent of sin, He will remove our heart of stone and once again give us a heart that is fully alive in Him. Take some time to search your heart for any signs of hardness. After all, even the Master Craftsman can't build anything useful with petrified wood.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Bottom Line

Repentance makes your heart soft and usable by God.

Seeing with the Eyes of Jesus

He saw a huge crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).

Imagine you are walking down a busy street and you are holding your phone. You are scrolling through emails and text messages, checking up on work as you're headed to a meeting. Across the street, you see a familiar face. It's a single mother who lives in your neighborhood. It's evident that she is in need of help. Your heart goes out to her, but you don't want to be late for your meeting. Do you keep walking, pretending not to see her? Do you turn down a side street to avoid her? Or do you run the risk of being late in order to see what you can do to help?

Jesus Sees

American life is characterized by busyness. Ask anyone how they are doing and you're likely to hear, "I'm good. Busy, but good." The hustle and bustle of our daily lives can cause us to be so focused on our own needs, agendas, and to-do lists that we don't have the capacity to see or step into the needs of others. When unexpected interactions come along in our day, it's easy to see them as interruptions.

In Mark 6, when Jesus and His disciples have an unexpected interaction with a large crowd, Jesus doesn't see it as an interruption, but as a kingdom opportunity. His seeing leads to compassion, and His compassion leads to care.

Jesus Steps In

As you go about your day, you will likely catch glimpses of people in need if you're paying attention. Whether it is someone on the street, at work, or somewhere else, there are needs all around you that can tug at your heart. However, seeing the needs and feeling pity doesn't always lead us to action. In Mark 1:41, we are told that Jesus was "moved with compassion." He reached out and healed the man. That's what compassion is: it's emotion *and* action. When Jesus saw the plight of helpless people, He was moved by their circumstances to the point where His compassion led to action. Don't just stop at feeling emotion.

Mark 6:30-44

Bottom Line

Seeing people with the eyes of Jesus moves us to compassion and leads us to care for others.

Invitation and Challenge

His disciples approached Him and said, "This place is a wilderness, and it is already late! Send them away, so they can . . . buy themselves something to eat." "You give them something to eat," He responded (Mark 6:35-37).

"To follow Jesus implies that we enter into a way of life that is given character and shape and direction by the one who calls us."

—Eugene H. Peterson

Invitation

God designed us for relationship. At our core, we long to connect with people on more than just a superficial level. When Jesus calls people to follow Him, He's not inviting "bad" people to become "good" people. Rather, He's inviting us into an intimate relationship with Him.

In Mark 6, the disciples are returning from being sent out on a missionary journey by Jesus. We don't know how long they were away, but they worked hard and have stories to tell of their travels. When they return to Jesus, His first response is an invitation to come away with Him in order to rest and be with Him (v. 31).

Challenge

It doesn't take long before Jesus' spiritual retreat with His disciples is interrupted by a large crowd. After watching Jesus tend to and teach the crowd, the disciples notice that it's getting late. They suggest sending the crowd of thousands away to find dinner for themselves. Were the disciples tired and hungry and eager for Jesus to finish? Scripture doesn't say.

But Jesus' response to their suggestion is surprising. He says, "You give them something to eat." That's 5,000 people! Even though Jesus seeks to nurture and care for His disciples, He also gently pushes them outside their comfort zone to a place where they have to trust Him and depend on Him. The same thing happens in our lives, too.

John 14:1

Bottom Line

Where is Jesus inviting you to trust Him more?
Where is He challenging you to increase your dependence on Him?

Impossible Becomes Possible

Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to His disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate and was filled (Mark 6:41–42).

It requires faith to follow Jesus into impossible situations. Oswald Chambers once said, "Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time." God is faithful and will never leave us or forsake us. Even though a situation may seem impossible, God never leaves us hanging out to dry.

The Impossible

Following Jesus can take us to unexpected and overwhelming places. You can imagine that when the disciples came back from their missionary journey, they were excited to get away for some rest and relaxation. Little did they know that their spiritual retreat would begin with an impossible situation. After Jesus teaches the crowd of 5,000 people, the disciples are ready to send them away to get something to eat, but Jesus says to them, "You give them something to eat."

Jesus is no stranger to leading people into impossible situations. All throughout His ministry, He defies the laws of nature. He walks on water. He heals people with a word. He raises dead people to life. Jesus is constantly confronted with what we see as the impossible, and He invites His disciples to enter into those places with Him.

Becomes Possible

Today, Jesus leads us into situations beyond our control. He doesn't do this to cause anxiety or distress, but rather to teach us to trust Him and depend on Him. Jesus leads us into impossible situations to show us that when we completely surrender to Him, He makes the impossible possible.

What seemingly impossible situations is Jesus currently leading you toward? How are you responding to your impossible situation? Are you following Him or resisting Him? He can be trusted.

Mark 10:27

Bottom Line

Jesus grows our faith when we are faced with seemingly impossible situations. Trust Him, and watch to see what He will do.

Worship Wins the War

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom should I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom should I be afraid? . . . Though an army deploys against me, my heart is not afraid; though a war breaks out against me, still I am confident (Psalm 27:1, 3).

As Jeff grabbed his keys and walked out the door to his car, the weight of the world fell on his shoulders. Lately, his job seemed more like a battlefield than a workplace. As he sank into the driver's seat and cranked up the ignition, a song came over the airwaves that captured his heart. Driving to work, the song of praise began to sink deep into his soul. Through a posture of worship, Jeff found strength to face the day, knowing that no matter what attack might come, the Lord was with him.

The War

In this passage of Scripture, even though the words are confident and hopeful, the imagery is one of a battle. David writes that evildoers and enemies are attacking, but he is not afraid. Armies are deploying against him, but he is confident. War is breaking out, but his enemies fall. Whether David is using this as a metaphor to describe life or perhaps an actual war is going on around him, he finds himself on the defensive. But he knows the One who will shelter him.

We all go through seasons where life feels like a battle. Relationships aren't working. Situations at work are tenuous. We receive a bad health report. In these difficult situations and in many others like them, when life feels like a battle, how do we stay confident and hopeful? Where can we go for strength and safety?

Winning Through Worship

With war breaking out all around him, David seeks shelter and refuge. In verse 1 he turns to the Lord for help: "The LORD is the stronghold of my life." And in 27:6, he writes: "I will offer sacrifices . . . with joy. I will sing and make music to the LORD." In the midst of chaotic circumstances, David gains strength and confidence through worshipping God. Worship gives us perspective—it pulls us up above our circumstances. It reminds us that when God is for us, no one can be against us.

Psalm 27

Bottom Line

In seasons when life feels like a battle, win the war through worshipping God.

See p. 39 for Weekend Reflections.

Zealous for God

Then He said to Jacob, “Let Me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me” (Genesis 32:26).

“I want the presence of God Himself, or I don’t want anything at all to do with religion. . . . I want all that God has or I don’t want any.”

—A. W. Tozer,
The Counselor

The Trouble with Jacob

Before he even left his mother’s womb, Jacob grasped for greatness, clutching his brother Esau’s heel. For years thereafter, he continued to grasp—purchasing Esau’s birthright and tricking his way into his father’s blessing. He even matched wits with his father-in-law to make himself wealthy.

Jacob’s name means “he cheats,” and it seems there was no line he wouldn’t cross to get what he wanted. But God blessed Jacob, choosing him to be the heir of His promises. The fact that God chose to bless Jacob despite his multiple and significant failings is good news for the rest of us. God’s grace exceeds our sin. And He uses imperfect people.

Jacob’s Trouble

So what did God see in this natural-born cheater? Deep within Jacob’s heart was a desire for God—to know Him, to walk with Him, to carry His promises, and to be blessed by Him. With a fervor and intensity unparalleled in his generation, Jacob wrestled with God. And one night, he did so literally.

God desires for men and women to love Him with their entire being (see Mark 12:30). Jacob’s ethics were sometimes reprehensible, but we should admire how he zealously chased after God. Pursuing Jesus means seeking to take hold of the one thing that matters most—knowing Jesus personally and intimately. Ask God to give you that desire.

Luke 14:25–33

Bottom Line

Pursue God with every ounce of your being, even if it means wrestling with Him long into the night. And know that He is pursuing you, too.

A New Heart

Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22).

“None but the pure are capable of seeing God, nor would heaven be happiness to the impure. As God cannot endure to look upon their iniquity, so they cannot look upon His purity.”

—Matthew Henry

Ezekiel 36:22–36

Who We Were

Many of us stand before the sin in our lives like the Israelites trembling before Goliath the Philistine. Before we ever enter into battle, we believe defeat to be a foregone conclusion. We have heard that our hearts are deceitful and prone to wander (see Jeremiah 17:9). There’s a sense in which that’s true, even after coming to faith. Paul says in Romans 7:18: “For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.”

So we continue to struggle with sin, even as Christians. And yet God promised to do something about our hearts in the new covenant: “I will remove their heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19).

Who We Are

This promise of a new heart was fulfilled in Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian has received a new heart. Sin still remains, but just like David facing Goliath, we can have confidence in the battle. We need not enter the fight defeated. We fight from victory—Christ’s on our behalf—for victory. And this is from God, not ourselves. So rather than focusing on our sinful desires, which have not been completely removed, we can live in the power of God’s Spirit. We can focus on Jesus and His grace instead. We have been given a new heart—one that loves God and desires to please Him.

Bottom Line

A Christian has been given a new heart. Knowing this, believing this, and living out of this is a powerful weapon in the Christian’s fight against sin.

Entrusting Your Work to God

“Master,” Simon replied, “we’ve worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I’ll let down the nets” (Luke 5:5).

“The purpose of any Christian, in business or otherwise, is to glorify God, not just to make a profit.”

—Larry Burkett, founder
of Crown Financial
Ministries

Submit Your Work

The apostle Peter was tired from a long night of fishing with no catch, but at Jesus’ request, he put his boat out a bit from shore. As the crowds drew near, the staple of Peter’s livelihood became a floating pulpit from which Jesus preached the Word of God.

It’s not just those in full-time ministry who are called to serve Jesus at work. Believers in every career imaginable, willing to push out a little bit from shore, can impact their world for the kingdom. All it takes is a surrendered heart and faith to believe that God is working with you and through you, and knowing that what you’re doing matters. First Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” This refers to ministry, but all work can be done as unto the Lord (see Colossians 3:23).

Every Business Decision

After speaking to the crowds, Jesus told Peter to put out to deep water one last time for a catch. Peter, an experienced fisherman, had just spent a fruitless night out on the lake. On top of that, he had just cleaned his nets.

But to Peter’s credit, he trusted Jesus with his work life—every last bit of it. The result was a catch so big that the nets began to tear and the boats began to sink. Trust Jesus with your career, let down the nets, and serve Him even at work. He is good!

Colossians 3:23–24

Bottom Line

Your job can further God’s kingdom and lead you into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Make sure you bring the right attitude of faith to it.

Mind the Gap

Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16).

“Mind the gap” is a warning to train passengers to take caution while crossing the gap between the train door and the station platform. It was introduced in 1969 on the London Underground, because many of its platforms were curved, while the railcars were straight. The resulting gap created a hazard for unaware passengers. “Mind the gap” has since been adopted by transit systems worldwide, even though most new systems avoid stations on curves.

source: wikipedia.org

Careless

The context of today’s verse is the apostle Paul’s admonition to us to walk as children of light and to abstain from sin and immorality. Instead, we should do what we know is pleasing to God. Paul mentions some examples of behaviors we should avoid, like sexual immorality, greed, coarse joking, obscenity, and drunkenness, but let’s not misunderstand what he’s saying. Paul is not giving us a checklist of things to do and not to do; instead, he is urging us to be purposeful and wise in our choices. His list of bad behaviors are examples of what unwise choices will lead to. We can find ourselves there when we aren’t careful about the choices we make, allowing the culture around us to shape our character.

Deliberate

When you walk across a wood plank bridge, for example, being careful doesn’t just mean looking out for things that might knock you off; it also means being deliberate about where you step. Applied to our daily lives, this means finding out what pleases the Lord through time in His Word and in prayer, and then obeying what He shows us.

It’s easy to look back at the end of a week and grade ourselves on Paul’s list—didn’t get drunk, didn’t swear, no pornography, played well with others—but were we deliberate? Did we make the most of every opportunity? Pursuing God is more than just trying to avoid sin.

Deuteronomy 5:32

Bottom Line

Being careful is not just being cautious; it also means being deliberate.

Choose Your Response

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (Romans 12:14).

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's response."

—Viktor E. Frankl

When We Are Wronged

In Genesis 26, Isaac was living in Philistine country where he was growing successful and wealthy. At a certain point, the jealousy of the Philistines reached a boiling point, and they decided to do something about it. They sabotaged Isaac's wells (cutting off his water supply) and ran him out of the country. As he moved from place to place, he continued to face opposition from people who claimed ownership of the wells that belonged to him. Each time, Isaac moved on rather than fighting back. Why didn't he stand up for himself? Isn't that the right thing to do?

We Can Witness

Later in Genesis 26, we see that these former enemies came to Isaac to make peace. Why? Because they saw clearly that God was with him and that he was blessed by the Lord. The forbearance and restraint Isaac showed while being treated unfairly ended up being a powerful testimony to those who needed it. We don't know whether these former enemies ended up seeking after God, but we do know they understood that Isaac's God—our God—involves Himself personally in the lives of those who love Him. That's not a bad place for faith to start.

The next time you're treated unfairly, consider that your response might be what turns someone's attention to their need for God.

Matthew 5:38–48

Bottom Line

Sometimes the boldest statement about our confidence in Christ is made when we bless those who persecute us.

See p. 39 for Weekend Reflections.

STAND FIRM 17

smart guy

NO MATTER

NO MATTER THE COST : BY VANCE BROWN

THE COST

A Q & A with author
Vance Brown offering
hope to discouraged men

18 September 2013

SF: You describe a generation of “hopeless” Christian men in the book. Why do you believe they are hopeless?

Vance: Men are bombarded with discouraging circumstances. Something is not working for men, even those who call themselves Christians. They question why their lives are still so difficult. We conduct Band of Brothers retreats throughout the country, and we see and hear a common theme: Most men are tired, often disappointed in their life circumstances, questioning their worth, and feeling like they have nothing left to give. And because they carry deep secrets, they feel alone. When life circumstances are so difficult for so long, we men lose hope.

SF: Where did you get the inspiration for the title of the book, *No Matter the Cost*, and what does it mean?

Vance: Most Christians are familiar with John 3:16, where we learn in the Bible that we are offered the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. There is no cost to us associated with this decision; it is a free gift. However, Luke 14 asks us to consider the costs before answering the call to be a true disciple and follower of Jesus, to be a victorious warrior in the army depicted in this passage, one who will face overwhelming odds and keep going. It says you must be willing to give up everything—no matter the cost. This is a scary commitment. What will our King ask of us? What burdens will He insist that we carry, and what assignments will He give us? But we believe it is worth it, because He is good and has our best interests at heart.

SF: You say in the book that men are “guaranteed” to live out the purpose for which they are created if they choose to follow Christ no matter the cost. Please explain more of what you mean.

Vance: We believe God is faithful. We believe that if we ask God to transform our hearts and minds so that we can live out the purpose for which we were created, He will honor that prayer. Our Creator designed us for a unique calling, but this is not a draft army—it is a volunteer army. God is asking us to choose to come and follow Him—no matter the cost. If we do, we will live out the purpose for which we were created; we will have an eternity filled with no regrets; and we will have a cloud of witnesses cheering us on, including Jesus Christ our Lord and King. Why? Because He is faithful. God desires that we live the life for which we were created, but it doesn't come without sacrifices and costs.

SF: From stories of affairs to emotional breakdowns, you and other men share openly about the ugly and difficult seasons of your lives in *No Matter the Cost*. Why do you do that?

Vance: In Revelation 12:11, one of the key components to defeating evil is to share our testimony, our stories. Truth really does set us free. In our DNA we were created with the desire to be loved unconditionally. But how can we be truly loved unconditionally if we are not fully known? Satan would rather we keep our stories secret; that is because our story—all of it—not only has the power to set us free but the power to set others free.

SF: Why is it so important for a Christ-follower to find a band of brothers?

Vance: This mission to defeat evil is much bigger than ourselves. No epic mission is ever accomplished alone: Jonathan had David, Moses had Aaron, and Paul never traveled without a companion. Scripture teaches that Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs (see Mark 6:7). There is a reason that Jesus modeled brotherhood by surrounding Himself with 12 other men. The final prayer of Jesus was that His disciples [and future disciples] would become one, just as He and the Father are one. The power to defeat evil is found in the body of Christ's true followers. We need each other; we need other men in our foxholes whom we believe in and who believe in us. We need to be part of Christ's band of brothers.

SF: Describe the significance of the Lord's Prayer in *No Matter the Cost*.

Vance: There is incredible power in prayer, yet only one time in Scripture does Jesus actually teach us how to pray. Accordingly, we believe that these short verses are a brief summary of the greatest story ever told—words that tell us not only about God, but how to be victorious in the most important battle of humanity. These words are an invitation to live, a call to arms, a bracing call of discipleship, a ground-level map to hold on to for dear life. In the book, we examine the Lord's Prayer because it's such an important passage for men to pray and live from.

SF: What is the single most important thing you want men to get out of this book?

Vance: Hope. Hope that there is a Father who loves us unconditionally. Hope that our sins really can be forgiven—regardless of how horrible they are. Hope that there is an epic and unique purpose for our lives—in spite of what circumstances we are facing. Hope that we are not alone. Hope that we will find home, close to the Father's heart. This book gives men hope that there is a place to create meaning in their lives—from right where they are and in the midst of their current circumstances.

SF: Is there anything in *No Matter the Cost* that would benefit women?

Vance: This book honors women. It encourages men to become better husbands, better fathers, better men of God. Women desire that the men they love fight to become good men—men who love well. And every man I know wants to be a good man. This book provides a trail map for men to reach that destination. **SF**



A Band of Brothers

KEY VERSE: ECCLESIASTES 4:12

No man is an island. We need the support of our brothers in Christ. Vance Brown writes:

“A Band of Brothers. Just what is that? It’s a small number of men committed to fighting alongside one another for the cause of Christ, no matter the cost. It’s as simple and as difficult as that. For a brotherhood to not just survive but thrive, there must be an agreement: relationships with no secrets and no condemnation. As crafty as Satan is, there is always a common line to his attacks—divide and conquer. And if there’s anything that can divide and defeat men, it’s secrets and shame.

“I believe the most effective way to forge a bond between men begins with the willingness to share your personal story. But there cannot be any secrets; it must be an honest telling. There is an infatuation these days with being raw and authentic, a tendency to spill our guts. However, many times, especially among Christian men, it is a collection of ‘rubber guts.’ In other words, falsehood, fabrication, lies, posing, saying the things people either want or expect to hear.

“I start from square one by telling my story as honestly as I can at the time. My story represents who I am. It stays with me through eternity. I don’t want a man listening for inconsistencies or theological drift. I just want a man to listen, no condemnation. I don’t want an accountant; I want a brother.”

REACTION QUESTIONS:

Do you have a “band of brothers” you can trust?

How have you benefited from the insights and encouragement of other men?

ACTION STEP:

If you are connected to a group of guys, pray that God would give you wisdom for how you can encourage your brothers. If you’re not connected, ask God to lead you to some men you can share life with.

GET THE WHOLE STORY:

Read John 13:12–15, noting how Jesus served His disciples and called them to serve one other, too.

Use this page to stimulate a discussion in your Bible study group...or simply for your own personal study and reflection.



I Want It . . . Later!

And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for one meal (Hebrews 12:16).

Riches I heed not, nor
man's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance
now and always;
Be thou and thou only
the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of Heaven,
my treasure thou art.

—Fourth verse of the
hymn, "Be Thou My
Vision"

Indulgence

Remember the story of Jacob and his brother, Esau? Esau wanted some of Jacob's stew so badly that he didn't even hesitate when Jacob demanded his birthright in exchange. In essence, Esau's reply to his brother was, "What good is my birthright right now? I'm more interested in appeasing my desires in this moment than I am in whatever promise I might have in store down the road." So without a second thought, even though he knew what the birthright actually entailed, he made the deal. A spiritual blessing, a double portion of the inheritance, leadership of the family . . . traded for a bowl of stew. Sounds ludicrous, doesn't it?

Significance

Unfortunately, the story of Esau is being relived by many people, including ourselves sometimes. When we focus our time, energies, and resources on achieving and acquiring what feels good now, we can miss opportunities to participate in the promises and purposes of God. Think about that: We can miss opportunities to join God's work in the world.

Reread Hebrews 12:16 with the following definitions in mind: immoral—giving priority to selfish desires; irreverent—treating God in a way that is not respectful. Now ask yourself this question: Is there an area in your life where you're trading away God's blessings for something else that seems more important right now?

Bottom Line

A life lived for Christ is a life focused on kingdom significance, and a life of kingdom significance will always far outweigh a life of indulgence.

Colossians 1:9–12

Sticky Change

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

"The bridge of grace will bear your weight, brother. Thousands of big sinners have gone across that bridge, yea, tens of thousands have gone over it. Some have been the chief of sinners and some have come at the very last of their days, but the arch has never yielded beneath their weight. I will go with them trusting to the same support. It will bear me over as it has for them."

—Charles Spurgeon

Psalm 130:3–4

A Crushed Cup

Rick couldn't believe what he was seeing. The drink cup—the full drink cup—had somehow been crushed as his son was getting out of the car, and now there was sticky soda everywhere. It not only completely filled its own cup holder, but the one next to it and an adjoining change holder as well. And Rick's jacket was a soggy mess.

Rick was so angry that words escaped him. He couldn't even express in complete sentences to his son what was wrong. "Cup crushed. Soda mess. Car cup holders. Paper towels, now!" The poor kid's eyes were as big as saucers. He was in trouble. Dad had told him not to get in the car with an uncovered cup.

God's Children

We are God's children, and we mess up all the time. Thankfully for us, though, God's patience and mercy go far beyond what we deserve or expect. When we seek His forgiveness, He willingly grants it. His Son gave His life to assure us that we wouldn't have to pay for our sins. Yes, there can be consequences, but there is no condemnation or punishment from God.

Did Rick's son deserve punishment? Maybe. But in the grand scheme of things, it could have been much worse. There had been plenty of times when Rick himself had done careless things as a kid. Wouldn't it be amazing if we showed everyone—not just our children—something like the same kind of compassion that God has for us?

Bottom Line

God calls fathers to offer their children grace and mercy just as He offers us grace and mercy. Discipline should always be administered with love.

What's Past Is Past

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my acts of rebellion; in keeping with Your faithful love, remember me because of Your goodness, LORD (Psalm 25:7).

Raise your hand if
you've ever . . .

- Helped roll
somebody's yard
with toilet paper
- Snuck into a movie
you weren't old
enough to see
- Copied a buddy's
homework
- Fought with a brother
or sister
- Talked back to a
parent or teacher
- Thought you knew
everything there was
to know about life

Yard Artist

It wasn't exactly a weekly thing, but the Knight family routinely had the trees in their front yard rolled with toilet paper by a family friend. His efforts were works of art, if he did say so himself, roll after roll after roll hanging from the limbs, blowing in the breeze, getting soggy in the rain. Many times, the culprit would help clean it all up.

Fast forward 25 years or so. Now an adult, the former "yard artist" stayed with the Knight family during a visit to town. When he got to his room, it was completely covered with toilet paper! The bed. The pillows. Hanging from light fixtures. Everywhere! It was sweet revenge for the Knights.

A Forgiven Past

The Knights and their friend were able to laugh about the foolish stuff he did as a teenager, but many aren't that fortunate. Some kids get into more serious trouble and then spend much of their lives living it down—legally, emotionally, or both. Worst of all can be the guilt. Some people have a hard time experiencing God's forgiveness for the things they did even though His forgiveness is available to them.

A life of faith is not about feeling guilty about things in your past. God's grace and forgiveness can give you a fresh start. The cross is not for perfect people; it's for people who aren't perfect and who desperately need forgiveness. So don't believe the enemy's accusations. You are forgiven in Christ.

Psalm 103:12

Bottom Line

You might have messed up big time as a kid or even as an adult, but God's forgiveness is big enough to handle it! Let His grace set you free from your past.

Muzzle

LORD, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).

"By swallowing evil words unsaid, no one has ever harmed his stomach."

—Winston Churchill

Honest Abe

Abraham Lincoln once said that it's better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it. When you say the wrong thing at the wrong time, there can be many consequences. And sometimes we just can't seem to help ourselves.

Sometimes we use our mouth to put others down, to reveal confidences disguised as "prayer requests," or to build ourselves up in the eyes of others. Sometimes we provide a running commentary on life—the good, the bad, and the ugly. James calls the tongue a world of unrighteousness and a restless evil (see James 3:5-8).

Good Advice

Ephesians 4:29 says, "No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear." Think about that. Could there possibly be any better advice when it comes to our speech? It can take years to build trust with someone, and only a few ill-chosen words to tear it all back down. Remember that your mouth is one of the most obvious windows to your relationship with Christ! What we say can encourage people in need and give grace to the hearer. While the tongue can be used recklessly, causing great damage, it can also be used wisely, causing great good. Allow Him to guide your words. Make your speech a matter of prayer.

Proverbs 16:23

Bottom Line

Your mouth can be a useful ministry tool or a weapon. By God's grace, seek to use your words for His glory.

A Shining Light

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

"A saint is one who makes it easy to believe in Jesus."

—Ruth Bell Graham

Christian Example

What does it mean to let your light shine as a good Christian example? It can mean different things for different people. For some, it may look like a willingness to share their faith openly and without reservation. For others, it may look more like living a life of quiet service. The two aren't mutually exclusive, of course, but we all have different strengths and temperaments.

Both examples share at least a couple of things in common. They are both focused on Jesus. He is the light we are shining, we are the conduit. He is the One we're shining a light on, not ourselves. And they both involve loving others—something that can be exemplified in countless ways.

Loving Others Glorifies Jesus

How we go about it isn't necessarily the most important aspect of being a light for Jesus. Can you sing? Consider signing up for the choir or praise team. Can you teach? Then prayerfully look for opportunities to use your teaching gifts. Do you know someone who's struggling? Be there for them. Listen, counsel, help however you can.

Today's additional reading (Matthew 5:13-16) is a great reminder of how Jesus viewed those who believed in Him. What are Christians? We're the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Jesus wants to live His life through you, bringing glory to the Father. So rely on Him, and let your light shine!

Matthew 5:13-16

Bottom Line

Through your words and your deeds, do everything you can to shine a light on Jesus.

FROM VILLAIN TO HERO IN 60 SECONDS FLAT

by Dave Meurer

Childbirth classes are run by the same people who create those television ads for the Marine Corps that make boot camp actually look like a frolic at the county fair (albeit a fair in which everyone is heavily armed).

What a bunch of liars.

I did *exactly* what the childbirth teachers said to do, even the breathing exercises, and nevertheless the real birth was *nothing* like the practice run. In the class, none of the women were sweating like prizefighters in the ninth round. And they didn't scream at people, either. But once we were in the labor room, every time I tried to offer my wife helpful advice like, "Try to pretend it doesn't hurt so much," and "Try not to dig your fingernails so deeply into the bed frame," she replied with sharply unappreciative comments.

Women believe they shoulder a disproportionate share of the suffering in a

pregnancy. And while it is true that they have to endure the morning sickness, the weight gain, the awkward exams, the sleepless nights, the stretch marks, the bloating, and the agony of delivery, they need to bear in mind that men are often the ones who get stuck filling out all the insurance forms. So I would say that guys deserve some credit in the suffering department.

The coolest thing about the delivery of the baby is that after all the yelling and hostility about the fact that **YOU** did this to her and it is **ALL YOUR FAULT**, and you are pretty much convinced that there is no way your wife will ever be intimate with you again, you discover that your beloved becomes very forgiving and starts to like you again within moments of holding your new baby.

When you think about it, gentlemen, *that* is the miracle of childbirth. **SF**

FROM VILLAIN TO HERO IN 60 SECONDS FLAT : BY DAVE MEURER

Photos: Thinkstock

men's ministry update

MAKING DISCIPLES OF MEN

by Jason Ellerbrook

MAKING DISCIPLES OF MEN : BY JASON ELLERBROOK

The movie *Courageous* became a catalyst that helped launch a movement in churches calling men to Christ. While many are asking questions like, "Where have all the good men gone?" the church is waking the sleeping giant! As Kenny Luck, founder of Every Man Ministries and author of *Sleeping Giant* says, "There is no movement of God without men of God!" LifeWay Men is committed to this movement and to helping churches lead men to recruit, train, and activate men.

Over the past two years, LifeWay Men has built a team out of the most successful male leaders of our time to champion biblical manhood. This team, consisting of pastors, authors, coaches, and leaders, has influenced our culture through sports, politics, media, and the church. They are all winners and have succeeded at the highest level of their professions. What makes this group of leaders truly different, though, is their relationship with Jesus Christ. These leaders are

striving for the greatest reward of all — a championship that will never end. Our hope is that God will use their messages to impact the lives of men like you.

LifeWay Men exists to help churches make disciples of men. We want to make it easy for you and easy for the church. We will give you the tools to impact other men. You can trust that our resources and events will always be deeply rooted in Scripture and that we will do whatever it takes to help you succeed.

On January 26 and August 31 we presented an event for fathers and kids called the All Pro Dad Simulcast (allprodadsimulcast.com) with Tony Dungy, Clark Kellogg, Tommy Bowden, and Hunter Smith, and hosted by Mark Merrill. On July 26-27 we experienced The Main Event—LifeWay's Conference for Men (lifeway.com/mainevent). This event featured 18 key voices, including Willie Robertson (star of A&E's "Duck Dynasty"), Bobby and Tommy

Bowden, Dr. Tony Evans, and others. The event was held at Belmont's Curb Center in Nashville, Tenn. LifeWay's Black Church Ministry-sponsored event for men at Ridgecrest called I'm the Man continues to have a great impact. This annual event grows each year in the number of churches represented and men attending.

We resource the church through curriculum for groups, such as *Sleeping Giant: No Movement of God Without Men of God*—Men's Ministry in a Box, by Kenny Luck; *33 The Series*, Volumes 1 and 2 (based on the original Men's Fraternity material created by Dr. Robert Lewis); and *Kingdom Man*, by Dr. Tony Evans. We have also seen many churches take men through *Game Plan for Life* Bible studies by Joe Gibbs, Volumes 1 and 2; *Courageous Living Bible Study* (4 weeks); and *Honor Begins at Home: The COURAGEOUS Bible Study* (8 weeks). *The Men's Fraternity Classic* series has an ongoing impact as well with *The Quest for Authentic Manhood*, *The Great Adventure*, and *Winning at Work & Home* by Robert Lewis.

This year we launched new resources including *33 The Series*, Volumes 3 and 4 (based on the original Men's Fraternity material created by Dr. Robert Lewis), *All Pro Dad* with Mark Merrill and Tony Dungy, and *Manhood Restored* by Eric Mason. LifeWay Men took to the field producing studies for men and dads like *The Real Win*, by NFL Quarterback Colt McCoy and Matt Carter, and the *Two-Minute Drill to Manhood* by former Alabama linebacker John Croyle. *The Gospel Project* and the relaunch of *Bible Studies for Life* provide Sunday School and small group curriculum for ongoing study and growth.

We are committed to providing trusted biblical content and experiences that will help churches implement the Sleeping Giant strategy for men's ministry by:

1. Getting men in (through catalytic events)
2. Getting men healthy through ongoing and short-term Bible studies
3. Getting men strong through discipleship resources
4. Getting men going through leadership and training tools.

Many tools are available at *LifeWay.com* to help you implement strategy for ministry to men. Leading Men: Recruit – Train – Activate (lifeway.com/leading-men) is a tool created specifically for your church in its effort to help men become leaders. The Ministry Grid: Training Made Simple (ministrygrid.com) provides tools specifically for ministry to men in addition to comprehensive church training for pastors, staff, and lay leadership. Follow the social media sites [Facebook.com/LifeWayMen](https://www.facebook.com/LifeWayMen) and [Twitter.com/lifewaymen](https://twitter.com/lifewaymen) for real-time updates and to engage the movement.

Thank you for trusting LifeWay Men with the opportunity to serve you through *Stand Firm*. It would be our honor to help you recruit, train, and activate men to follow Jesus Christ, strengthen their families, and serve their church. See what God is doing, and join the movement—it's just the beginning! **SF**

Jason Ellerbrook is men's ministry leader at LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, Tenn.

Trust Factor

I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:2).

Visitors to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, can find a gray and white monument inscribed with the Cadet Honor Code: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do." But these officers-in-training at West Point also live by the Cadet Maxim that says, "Risk more than others think is safe. Care more than others think is wise. Dream more than others think is practical. Expect more than others think is possible."

Isaiah 12:2

In God I Trust

How did I let my son talk me into this? Richard thought as the two of them slowly rose into the air. The theme park they visited the day before had been fun, but now Richard found himself strapped to his son on the world's tallest skycoaster.

"Are you sure we're just 300 feet up?" Richard said. "This feels way higher than a football field."

"Don't be a baby, Dad," Josh said. "It'll be fun." Richard looked at the steel cable that suspended them above the ground. *Okay*, he thought. *My life depends on the strength of this cable.*

Suddenly, Richard found himself speeding toward the ground at more than 70 mph. He was scared, but his fear couldn't wipe the smile off his face. "This is awesome," he shouted as they flew back in the other direction.

Get Ready to Soar

As Christians, we're supposed to trust Jesus with our lives. But our actions don't always show it. We may use words like David did in Psalm 34, but then we don't put our faith into action like David did.

Richard and his son couldn't soar until they trusted the steel cable. It's much the same way in our Christian lives. We're stuck going nowhere until we trust Jesus to hold us up. Is there something you've wanted to do for God but you've been too afraid to try? Trust Him. Ask Him to increase your faith. He's way more reliable than any steel cable.

Bottom Line

What's holding you back from stepping out for Jesus? Take a risk and discover the adventure that awaits.

Secret to a Long Marriage

"The two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate" (Mark 10:8-9).

John and Ann Betar have been married 80 years. On February 9, 2013, Worldwide Marriage Encounter recognized them as the "Longest Married Couple." John, who's 101, told reporters they don't have a secret to maintaining their marriage, but they do follow some rules: "We just live with contentment, and we don't live beyond our means. Just go with the flow."

source:
nydailynews.com

TV Off, Romance On

For years studies have shown that TV watching is bad for your health. All the sitting increases your risk of heart disease and developing type 2 diabetes. But some of the latest research shows that TV watching can be bad for your marriage.

After studying nearly 400 couples, Dr. Jeremy Osborn of Albion College in Michigan found that "people who believe the unrealistic [romantic] portrayals on TV are actually less committed to their spouses." Instead of letting TV dictate what relationships look like, we need to turn off the TV and turn on the real-life romance.

TV Ending?

Most problems aren't solved in 30 minutes, and couples rarely live "happily ever after" without hard work, patience, and commitment.

When Jesus was asked about divorce, He said, "What God has joined together, man must not separate" (Mark 10:9). Yet many marriages fall apart not on biblical grounds, but because of unmet expectations. Dr. Osborn said he hopes people will look at their expectations of marriage and ask: "Where did these expectations come from, and are they realistic?"

Marriage isn't exciting all the time. Fights don't always end with passionate kisses. But by committing ourselves to our wives and to God, we can create marriages that Hollywood can only dream about.

Proverbs 5:18-19

Bottom Line

What can you do to turn up the romance in your marriage? Have you had unreasonable expectations about marriage?

Bore Your Kids with Chores

For each person will have to carry his own load (Galatians 6:5).

Studies show that parents assign more housework to girls than boys. But this same research indicates that children are doing fewer chores today than they did 15 years ago. Kids between 6 and 12 years old spend less than 30 minutes a day cleaning and doing other housework. On the plus side, time spent reading, studying, and attending youth groups has increased since 1997.

source: wsj.com

Let's Work Together

Nobody likes doing chores. That's probably why adults are doing less housework than they did 20 years ago. Experts say children who help their families around the house not only learn the practical skills of taking care of a house or a yard, but they also learn responsibility, organizational skills, and self-sufficiency, and they get in the habit of serving others. That not only makes them more productive adults, but it could also benefit their marriages. A 2006 study found that marriages in the United States tend to be more stable when men take an active role in domestic tasks and the housework is shared.

Good Work

As parents, we need to teach our children that every family member needs to help out according to his age and ability. Obviously, a 5-year-old shouldn't be tasked with washing your fine china. But filling water cups, putting clothes in the hamper, or picking up toys could be helpful options.

In Galatians 6:5, Paul says that each person should carry his own load. That's the case in families, and in the family of God. We all need to work together and do our share. What household responsibilities are your kids ready to help with? Make a list, sit down with them, and create a plan. And if your kids are already doing chores, thank them for helping out.

Hebrews 13:16

Bottom Line

Families, including God's family, thrive when all the members work together to benefit each other.

From Pride to the Pit

"My sheaf stood up, and your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf"
(Genesis 37:7).

"Greatness is not found in possessions, power, position, or prestige. It is discovered in goodness, humility, service, and character."

—E.C. McKenzie,
*14,000 Quips
and Quotes*

Favorite Son

For a couple of days, we're going to look at the familiar story of Joseph, one of the Bible's most memorable men. Jacob had 12 sons, but he loved Joseph more than any of the others (see Genesis 37:3). And as expected, such obvious parental favoritism did not play well with the older brothers. Let's recall some of the story's details.

First, Jacob dressed Joseph better than he clothed the older brothers—Joseph's colorful coat contrasted with the brothers' plain, drab robes (37:3). Then, Joseph came home from tending sheep and tattled on two of his brothers. Finally, we're told his brothers hated him and wouldn't even speak to him decently (37:4).

Fantastic Dreamer

At age 17, Joseph boasted about his dream in which his brothers symbolically bowed down to him (37:7). Did he really think this would endear him to them? Was he trying to prove that God was on his side? Not long after this dream, Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit, debated about killing him, and instead, sold him into slavery (37:28).

The evidence suggests that Joseph may have been an overly confident teenager. Fortunately, we have the rest of the story: He grew into a godly man of wisdom, integrity, forgiveness, compassion, and humility. Take time now to consider how these godly characteristics are reflected in your life.

Genesis 37:1-11

Bottom Line

One of the keys to growing in godliness is spending more time focusing on God than ourselves. Even so, sometimes an honest self-evaluation is helpful.

From the Pit to the Palace

“God sent me ahead of you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5).

A recent movie called *King’s Faith* opens with 18-year-old Brendan King being released after three years of juvenile lock-up, an apt parallel to Joseph’s young-adult years in prison. Fortunately, Brendan had come to faith in Christ while incarcerated. Once released, he begins to encounter the challenges of overcoming his past, including threats and violence from his old street gang. Yet he stays focused on cultivating the godly characteristics required of a man who follows Christ. For all men, Brendan exemplifies the fact that being faithful may be hard, but it’s worth the effort. (kingsfaith.com)

Genesis 39:1–19

From Slavery to Success

Imagine Joseph’s fears and feelings as his brothers dropped him in the pit. Surely they were just playing a sick joke on him. Wouldn’t they come pull him out any minute? Did he beg them to stop the abuse? Did he hear them haggling with the merchants who bought him?

Fast forward to Joseph’s life as a slave to Potiphar, one of the Pharaoh’s top officers. We’re told that God was with Joseph and made everything he did successful (see Genesis 39:3–4). Potiphar grew to trust him. So what caused Joseph to grow in godly character?

From Famine to Family

First of all, humility must have come as the result of becoming a slave, isolated from his family (39:1). His reputation for integrity was earned by loyalty and faithful service to his master. Remember, Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he ran away (39:12). Then she lied to get him imprisoned (39:17). Again, Joseph proved honest and upright, even through his years in prison.

The kind of wisdom that made Joseph trustworthy—for example, interpreting dreams about a great famine—could have come only from God (41:15–16). Finally, Joseph showed a lot of compassion and forgiveness when his brothers appeared years later, asking to purchase grain (45:4). Joseph was finally reunited with his father and family.

Bottom Line

God rewarded Joseph’s faithfulness, but it took a while. If you’re in a pit right now, don’t give up. Believe that God is able to bring good out of it.

See p. 39 for Weekend Reflections.

When the Cows Come Home

Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds, for wealth is not forever (Proverbs 27:23-24).

As a kid, on Sunday afternoons if we were away from home to visit friends or family, I remember that Dad, a part-time farmer, always thought he needed to be home before dark to “check the cows.” He wanted to make sure they had come into the barn for the night, to see if a new calf had been born, to do the evening milking. I never realized until years later that Dad’s careful attention to caring for his cattle reflected a simple but serious stewardship of the resources God had given him charge of.

—Randall Murphree

Stewardship of Self

Financial counselor Dan Celia (www.financialissues.org) cringes when he considers today’s short-sighted definition of stewardship. Yes, money is important, but stewardship is about much more than money, he says. It includes our time, talents, and treasure.

“There are many strands of a man’s life that demand good stewardship,” Celia explains, “our family, our personal testimony, our time and talents, our resources.” He emphasizes that resources include not only our monthly paycheck, but also property we own—cattle or horses, cars or houses.

Stewardship of Money

After looking at that broader definition of stewardship, Celia is quick to offer wise financial counsel. After all, it’s a man’s responsibility to do his best to provide for his family. “Good stewardship of our finances is our duty to God and our family,” he says, “and we must pursue that with diligence.”

Here are some items that should be on your financial stewardship checklist: know your financial picture—checking account balance, credit card debt, the value of your retirement fund, etc.; prayerfully build an annual budget with your wife (and children, as age-appropriate) and stick to it; teach your children that money is earned, not an entitlement; accumulate savings and investments for your family’s future; give generously. Add to your checklist according to your family’s needs.

Luke 19:11-27

Bottom Line

Beginning with prayer for wisdom and the list above, make a checklist to help you begin getting your financial stewardship fully under control.



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STANDING FIRM AT HOME

by Brian Doyle

STANDING FIRM AT HOME : BY BRIAN DOYLE

Family devotions are critical but not complicated.

Jesus took on human flesh and came all the way to earth to save us. Have you placed your faith in Him for the forgiveness of sin and new life? To find out more, please visit www.sbc.net/knowjesus.

Men's ministry at church has some moments that are stronger than others. I have been thinking about this quite a bit, and my conclusion is that I prefer it when my church gives focus to ministry *through* men rather than ministry *to* men. I know there are times when I need encouragement and exhortation, but what I really long for is help in some of the key areas of my life. Let me share what I mean.

In this season of life, I am not only a husband but also a very engaged dad. My five children are ages 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17. These are critical years as my wife, Barb, and I launch them by God's grace into adulthood. I am *really* interested in how to do this, so when the men of my church attended a men's equipping conference, I chose the equipping seminar on "leading family devotions." We had been doing this as a family, but I was looking for some tips to keep things fresh. The presenter talked about praying a blessing on each of your kids, and I took some notes and tucked these away for a future day.

Here's how we do things around our house. Almost every morning I open up the Bible for a short time of family devotions around the breakfast table. The kids have begun to eat by the time I do this, so their blood sugar is rising, and everyone is in relatively good spirits. We read together for about five to six minutes and then I ask a couple of questions about what we read. Sometimes we have wonderful interactions, and sometimes I get blank stares.

We then hold hands, and I pray specifically for each family member. We have done this for years. One day recently, after our Bible reading time, I realized that I had made an early morning

appointment and I was late! I quickly got up and began to exit when my oldest daughter, Jessica, exclaimed, "Dad, you didn't pray for us!" I stopped in my tracks, and I believe God's Spirit reminded me of what I heard in that equipping seminar at the men's conference. I proceeded to put my hands on my oldest boy's shoulders and prayed specifically for him. This was a quick 20-second prayer. Then I moved to the left and prayed another 20- to 30-second specific prayer for another son. I kept moving around the table and covered everyone quickly as I stood behind them, laid my hands on them, and prayed specifically for them. My wife, Barb, even said, "I'd like a little of that."

Behold—a new tradition was born. We usually still hold hands when we pray, but now we have another option. Every once in a while I will stand behind each family member and rotate around the table. I place both hands on their shoulders and pray specifically for each one. The prayers are still pretty short, but putting my hands on their shoulders seems to make a difference. Physical touch adds another element of closeness.

You and I can do this. We can simply read the Bible at home around the table with our families. We can also stand up as God's man in the house and pray specifically for each member of our family. God has wired us to be a blessing and to bless each member of our family. You can do this on a daily basis or whenever time allows. Your prayers can be short—but make them personal. And don't be afraid to lay your hands on each family member as you pray. They will often sense the love of God through you as you pray that way. **SF**

STANDING FIRM AT HOME : BY BRIAN DOYLE

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Weekend Reflections

SATURDAY	SUNDAY
September 7 <p>“Don’t love sleep, or you will become poor; open your eyes, and you’ll have enough to eat” (Proverbs 20:13). Many men today could actually use a little more sleep. But that’s not the point here. The point is to avoid laziness, work hard, and look for opportunities.</p>	September 8 <p>“There is gold and a multitude of jewels, but knowledgeable lips are a rare treasure” (Proverbs 20:15). The Scriptures recommend a value system of wisdom over wealth. That certainly goes against much of the world’s thinking. Who will you believe?</p>
September 14 <p>“Food gained by fraud is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth is full of gravel” (Proverbs 20:17). Doing things the right way and not taking shortcuts pays off in the long run. The price of true satisfaction is integrity and hard work, empowered by grace.</p>	September 15 <p>“Finalize plans with counsel, and wage war with sound guidance” (Proverbs 20:18). None of us is smart enough to figure out life on our own. Wise counsel can keep us from making foolish decisions. Are you in the habit of seeking wise counsel?</p>
September 21 <p>“The one who reveals secrets is a constant gossip; avoid someone with a big mouth” (Proverbs 20:19). Not everyone can be trusted to keep a secret. Some people love to talk. So be really careful about what you say and to whom you say it.</p>	September 22 <p>“An inheritance gained prematurely will not be blessed ultimately” (Proverbs 20:21). Money isn’t always a blessing. Handled poorly, it can complicate life, making things more difficult rather than easier. It takes spiritual maturity to handle wealth wisely.</p>
September 28 <p>“Don’t say, ‘I will avenge this evil!’ Wait on the LORD, and He will rescue you” (Proverbs 20:22). When we’re wronged, our natural instinct is to want to get back at the other person, returning evil for evil. That’s unwise, though. Instead, we should pray and wait on the Lord.</p>	September 29 <p>“Differing weights are detestable to the LORD, and dishonest scales are unfair” (Proverbs 20:23). God loves fairness and justice. As His image-bearers, we naturally long for it, too. When something unfair happens to you, keep in mind that God sees it, and He is able to make it right.</p>

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