



THIRTEEN WEEKS FOR A MEN'S CLASS

WHEN MEN LEAD

STUDY GUIDE

A workbook for the man in the chair. Thirteen weeks of four questions: who am I when nobody sees, what temperature did I set, who went first, where am I pointing them.

BY JACOB MCCLUSKEY
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JAKE MCCLUSKEY
STAND YOUR WATCH

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Print as many copies as your church needs. You do not need to ask me. You do not need to write to anybody, fill out a form, or pay for a license.

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If it helps one man in your church lead the people in front of him a little better, it did its job.

The only thing I ask is that you do not sell it.

BEFORE YOU START

You are already leading. That is not the question.

The people who live with you are already taking their reading off of you. They already know what kind of day it is by the sound of your keys on the counter. They already know which subjects are safe and which ones make the room go quiet. That is happening whether you decided on it or not.

So the question this guide asks is not whether you will lead. It is what you are leading them toward, and whether you have anything left in the tank to do it on purpose.

Here is how it works.

Each week has four parts. Something to read. Something to answer. One thing to write down. And one small thing to do before you come back.

You do not need the book to use this guide. If your class is reading *When Men Lead* alongside it, good. Every session tells you which chapters go with it. If your church could not get the books, everything you need to work through the week is printed right here.

You will be asked to read what you wrote to one other man. I am telling you now so it does not ambush you in week two. Nothing you write gets read to the whole room unless you offer it. But you will have a partner, and you will read to him.

Write badly. Nobody is grading this. Three honest sentences beat three pages of the answer you think a Christian is supposed to give.

Two more things before we start.

This is the third book in a series, and you can start here. If you have read *When Men Pray* and *When Men Stand Firm*, this is where it lands. If you have not, nothing in these thirteen weeks depends on them.

This one will get personal fast. The first two books were about you and God. This one is about the people who have to live with the result. Some of you are going to hit a week where the honest answer is not flattering. Write it down anyway. A man who can look at that is already leading better than he was in week one.

Let's begin.

THE FOUR CHECKS

Every week in this guide runs the same four checks. They come out of the book, and together they are the whole job.

One. Who am I when nobody sees? There is a version of you that only exists when the house is asleep and the truck door is shut. Everything you build on top of that man is sitting on him. Check him first.

Two. What temperature did I set? You control the mood of your house. Not entirely, and not on every day, but far more than you have been admitting. Walk back through the week and ask what the room felt like when you came into it.

Three. Who went first? Leading is going first. First to say the hard thing. First to apologize. First to serve. First to break the silence. Ask who went first this week, and be honest if the answer was nobody.

Four. Where am I pointing them? Every man is aiming the people who follow him at something. At Jesus, or at himself, or at nothing in particular. Ask where you actually aimed them this week, not where you meant to.

Who am I when nobody sees. What temperature did I set. Who went first. Where am I pointing them.

Four checks. You will run them thirteen times in this guide, and I hope you keep running them on Sunday nights for the rest of your life.

SESSION ONE

WHERE THE STRENGTH COMES FROM



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 1 and 2

A man walks in from work with about a quarter tank left.

His daughter says something to him and he answers without really looking up. He fixes a plate. He goes a little quiet. Nobody is fighting. From across the room it looks like an ordinary Tuesday evening.

But everybody in that house has already adjusted. They read the gauge the second he came through the door, and they set themselves to it.

He is leading that home. Make no mistake. He is setting the temperature of every room he walks into. He is just doing it on empty, and everyone but him can feel it.

We think leadership starts with being in charge. Having enough together to tell other people what to do.

It does not start there. It starts on your knees.

Now, I know how that sounds to a working man. Soft. Churchy. Something you do after the real work is done.

It is the opposite of soft. The strongest thing you will ever do as a leader is get down low and admit, out loud, that you cannot carry this on your own.

Think about two kinds of strong men you have known. One is strong the way a bridge is strong, loaded down and carrying it. The other is strong the way a man holding his breath is strong. From across the room they look the same. Only one of them is safe to follow.

The difference is not how much they can carry. It is what they are carrying it with.

And here is the second half, the one that stings.

They are not going where you tell them. They are going where you go.

You can preach a direction all day. Your kids will follow the walking. That is the way it runs. Which means the work starts on you, not on them.

Do not hear that as become flawless or you will ruin your children. The gap between what you preach and how you walk exists in every man alive, and it is not the disqualifier. Pretending it is not there, that is the disqualifier. Turn and face the right way, and start walking, because they are coming with you either way.

SCRIPTURE

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:6, NASB 1995).

That was said to Zerubbabel, standing in front of a half-built temple. God did not make the job smaller. He told him where the power was coming from.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. What does your family read off you when you come through the door? Be honest. They already know the answer.

2. What are you running on right now? Where does your strength actually come from on a Tuesday?

WHO AM I WHEN NOBODY SEES?

Write the direction you most want your family to go. Then write, honestly, whether you are walking that way yourself.

THIS WEEK

Once this week, kneel down. On the actual floor. Before the day gets its hands on you.

You do not need good words. These will do. God, I cannot carry this. I have been trying, and I am running low, and I am done pretending. Be the strength I keep telling everybody I already am.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION TWO

THE MAN NOBODY SEES



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 3 and 4

There is a version of you that only exists when nobody is watching.

The house is asleep. The truck door is shut. Nobody has an opinion about you for the next twenty minutes.

That man is the real one. The rest is management.

Not because the public man is fake, exactly. He is real too. But he is built on the private one, and whatever the private one is doing is eventually what the whole structure does.

The shame is not in having a hidden man. Every son of Adam has one. The trouble starts when we decide to keep him hidden, feed him in the dark, and hope he never gets big enough to bring the building down.

Sin grows in the dark. It is a mushroom. It needs the dark to live, and the second you haul it into the light it starts to die.

That is what the light is for. Not exposure. Death of the thing.

And then the second half of this week, which is the one most men will argue with.

The strongest thing a man ever says is, “I was wrong.”

Most men would rather lose the relationship than lose the argument. You have watched it. You have probably done it. Something sharp gets said in the kitchen, her face changes, and you say nothing. Then three days of being polite like strangers, both of you waiting to see who breaks.

Leadership is going first.

Not “I’m sorry you took it that way.” Not the apology with a but bolted on the end. That is not repentance, that is pride negotiating a ceasefire.

The specific thing, named, with nothing attached.

Two guards on this week, and a leader should say both out loud.

Confession is something you choose, to a man you trust. It is not something anybody gets to demand from you, and it is not something you get to demand from a man under you.

And when you go first with your wife, that is your responsibility to initiate repair. It is not a diagnosis of her.

SCRIPTURE

“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (Proverbs 28:13, NASB 1995).

Both verbs. Confesses and forsakes. Saying it out loud is half.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. What does the man nobody sees do with his time?

2. Whose apology have you been holding onto? Who is owed one from you that you have not given?

WHO WENT FIRST?

Write the specific sentence you owe somebody. The whole thing. No but.

THIS WEEK

Two things.

Name one hidden thing out loud to God, by name, on your knees. Then tell it to one trusted man, face to face. Not by text.

And give the apology you wrote above. Face to face if you can get there.

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SESSION THREE

SHE IS NOT BENEATH THE MISSION



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 5, 6, and 7

A man builds. That is a good thing. God is not against a man building something.

But somewhere in the building, a lot of us quietly filed our wife under support. Not on purpose. Nobody decides that. She just moved from being the point to being the thing that keeps the point running.

She is not beneath your mission. She is closer to the center of it than the mission is.

That does not mean quit. Ambition is not the enemy and working hard is not the sin. It means you have the order wrong, and everything you build on the wrong order eventually leans.

Then the second chapter, and it is the one that separates talk from love.

Love only starts to mean anything the day it costs you something you did not want to give up.

You know what it costs. It is the Saturday. It is the two hours out of the house you hand her when you had plans for them. It is the conversation with her mother.

And here is where men ruin it. We give the thing, and then we keep the receipt.

A man keeping a careful ledger of everything he gave up has not been loving her. He has been lending, at interest, and one day he calls in the debt and cannot understand why she never felt loved.

Give it with no sigh, and never mention it again.

Then the third chapter, which is the hardest one in the book.

God gave you your strength to cover her, not to corner her.

Most of us are not talking about hands. Most of us are talking about the quieter weapons. Getting louder until she backs down. Going cold for two days until she comes to smooth it over. Correcting her in front of the kids. Making her the punchline in front of other couples.

A big man does not need his wife to be little.

Now the necessary line, and it is not a footnote. If your anger has ever put your hand on her, or made her afraid you might, that is not a rough patch and it is not something you fix on your own with more self-control. Stop and get real help. Talk to your pastor this week. That is the obedience for you right now.

For most men reading this, it is not that. For most men it is the temper, the silence, and the contempt. Deal with those before they become the other thing.

SCRIPTURE

“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28, NASB 1995).

Read what it does not say. It does not say she is your project. It says she is your own body. Nobody starves his own arm to make a point.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. Where has she quietly become support instead of the point?

2. Which weapon do you reach for? The blow-up, the freeze-out, or the cutting remark. Pick the one that is actually yours.

WHAT TEMPERATURE DID I SET?

Write one thing she needs from you that you do not want to give.

THIS WEEK

Three, and they are small.

One real conversation, phone in another room, where you ask how she actually is and you only listen. No fixing.

Do the thing you wrote above. Fully. No sigh, and do not bring it up later.

And the next time your weapon rises, go out to the garage for ten minutes instead of firing it.

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SESSION FOUR

GO FIRST



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 8 and 9

You know the bed with the line painted down the middle.

Short answers. Polite if the kids are around, cold when they are not.
Both of you waiting the other one out to see who breaks.

Somebody has to walk across the room.

You can be genuinely, provably more right and still be the one who crosses first. That is not weakness. That is a man leading his marriage out of a ditch that both of them drove into.

Being right is not the prize. Being close is the prize.

And breaking the silence is not saying you were wrong when you were not. It is not surrendering the issue. It is refusing to let the distance win.

Not a text. Walk over.

You are only able to come to God at all because He moved first. Every man in that room got reached by somebody who did not wait to be approached.

Then the second half, which is quieter and does more damage.

You did not marry her once. You marry her again every day, in a hundred small choices nobody sees.

She walks into the room and you keep scrolling. She tells you about her day and you grunt. You have not reached for her hand in so long you would not think to.

Nothing dramatic happened. That is the point. It never does.

Three doors let the distance in. Resentment, which is just love a man let go sour by refusing to deal with it. Secrecy, the purchase or the habit or the thread you would close if she walked up behind you. And the third one, the easy someone, or the screen that took her spot.

Almost nobody decides to betray. It starts with a man who stopped turning toward his wife and let something else quietly take that place.

One guard. This week is about ordinary friction and cold silences. If there is abuse in a home, “go first” is not the instruction. Safety is. Talk to your elders and get outside help.

SCRIPTURE

“Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you” (Colossians 3:13, NASB 1995).

Just as. That is the measure, and it is a hard one, and it went in your favor first.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. Which of the three doors is cracked in your marriage right now? Resentment, secrecy, or something that took her spot.

2. What are you waiting for her to do before you move?

WHO WENT FIRST?

Write the specific thing you have been filing away instead of releasing.

THIS WEEK

Shut the door you named. Deal with the thing you have been filing. Or open the locked room. Or cut off the person or the habit.

And if there is silence in your house right now, walk over. This week.

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SESSION FIVE

THEY BECOME WHAT YOU ARE

READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 10, 11, and 12

You did not lose your kid in a blowup.

You lost him in ten thousand uh huhs.

He came in with a drawing, or a fact about dinosaurs, or the thing that happened at recess, and he watched your face to see if it lit up. Some of the time it did. A lot of the time your body was on the couch and you were down in a screen.

The lie is that providing is fathering.

Provide. It is a real and good part of the job. Just do not let it become the place you hide from the harder work of being known by your own kids.

Then the second thing, and it is uncomfortable.

They do not just follow your direction. They become you.

A son goes quiet and slams a cabinet, and you know exactly where he got it, because you did it behind the workbench last month over a lost bolt. Faith is caught more than it is taught, and so is everything else.

Now the guard, and it matters. They are their own souls before God. They will make their own choices, and they are responsible for them. This is not a formula where a good father guarantees a good kid. It is a warning that you are teaching all the time whether you meant to be or not.

And the third piece, which will change how you correct.

A lot of what we call disciplining our kids is really blowing off steam.

The behavior is the smoke. Heart-level correction goes looking for the fire. Why did you do that. What were you afraid of. What did you want.

There is no shame in telling a kid, I need a few minutes, and we will deal with this when I have cooled down. That is not weakness in front of your children. That is the first thing you have taught them all week.

And when the correction is over, put a hand on him. We are good. I love you. That is over now.

SCRIPTURE

“You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7, NASB 1995).

Look at the times listed. Sitting. Walking. Lying down. Getting up. Nothing scheduled. Nothing special. All the ordinary hours, which is where you actually live.

That verse was spoken to Israel under a covenant that has since been brought to its end in Christ, so here is the same charge handed to fathers on this side of the cross: **“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4). Same job. Same ordinary hours. Given to you directly.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. What have your kids caught from you that you never sat down and taught them?

2. When you corrected your kid last, were you dealing with him or with your own frustration?

WHERE AM I POINTING THEM?

Write one thing you want your kid to have that you do not currently model.

THIS WEEK

Put the phone in another room and give one kid twenty undivided minutes.

On the floor. Or a drive with the radio off. Or sitting on the edge of the bed at night, which is when kids of every age start talking if a dad is quiet long enough.

Not fixing anything. Not correcting anything. Present.

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SESSION SIX

LET THEM WATCH YOU GET UP



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 13 and 14

A lot of good fathers are working very hard to give their kids something that will hurt them.

Not a good father. A perfect one, or at least the appearance of one.

Your kids do not need a father who never falls. They need one they can watch get back up.

Think about what that actually teaches. If they only ever see the managed version of you, then the first time they blow it badly, they have no idea what a man does next. They have never seen it done. All they know is that dad does not do this, so whatever they are is something else.

Failing well looks like three things. Honesty about the fall. Ownership with no excuse. And then the rising.

Most men can do two of the three. We fall and we stay down, or we fall and blame the weather, or we admit it and never come back and repair it.

Scripture does not say a righteous man never falls. It says he rises.

Then the second half, and this one is a long game.

You are not raising kids to keep. You are raising them to release.

Everything you do, from teaching a kid to tie his own shoes to letting him take a job you would not have taken, is aimed at a door he walks out of. If you do everything for him, rescue him from every

consequence, and make every decision, you have not protected him. You have kept him from getting the muscles.

And some of them, once released, are going to fly the wrong way for a while.

Hear this if it is you. That is not automatic proof you failed. God said it about His own people. “Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me” (Isaiah 1:2, NASB 1995). That is not proof He failed either.

The father in that parable did not chase the boy down and drag him back. Dragging him back would not have fixed him anyway, and it will not fix yours.

But he never bolted the door.

One guard. Leaving the door open means not letting bitterness close it. It does not mean removing every boundary or exposing your household to ongoing harm. Those are different things, and a man can do the first without doing the second.

SCRIPTURE

“For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in time of calamity” (Proverbs 24:16, NASB 1995).

Seven times. The man in that verse keeps getting flattened and the thing that marks him is that he is on his feet again.

Be honest about the verse, though, because a man with a study Bible will be. Read verse 15 and you find it is addressed to a wicked man plotting against his righteous neighbour, and the falling there is trouble coming at him, not sin he committed. It is a promise that you cannot put a righteous man down for good, not a licence for a repeating cycle.

The verse that says the other thing, plainly, is Micah. **“Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me”** (Micah 7:8), and the next verse names the fall as his own sin: “I will bear the indignation of the LORD

Because I have sinned against Him.” That is a man who did it to himself, saying he is getting up anyway. **That is the one to take home.**

TWO QUESTIONS

1. When did your kids last see you own something out loud, with no excuse?

2. What are you still doing for your kid that he is old enough to do himself?

WHO WENT FIRST?

If you have a child who has walked away, write what you would say to him if you knew he would read it. No lecture in it.

THIS WEEK

The next time you fail in front of your kids, and there will be a next time, own it out loud with no excuse, and let them see you get back up.

Hand one task to a kid who is old enough for it.

And if you have a wanderer, send one text or make one call that says I love you and I am here. Nothing else attached.

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SESSION SEVEN

WHERE YOUR FAITH ACTUALLY SHOWS



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 15 and 16

The men you work with are reading your faith off your work, not off your words.

That is the sermon they are actually hearing. The sticker, the shirt, the verse in the email signature, and then the minimum on the job. In late, first one gone, corner cut the second the boss walks out.

A Christian who works halfway is a man whose Monday is calling his Sunday a liar.

Now the guard, and it is important because this gets abused. This is not a call to become a workaholic or grind your family into dust for the sake of Christian excellence. It is that for the hours you are actually on the clock, whatever those hours are, you work like a man who serves God.

And if you are unemployed, or disabled, or stuck under a boss who makes your output impossible, this verse is not measuring your worth by your productivity. It is about effort and integrity inside what you actually control.

You do not have to be the boss to be a leader on a crew. You have to be the man whose work makes people quietly want what he has.

Then the second half, which costs more.

Any man keeps his word when keeping it is free.

You shook hands on a price and then the costs went up. You promised your kid you would be there and then something came up. You signed

on to the church thing back in September and now you do not feel like it.

And you have already built the case in your head. The circumstances changed. There is a technicality. It is not really the same deal anymore.

Integrity is what your word is worth on the day keeping it is going to cost you.

One caution, because integrity is not stupidity. If you made a genuinely foolish or sinful promise, keeping it may be the wrong move. There are times to go back to somebody honestly and renegotiate in the open. What there is never a time for is quietly slipping out and calling it circumstances.

SCRIPTURE

“He swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Psalm 15:4b, NASB 1995).

That is the standard. Not honest when it is easy. Unchanged when it hurts.

And read the whole psalm sometime. It is a portrait of the man God’s presence makes, not a list you clear to get in.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. If your crew judged your faith only by your work, what would they conclude?

2. Which promise has quietly gotten expensive? The one you have been building a case to get out of.

WHO AM I WHEN NOBODY SEES?

Write what you do on the job when you are certain no one is checking.

THIS WEEK

Keep that expensive promise. Exactly as you gave it. Pay what it costs.

Then do not announce the struggle or the win to anybody.

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SESSION EIGHT

TAKE THE BLAME, GIVE THE CREDIT



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 17 and 18

Grab the credit, deflect the blame.

It is so natural we do it without deciding to, and it is the single clearest mark of a small man.

Watch it happen on any crew. Something goes right and it goes up the chain in the first person. Something goes wrong and suddenly there is a name attached that is not his.

Now flip it, and think about the man you would follow anywhere.

If it goes wrong, he will cover me. If it goes right, he will make sure I get the credit.

You already know a man like that, or you have wished you did. There is nothing complicated about what he is doing. He steps in front of somebody else's mistake and says that one is on me, they are mine. He names the people who did the work in front of the people who matter.

Take the blame. Give away the credit. That is what a leader is for.

One line on how you say it, because last week was about a man's word. **Do not say "that was my call" if it was not your call.** Accountability is genuinely yours and you should take it in front of everybody. But on a safety report or an insurance claim, a false statement is a false statement no matter how noble the motive, and every foreman reading this already knows that. Shoulder it without misreporting it.

Then the second half, and this is the one that comes for good men.

Your home is not the thing you sacrifice for success. Your home is the success.

The promotion with the extra hours. The relocation that is quietly hard on the family. The tank that gets emptied at the job so the house gets the fumes.

Every one of them makes sense on its own. Every one is defensible. And the man making them has burned down the house to build a nicer garage.

Here is the guard, and say it out loud in the room. Sometimes a man genuinely has to work brutal hours for a real season. A layoff, a medical bill, a business getting off the ground. That is real and it is not what this chapter is about.

The problem is that the season never ends. There is always another one coming, and a man can spend thirty years inside a temporary sprint.

No man ever lay dying and wished he had climbed one more rung.

SCRIPTURE

“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15, NASB 1995).

Not even when one has an abundance. That is the part that ruins the plan. Getting there does not fix it.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. When something went wrong last, whose name got attached to it?

2. What are you spending from home right now to buy something out there? Name the exact trade.

WHAT TEMPERATURE DID I SET?

Write the name of one man who deserves credit you have not given him.

THIS WEEK

Give that man the credit, out loud, in front of somebody who matters.

And come home on time one night you would normally have worked.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION NINE

MEN DO NOT DROWN LOUDLY



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 19, 20, and 21

A hammer that will not drive a nail is just a heavy thing you carry around.

That is a man with strength and no one to spend it on. And a strength that only flows in and never out is not a blessing. It is a hoard, and hoards rot.

Whatever you have, the truck, the trade, the money, the steadiness, the name people trust, the strength itself creates the responsibility. You do not get to be strong and off the hook. Being strong is the hook.

Then the harder one.

Silence is rarely neutral. It quietly sides with whoever already has the power.

You have been at the table when the joke landed on somebody. You have watched a coworker get piled on. Your silence told the strong one that what he is doing is fine, and it told the weak one that nobody is coming.

Sometimes it is three words. Hey, that is enough.

Two guards on this, and both go in the room out loud.

Do not become a self-appointed avenger, spoiling for a fight and calling your own anger justice. Wisdom, not bravado. But under the wisdom, a spine.

And if a vulnerable person is being harmed, the move is not to handle it yourself. Call the authorities. Tell your pastor or your elders. Getting

somebody real help is not butting in. It is being the one who finally did something.

Then the last chapter of the three, and it is the one this whole week is built toward.

Men do not drown loudly.

They say good, busy, you know how it is, with a quick smile, and then they go home. You cannot see the water line. You are never going to be able to. So you throw the rope anyway.

The rope is one more question. No, how are you really.

Then you stay quiet and let it be awkward. Most men will fill that silence if you can stand to leave it there.

And if you are the one drowning, hear this, because it is the whole reason this chapter exists. Reaching out is not weakness. Tell somebody today. A brother, your pastor, your wife, a doctor. The numbers are on the back page of this guide and they answer around the clock.

SCRIPTURE

“Open your mouth for the mute, For the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9, NASB 1995).

Open your mouth. He says it twice.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, NASB 1995).

One another. It is not a specialty. It is the job description.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. When did you last stay quiet while somebody got run over? What did your silence say?

2. Who in your life said fine the last time you asked, and you let it go?

WHERE AM I POINTING THEM?

Write his name. Write the day you are going to call him.

THIS WEEK

Call him or sit down with him. When he says he is fine, ask the second question out loud. No, how are you really.

Then be quiet and let him answer.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION TEN

GIVE IT AWAY



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 22 and 23

It is easy to stand on the far side of the gap and criticize the younger men coming up.

They are soft. They are on their phones. They do not know how to work.

It is the laziest thing a mature man can do, and we dress it up as standards.

Here is another picture. A guy on a crew takes the new kid and actually teaches him instead of barking at him. A father lets his son's friend, the one with no dad, hang around the garage and watch how a steady man handles things. An older man at church takes a struggling young husband to breakfast every couple weeks and just walks with him.

The younger generation does not mainly need to be criticized. It needs to be fathered, and a lot of its actual fathers went missing.

The point was never to be the best. The point was to be useful, and the most useful thing you can do with everything you learned the hard way is hand it to somebody who would otherwise have to learn it the same way, or never learn it at all.

Then the second half, which is a mirror.

A lot of men will serve, as long as they get to be in charge of it.

Take away the control and the credit and see how much of your serving is left.

You have seen the man who shows up to help and within twenty minutes is running it, reorganizing it, telling everybody how it should be done. He is not serving the church. He is using it to feed something.

The test is simple and unpleasant. Go do the setup and the teardown that nobody sees and nobody thanks. Watch somebody else get credit for a thing you did half of, and notice whether it bothers you.

Authority runs from the men who chase it and settles on the men who serve without needing it.

One guard, and a leader should say it plainly. This diagnostic is for looking at yourself. It is not for identifying that guy in your church. The second the room starts using it that way, shut it down.

SCRIPTURE

“Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3, NASB 1995).

Examples, not bosses. The flock is watching a life, not taking orders.

Peter wrote that to elders. If that is the rule for the men with the title, it is not a lower bar for the rest of us.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. Who is the younger man already in your orbit? Name him.

2. How much of your serving requires you to be in charge of it?

WHO AM I WHEN NOBODY SEES?

Write what you would want to hand a younger man. The thing you learned the expensive way.

THIS WEEK

Two things.

Take one step toward the younger man you named. Invite him to the thing, teach him a skill, or ask him to breakfast.

And go serve somewhere you are not in charge. Take direction from somebody else on the part they give you. Make sure nobody important finds out you did it.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION ELEVEN

KEEP THE WHEEL



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 24, 25, and 26

If you are waiting to stop being afraid before you lead, you will wait forever, and your family will be leaderless the whole time you wait.

Fear shows up in a man two ways, and both of them look like something else.

The first man goes quiet. He disappears into himself, or he numbs it, and the house is left to guess. The second gets loud and certain and aggressive, because if he keeps talking nobody will notice he is scared.

Neither one is leading. Both are hiding.

The third option is the one this chapter is after. He sits them down and says, I am not going to lie to you, this is hard, and I do not have all the answers.

Then he keeps his hands on the wheel.

Courage is not waiting to feel unafraid. It is keeping the wheel while you shake.

Then the second chapter, and if you lead anything you already know this one.

Some calls have no clean answer. Whatever you decide, you carry weight and take hits, and there is no version where you come out clean.

That weight is not a sign something went wrong. It is a sign you are doing the job.

Two ways men blow it. Stalling, studying it forever, waiting for information that is not coming. Or firing it off fast to end the tension, with no prayer and no counsel.

Strength gathers counsel. Two or three people who will tell you the truth, not two or three people who will agree with you.

And when it goes sideways, own it. Do not hand it to your wife, or the circumstances, or bad luck.

Then the third, and it may be the most important page in this book.

Grieve out loud.

A man who buries it thinks he is being strong for everybody. He is not. It is a slow wound, and it does more damage than the grief would have.

You are allowed to grieve. Allowed to feel the weight, to cry, to fall apart for a while, to not be okay.

Jesus wept. He was minutes from calling a dead man out of the ground, and He still stopped and cried on the way there.

Let your kids see you say it. I am really sad. I loved them. This hurts. And then show up at dinner with your hand on your kid's shoulder.

That may be the strongest thing they ever watch you do.

One last thing on this week. There is a difference between grief and the thing that whispers everybody would be better off without you. If that voice has started, do not carry it alone another day. The numbers on the back page answer any hour.

SCRIPTURE

“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7, NASB 1995).

Not a spirit that never feels fear. A spirit that is not run by it.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. Which one are you when you are scared? The one who goes quiet or the one who gets loud?

2. What decision have you been stalling on, and what are you actually waiting for?

WHO WENT FIRST?

Write the loss you never let out. Or the fear you have not said to anybody.

THIS WEEK

Say it out loud to God. In words. Once. This week.

And where it is right, say it out loud to your family too.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION TWELVE

THE MEMORY YOU ARE WRITING

READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 27, 28, and 29

Something hard hits the family. A diagnosis, a job loss, a move nobody wanted.

And every person in the house turns and looks at one man.

The whole emotional weather of a family in a crisis takes its reading off of you. That is not fair and it is true anyway.

Two ways men blow it.

The first is secrecy. He does not tell her how bad the money is. He holds the severity of the diagnosis. He tells himself he is protecting her. Secrecy does not protect a family. It isolates the man and terrifies everybody else, because they can all tell something is wrong and now they are filling in the blank themselves.

The second is blame. He gets short and mean and goes looking for somebody in the house to fault.

The third way is to gather them and say plainly what is happening, what it means, and what is going to change. To the level they can carry. Kids do not need every adult detail. They need the truth at their size, from a man who is not lying to them.

Then the second chapter, which explains most of the first.

An empty man is a bad leader. Not sometimes. Reliably.

He says yes to everything. Work expands into every hour. He runs himself into the ground and calls it strength, and then he snaps at the people he did it for.

A man who never rests is not being more godly than God. He is quietly telling himself the world falls apart if he stops.

Needing help is not a defect in a man. It is the design.

Then the third, and it is quieter than both.

One day you will be a memory in the minds of people you love. That memory is being written today.

Not on your deathbed. This morning, off the man who came down for breakfast.

Some of you just did the math and did not like all of it. There are years in there you are not proud of, a version of you your kids saw that you wish they had not.

Hear this. The picture is not finished. As long as you are drawing breath you are still adding to it. A man who turns it around now does not erase what came before, but he changes what he is remembered for.

SCRIPTURE

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you” (Isaiah 43:2, NASB 1995).

Read what He does not promise. No waters. No fire. He promises you will not go through them alone and they will not finish you.

TWO QUESTIONS

1. What are you carrying right now that your wife does not know the size of?

2. What would your kids say about you if somebody asked them today?

WHAT TEMPERATURE DID I SET?

Write the one demand eating your capacity that you are going to say no to.

THIS WEEK

Three moves.

Put one guarded block of real rest on the calendar, and defend it like a shift.

Say no to the demand you named.

And ask one person to help carry one load you have been carrying alone.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SESSION THIRTEEN

LET IT END WITH YOU



READ THIS WEEK

Chapters 30 through 33

Every man reading this inherited something.

Some of you got a good deal. Some of you got a temper, or a way of numbing, or a silence that goes on for days, or a coldness that a whole family learned to live around.

And one day you heard your father's exact tone come out of your own mouth, aimed at your own kid, and it stopped you cold.

The chain that reached you does not have to reach your kids.

Be the circuit-breaker. Let it end with you.

Now hear how, because this is where men try and fail. The pattern is too old and too deep to break with sheer effort. You have already tested that. It is grace doing in you what willpower never could. You name the thing, you bring it to Christ, and you let Him do what He came to do.

And some of these chains do not break alone. If yours is addiction, or anger you cannot get on top of, calling somebody for real help is not a detour from obedience. It is the first honest swing at the chain.

Then the second thing, which is the other half of the same job.

Your scars are some of the best teaching you own.

Not the polished version. The real one. What God actually did, what it cost, what you learned the expensive way. Say it out loud at the dinner table. Tell it to a younger man. A story a boy hears from his father about God outlasts twenty lectures.

Then the third.

You cannot undo the past. Stop trying.

But there is a last day for every repair, and nobody gets told in advance which day it is. Too late is a real place, and a lot of men end up standing in it holding an apology with nowhere to go.

So name one relationship that is damaged but not dead. Where the door is still open even if it is barely open. Make one move.

The guard on this one matters. Owning your part is not the same as reconciling. If somebody is unsafe or abusive, repair of your own conscience does not require you to be back in a room with them. Talk to your pastor about what that looks like.

And then the last chapter, which is where this whole trilogy has been going.

You were never meant to be the destination.

Every man leading anybody is aiming them somewhere. If you aim them at yourself, you have set them up to be orphaned twice, once when you die and once when they figure out you could not hold their weight anyway.

Your kids' faith has to be anchored in Christ, not in you, so it can stand long after you are gone. Which means the goal of everything in this book is that you get smaller in the picture on purpose.

He must increase. You must decrease.

That is the job. Pray first. Stand firm. Lead them home, and then get out of the way.

SCRIPTURE

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30, NASB 1995).

That was said by the man Jesus called the greatest born of women, and in the same breath Jesus said the least in the kingdom is greater than he. Decreasing was not his failure. It was the point.

**TWO QUESTIONS**

1. What are you determined will not reach your kids? Name it specifically.

2. Which relationship is damaged but not dead?

WHERE AM I POINTING THEM?

Thirteen weeks in, write the honest answer. Are the people who follow you being aimed at Jesus, at you, or at nothing in particular?

THIS WEEK

Make one move toward the relationship you named. The call, the letter, the visit.

And say the plain words. I was wrong, and I am sorry. No but attached.

Then tell one true story about what God has done, out loud, to somebody younger than you.

That is the last assignment in this book, and it is the one that outlives you.

M T W T F ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

THE FOUR CHECKS, WEEK BY WEEK



The four checks do not expire in week thirteen. This is where the rest of them go.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS



If you have questions, you can reach me through jakemccluskey.com.

And if you ran this with a room of men, I want to hear how it went. What worked, what didn't, what you had to change to make it fit your church. If something in here was wrong, tell me that too. I would rather know.

If there is anything I can do to help your men, ask.

Jake

IF TONIGHT IS DARKER THAN A PAGE CAN REACH



Some weeks a man comes to a class like this carrying more than a study guide can hold. If that is you, or if it is the man sitting next to you, here is where to go.

Call or text **988**, any hour. It is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and a real person answers.

Veterans: **dial 988 then press 1**, or text **838255**.

Then tell one person who knows your face.

Using those numbers is not weakness. It is the first fight you will win.