# Strong Men of the Bible

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Jacob wasn’t an easy man to bless. It wasn’t that he didn’t want God to bless him. It was just that he went about it all wrong. And that is why he is so valuable to study. Jacob is what writers call “Everyman.” Reading through the stories of Jacob in the last half of Genesis, we get the impression that he is more sly and slippery than the rest of us. But at his core, Jacob may be the most typical person in the Bible.

One thing is sure—he personified the chosen people, Israel. Before the Jews were called Israel, God called Jacob Israel. Given after their famous wrestling match, it means, “God prevailed.” By studying the stories of Jacob, we see how relentless God’s grace is—and can save ourselves some grief by learning how to humbly receive the blessed life God wants to give those he loves.

Men of Integrity Lesson #1

Scripture:

Based on:
“Jacob: A Man Who Manipulated Everyone but God,” the profile on Jacob in the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible
PART 1

A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article “Jacob: A Man Who Manipulated Everyone but God” from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible.

Years ago, in the days of outdoor prizefights, one Australian fighter wired his father after a bout: “Won easily in 84 rounds.” That might well be what God would say about his experience with Jacob. Maybe with you, too. “Won easily in 38 years.” “Won easily after four job changes, a near-death experience, and 14 lost relationships.” God wins, but sometimes the match is long indeed!

Jacob was born trying to get ahead. Even while they were still in Rebekah’s womb, he and his twin brother Esau were fighting. When they were born, Genesis 25:26 says, Jacob was hanging on to his tiny brother’s heel! And that was the story of Jacob’s life. Heel Grabber. The kind of guy who steps on your heel in a race so you stumble as he scoots ahead.

The thing Jacob was so determined to win in life was God’s blessing. The irony of Jacob’s life was that he was always scheming to get the blessing God had promised him even before he was born (Genesis 25:23). The rub was that God only blesses on his terms, and that took Jacob about 60 years to learn.

Discussion starters:

[Q] Describe a time you were determined to get ahead of someone else. What did that experience do to you?

[Q] What do you think men most want from God?

[Q] Describe a time when you wrestled with God. What was it like?

PART 2

A Man’s Word

Teaching point one: We pay a steep price for grabbing for the God-blessed life in the wrong way.

The central fact in the stories of Jacob, his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham was that God determined to bless them. That meant that God would protect them from enemies, prosper them, give them their own land, make their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and bless all the world through them—which came true through Jesus the Messiah. Like an infinitely precious family heirloom, this blessing was passed from Abraham to Isaac, and then, surprisingly, to Jacob. By rights, Esau should have received the blessing, since he was the firstborn. But God’s pattern is often to bless the person you wouldn’t expect.

Read Genesis 27:1–45.

[Q] Everyone in this story was trying to win the blessing, but in the end they all lost—even Jacob. What did Jacob lose?
Leader’s Note: First, Jacob lost his integrity. In a sense, he gave up his identity. He lost his family. (Jacob apparently never saw his doting mother again. Her promise that he would only be away a few days turned into 20 years). He had to flee the very land that was promised to him. Instead of his brother serving him, his brother remained at home while Jacob fled and ultimately became the servant of his unscrupulous uncle, Laban. Perhaps most damaging, Jacob did not really see God solve his problem. Nor, for that matter, did the rest of the family. Had God been free to bless Jacob without interference, perhaps Esau would have been softened toward God instead of cultivating a murderous, self-righteous revenge.

When Rebekah and Jacob found out that Isaac was planning to bless Esau, they felt they had to act quickly or all would be lost. Their plan was audacious and it worked. What else could they have done, knowing that God wanted Jacob to be the one who was blessed?

Leader’s Note: Some might feel that the end justified the means in this case. After all, it is pretty difficult to think of anything else they could have done to save the day. A student asked a professor of Old Testament that question: “What else could they have done?” The professor replied simply, “They could have prayed.”

Q Name some ways that Christians today manhandle circumstances or people to get God’s blessing.

➢ What consequences do Christians who do these kinds of things experience?

Q God’s blessing on Jacob is expressed in vv.27–29, and more fully in 28:3–4. What promises make up the spiritual birthright of the Christian? What blessings come with our new birth in Christ?

Leader’s Note: Abundant life (John 10:10); everlasting life (John 3:16); sins forgiven and forgotten (Psalm 103:10–12); a new identity as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9); the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9); a family in the church (Ephesians 2:22); power over the devil (1 John 4:4); peace of mind and heart (Philippians 4:7); the privilege of coming to God our Father boldly in prayer (Hebrews 4:15-16); the word of God in Scripture and in Christ (2 Timothy 3:16; John 1:1).

Teaching point two: When God has promised to bless you, he will relentlessly pursue you.

So Jacob fled his home in Beersheba with only the clothes on his back and his walking stick. He was heading for Paddan-Aram, some 500–600 miles to the northeast, where he hoped to find his mother’s family. It was wild country, and he must have been terrified that Esau was hot on his heels. He finally collapsed at a place north of what would eventually be Jerusalem. Read what happened in Genesis 28:10–22.

Q Imagine you are writing this story as a novel, and you had just described Jacob’s deceit in stealing God’s blessing and his escape from his murderous brother. You are now
writing of how Jacob sleeps and has a dream of stairs, with angels going up and down. God speaks from the top of the stairs. What do you think you would have had God say if you had never read this account?

**Leader’s Note:** Most of us would have expected God to condemn Jacob. It is hard to imagine that God would be this kind, this gracious. There’s not a hint of displeasure. Surely a good scolding would have been in order. Maybe even a revocation of the blessing, given Jacob’s underhanded way of getting it. God’s grace here is almost jarring; it seems almost ... well, too good to be true!

Jacob seems to have thought he’d stumbled upon the one place on Earth where God had a portal—God’s secret stairway into our world. But, of course, the stairway from heaven was there because Jacob was there, and God was with Jacob.

**[Q]** Before we even look at what God said, what did this dream communicate to Jacob?

- Are any of these things true for us? How do you know?

**Leader’s Note:**

- **God has a stairway, as it were, to us. He has direct access. Jesus himself is our ladder (which many think was Jesus' meaning in John 1:49–51). Jesus brings God's presence right to where we are (Hebrews 4:15–16).**
- **God’s angels travel his stairway to your life (Psalm 91:11–12; Hebrews 1:14).**
- **God himself watches over you (Psalm 139:1–3, 7–10).**

Now look more closely at what God said in vv. 13–14. Here God repeats the promises he made to Abraham, and that Isaac passed on to Jacob. Each of these promises to Jacob ultimately found fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and then came to us as believers. However, let us focus on God’s great and timeless promise in v. 15: “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land.” God made this promise of his presence many times in the Bible, for example in Isaiah 43:1–2 and in Matthew 28:20.

**[Q]** Recall specific times when God’s promise to be with you was especially precious.

**[Q]** How do people who really trust this promise live life differently from other people?

**[Q]** God promised Jacob that he would eventually bring him back home to the Promised Land. God makes an even greater promise to us when he promises us heaven (John 14:1–4). What is one reason that promise from God is meaningful to you?

**Teaching point three: Sooner or later, we will all face a dark night of wrestling with God over his blessing.**

Teresa of Avila was a saintly woman living in Spain in the 1500s. Once, when she was traveling, she was miserably ill, it was raining, and the river she had to cross was swollen and dangerous. The story is that she looked disgustedly toward the sky and said, “Lord, if this is how you treat your friends, it is no wonder you have so few of them!”

The next 20 years of Jacob’s life were like that. God was blessing him, but there seemed to be no end of hassles. He found his way to his mother’s brother, Laban, but Laban spent the next...
20 years doing his level best to outfox Jacob at every turn. Jacob was reaping what he had sown. He ended up married to Laban’s two daughters, but they feuded bitterly and relentlessly. Eventually, they and their two servants bore Jacob 11 sons and a daughter—the beginning of God’s promised blessing that he would be the father of a great nation. Then, true to his word, God blessed Jacob with great prosperity—at Laban’s expense. When Laban and his sons grew angry, God told Jacob it was finally time to head for home. Now all that stood between Jacob and the land God had promised him was his brother and nemesis, Esau. At least, that’s what Jacob thought. Little did he know that the great conflict before him would not be with Esau, but with God himself.

Read Genesis 32:22–32.

This strange story turns out to be one of the most important stories in the Bible. It is the story of how the nation of Israel got its name, and is a picture of their entire history in a nutshell. More than that, it is a story that defines all God’s people. This is our story as Christians—each of us and all of us.

The “man” Jacob wrestled with was no ordinary man. He was an angel—perhaps one of those angels Jacob had seen ascending and descending in his dream of God’s staircase. Or perhaps he was God himself appearing in human form (a theophany), for Jacob would say when it was over, “I saw God face to face.”

Surely this wrestling match wasn’t about muscle, for even the lowliest angel could have immediately pinned Jacob.

**[Q]** What were these two fighting for? What was the prize?

**Leader’s Note:** This is the crux of the story. This wrestling match wasn’t about physical strength. It was a battle of wills. Read Hosea 11:12–12:6, the Bible’s own commentary on this passage. Hosea likens the rebellion of the Israelite nation in his own day to the stubbornness of their forefather Jacob. Verse 4 says, “He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.” Verse 6 says that the nation should do what Jacob did that dark night: “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.” That is the very definition of repentance. So Jacob was wrestling with God over repentance. This was not a battle of muscle, but a battle of wills. The man who was born gripping the heel of his brother, now wouldn’t let go of God!

Proverbs 11:29 says, “He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind.” That is exactly what Jacob feared he would inherit—nothing but the wind—because the next day he would face his brother Esau, whose murderous anger he had fled 20 years before. Jacob feared that Esau would kill all his family and seize his flocks, and then kill Jacob himself. He saw, perhaps for the first time, how all his conniving to get God’s blessing had brought him to this dark and lonely night with the prospect of losing everything. When Jacob realized in the midst of the wrestling match that he had been ambushed by God himself, he knew this was his last chance. If God left him, he would have nothing. Hosea makes clear that Jacob wept and begged for God’s favor.

**[Q]** Have you ever wrestled long with the Lord? What was that experience like for you? What were you wrestling for?
The man says a strange thing in response to Jacob’s plea for his blessing in verses 27–29. What was the Lord doing in this exchange?

**Leader’s Note:** Jacob’s name meant something like Trickster or Deceiver. Esau had said in Genesis 27:36, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times ...” That was the very reason why the coming day was so frightening to Jacob—the time had come for him to face the consequences of his life. But God gives him a new name. Israel is best translated “God prevails,” yet the man seems to turn the meaning the other way: “because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” It is all a matter of how you look at it. Jacob surely had struggled with people—his father and brother, his uncle and his wives—and now he had wrestled with the Lord himself, and in the end Jacob would have the blessing he had long sought. He had overcome. But from another perspective, it was God who had wrestled Jacob into the blessing he could have so easily forfeited. Despite all Jacob’s faults and faithlessness, God’s grace was too great to let him go.

If you had a name that described your character or personality before God fixed his love on you, what might it be?

- Would the name Israel, God Prevailed, be a good name for you now? Why or why not?

How does Jesus fit into this story as it applies to our lives? How is our story different from Jacob’s because of Christ?

**Leader’s Note:** Just as Jesus was the second Adam, so he is also the second Israel. He wrestled with God, but on our behalf. He wrestled with God in Gethsemane and was forsaken by his Father on the Cross. Rather than being blessed, he was cursed for our sake and in our place. God’s blessings are ours because of Jesus.

**Optional Activity:** On a sheet of paper map or chart the contours of your life with God—the times of rebellion or scheming, the times of God’s clear blessing, and the times when you wrestled with the Lord. Share your life map with one of the others in your group.

**PART 3**

**A Man’s Work**

Jacob called that lonely place by the river Peniel, meaning “Face of God.” The next day he met Esau, and was astonished to find that Esau welcomed him warmly. God was indeed blessing him. Not long after, Jacob fulfilled an old promise and returned to Bethel, the place where he had the dream of the stairway from God. There he built an altar to God “who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone” (Genesis 35:3).

Near the end of his life, Jacob gathered all his sons around him and blessed each of them with promises about their future. In particular, he blessed Joseph’s two sons: “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth” (Genesis 48:15–16).
And it was that faith—faith that trusted God for the far future of his sons—that is commended to us in Hebrews 11:21: “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.”

When God steps into someone’s life, he is in it for the long haul. God often takes a long, long time to bestow on us his best blessing—a deep trust in his love and faithfulness. We often think these stories point to Jacob’s sly and tricky ways, but the fact is, these stories show forth the God Who Prevails, not by force, but by grace.

Sometimes the God-blessed life is not the life you would have chosen. What are some ways you’ve learned that lesson?

Frederick Buechner wrote about this story in a book called The Magnificent Defeat. In it he writes, “Power, success, happiness, as the world knows them, are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, joy, are only from God. And God is the enemy whom Jacob fought there by the river, of course, and who, in one way or another, we all of us fight—God, the beloved enemy. Our enemy because, before giving us everything, he demands of us everything; before giving us life, he demands our lives—our selves, our wills, our treasures.”

Action Point: At first, Jacob and Esau both wanted God’s blessing because they wanted the temporal benefits—prosperity, peace, and a prominent family. Esau never wanted anything more; the Bible says, “Esau despised his birthright.” Gradually Jacob came to understand that God’s best blessing was his presence and grace, and the hope of a glorious future. Read Jacob’s blessing on Joseph’s sons in Genesis 48:15–16 again. Then write your own paraphrase of that blessing—perhaps for your own children, or for a spiritual son or daughter. Share what you’ve written with someone else in your group.

Study by Lee Eclov, Sr. Pastor, Village Church of Lincolnshire, Lake Forest, Illinois

Additional Resources


1 HarperOne, 1985, p. 18.
Jacob

A man who manipulated everyone but God.

When Isaac prayed for a child (Genesis 25:21), he got twice as much as he bargained for—Esau and Jacob. Both were troublemakers. Jacob, the “heel grabber,” showed his wily character early as he tried to beat his twin out of his mother’s womb. Esau, “Big Red” (Genesis 25:25, 30), was so spiritually insensitive that he gave up his birthright for a bowl of spicy stew (Genesis 25:29–34; Hebrews 12:16).

Even though Jacob’s brains outfoxed Esau’s brawn, the trade-off symbolized the values of each brother. Not only did Jacob scheme for Esau’s birthright (Genesis 25:29–34), but he also stole his blessing (Genesis 27:25–29). Genesis 27 describes a classic dysfunctional family—a compliant father (Isaac), a conniving mother (Rebekah), a careless son (Esau), and a conning son (Jacob). And each parent played favorites.

While Esau was out stalking prey (Genesis 27:5), Jacob was indoors stalking prey. He fooled his feeble father in every sense. He cheated Isaac’s sight (27:23), taste buds (27:14), touch (27:21–23), hearing (27:22), and smell (27:27). One day Jacob would be conned by his sons into believing his favorite son was killed by wild animals. He would be deceived by goat’s blood (Genesis 37:31–34), just as he had fooled his father with goat’s meat (27:14) and goat skins.

When Esau found out he had been outsmarted, he went after his brother to kill him. Jacob was forced to run four hundred miles away. He would never again see his mother alive.

While away from home, the fugitive met God (Genesis 28:10–22), his wife-to-be (Genesis 29:9–14), and Uncle Laban. Jacob loved Rachel at first sight (Genesis 29:18), but his future father-in-law proved to be more than his match. After working seven years for his bride, Jacob discovered in a pitch-black tent that Laban had deceived him by giving him the older Leah rather than her sister. Jacob had to work seven more years for Rachel.

Jacob returned to Bethel, where he had made a deal to worship God if God would protect him and bring him back to his father. What’s your response when God says to you: “Go back to what you heard and believed at first; ... turn to me again” (Revelation 3:3)? Like Jacob, will you return to Bethel to see Christ, the ladder that extends up to heaven?
“Romeo and Juliet, Samson and Delilah, Baby, You can bet their love they didn’t deny, Your words say split but your words they lie, 'Cause when we kiss, Fire,” Bruce Springsteen and the Pointer Sisters sang. Classic song, but sad evidence that the Bible character Samson is remembered more for his lustful passions than his divine calling, leadership, or faith. You don’t know whether to cheer, laugh, or cry when you read the story of Samson. In the end it’s a cautionary tale. But the one thing that’s louder and clearer than Samson’s failures is God’s grace. Whew! This study will explore the marks of Samson’s life: fearlessness, failure, and faith.

Men of Integrity Lesson #2

Scripture:

Based on:
The profile on Samson from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
PART 1

A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article “Samson: A man of extreme strength and weakness” from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible, included at the end of this study.

C’mon, let’s be honest now: How exactly did Samson make it into the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11? His story reads like that of some scandalous high profile “man of God” that we’ve become too accustomed to hearing about. Except that Samson didn’t hide his lustful appetites.

The Book of Judges declares about Israel, “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25, NASB). This seems to apply to Samson, too, even though he had a divine call upon his life. He was “… set apart to God from birth, [to] begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines” (Judges 13:5). The Spirit of God stirred Samson up to fearless feats of strength involving roaring lions, donkey jawbones, combustible foxes, and structural demolition that left thousands of Philistines dead. You can see why he led Israel for 20 years. In the end, though, clever and strong Samson would be undone by the female company he kept. His lust and uncontrolled passions left him blind, shackled, weak, and shamed in the hands of the Philistines. Can you find the metaphor in that? This could have been curtains for Samson’s story, but God performed an encore act of grace in response to Samson’s prayer—an act of grace that worked justice and even restored some dignity. In the end, Samson’s story—like all stories—is the story of God’s sovereign grace. And we can breathe a collective sigh of relief.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What do you think of when you hear the name Samson?

[Q] What stories of extreme giftedness and moral failure have you witnessed? Do the two seem to go together? Why or why not?

[Q] How does the story of Samson affect you? In what ways are you like Samson?

[Q] What does the story of Samson tell you about God? Why would God use him?

[Q] What would your church do with a leader like Samson?

PART 2

A Man’s Word

Teaching point one: Fearless leadership comes from God’s calling and empowerment.

“Our fearless leader” is usually said with a snicker, isn’t it? It’s a phrase that’s often attached to bumbling or waffling people in authority. But the very existence of the phrase shows our longing for leaders who take risks and step out boldly for the good of others. That kind of fearless leadership flows from confidence in God’s call and resources.

[Q] What must it have been like for Samson to know that he was set apart for God’s purposes before his birth? What kind of upbringing would his parents have given him in light of that knowledge?

**Leader’s Note:** You can find out more about the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:1–21.

[Q] What do you think of when you hear the word “deliverance” (13:5)?

➢ How does Samson’s life parallel Jesus’ life?

[Q] What are Samson’s admirable qualities in these passages?

[Q] Samson acts boldly and without fear against the Philistines in chapter 15. Where does this fearlessness come from?

[Q] What is your reaction to Samson’s actions in chapter 15? At least one of the acts is empowered by the Holy Spirit. What does this chapter tell you about God? His judgment?

[Q] What does the prayer in Judges 15:18–19 tell you about Samson and his relationship with God?

[Q] Why did people follow Samson for so long (15:20)?

[Q] Samson’s deadly use of a jawbone is in reaction to the Philistines’ oppressive rule over Israel (15:11). In what ways has God called and empowered you for leadership, especially for those who are oppressed or in need? Who needs to be “delivered”? From what and to what?

**Teaching point two:** Failure to exercise self-control will leave us powerless.

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls,” says Proverbs 25:28 (ESV). Too true. Make a mental list of all the leaders you can think of who have been demolished by a lack of self-control. Scary, isn’t it? We shake our heads, but know deep down that it wouldn’t take much for us to be in the same spot. Cautionary tales serve to help us inspect our own lives for cracks.

Read Judges 16:4–22.

[Q] Samson ends up blind in this passage. In what ways was he spiritually blind even before he lost his eyesight? What was his failure?

[Q] Do we judge Samson too harshly in light of his culture? Why or why not?

[Q] What did he see in Delilah? What was her motivation to be with him?

[Q] Why does Samson toy with Delilah like he does? And why does he finally give in? At what point do you think he knew the end of the story?
When do you toy with temptation? What keeps you from giving in?

What does it say about Samson’s condition that “he did not know that the Lord had left him” (v. 20)? Would you know if the Holy Spirit had left you? What would be different?

What would it have been like if Samson had lived up to his full potential?

In what ways is giving into temptation like being ensnared, blind, shackled, and humiliated (v. 21)?

What’s the lesson here for the church? For you? What kind of help do you need from your small group and/or church?

Optional Activity: On a 3x5 card, make a list of all you could lose due to a lack of self-control in the area of lust, anger, or whatever. Share it with your small group. Then, on the back of the card, write out Proverbs 25:28. Tape it on your bathroom mirror or stick it in your wallet as a reminder.

Teaching point three: Faith in God’s grace can redeem our story.

Google the lyrics for Steve Taylor’s song “The Finish Line.” In it he uses the metaphor of a track event to tell the story of someone who starts out strong in the Christian race and then falters. The focus then swings to the sidelines, where observers are writing off the runner as a hypocrite—a pastime for us Christians sometimes. But to the amazement of the observer, the race is not over: “I rose to my feet when you scaled the last wall / And I gasped / When I saw you fall / In his arms / At the finish line.” We must remember that because of God’s grace we can’t dismiss others. The story may not be over yet. And we shouldn’t count ourselves out either. Thank God.


Is this a sad story? A story of victory? A bad joke? Where would you file the story of Samson at a video store?

How did God fulfill the plan for which he had set Samson apart? Do you think Samson understood his calling? Why or why not?

What do you think was going through Samson’s mind as he reviewed his life in the final moments?

How could Samson pray so boldly in light of his failure (Judges 16:28)?

What does his prayer tell you about his relationship with, or understanding of, God?

In what ways does God redeem Samson in this final act?

How does Samson make it into the hall of faith in Hebrews 11? Can we hold on to our sin and still be faithful in God’s eyes?
![image]

**[Q]** How does the description in Hebrews 11:32–40 fit Samson? What does the description tell you about the nature and desire of faith? The worth of God?

**[Q]** What do you desire to be the final chapter of your story? What steps do you need to take with God today in order to get to that point in the future?

**[Q]** What will be your final prayer to God?

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## PART 2

### A Man’s Work

“[Samson] killed many more when he died than while he lived” (Judges 16:30). God brings Samson’s story full circle. From chosen deliverer of Israel to champion—albeit a deeply flawed champion—of Israel, even in death. God fulfills his purposes. Thus Samson’s story is really a story of God’s sovereignty and grace. When we are able to see this truth, by faith, we can be fearless leaders and redeemed failures before God. For our good and his glory.

**[Q]** What is your response to the life of Samson? What challenged you most? What difference will it make in your life?

**[Q]** What does the story of Samson tell you about your God?

### Action Points:

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” One of the marks of Samson’s life was fearless leadership for the benefit of others. As a small group, pray. Discuss people who might need your help—across the street or across the world. Discuss the fears and hurdles you have in reaching out. Then, consider God’s calling, his empowerment, and your gifts. To what kind of risky service is God calling your group? Make a practical plan to flex your muscles as a group on behalf of the lost, the poor, the oppressed, and so on.

A glaring mark of Samson’s life was his unchecked lust. And that is certainly a mark of our culture and definitely a struggle for today’s Christians. How long has it been since you asked the folks in your small group or church about their sexual purity? Build some time into your small group, on a regular basis, for accountability. Ask the questions. Share some cautionary tales and some victories. Allow for times of confession. You may even consider doing a study on sexual addiction, sexual purity, etc. with your group. You can go to ChristianBibleStudies.com and XXXchurch.com for more resources.

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*Study by Kyle White, director of neighborhouse.org, a ministry to at-risk students in DeKalb, Illinois*

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Visit SmallGroups.com and ChristianBibleStudies.com
Additional Resources:

- [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)  
  - Men of Integrity Series  
  - Confronting Sexual Addiction

- [XXXchurch.com](http://XXXchurch.com)


- *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*, Nate Larkin (Thomas Nelson, 2007; ISBN 9780849914591)


Samson
A man of extreme strength and weakness

Samson killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.
Judges 16:30

The Bible never tells us that Samson looked like Hulk Hogan; he may have looked more like Woody Allen. His strength was a secret until “the Spirit of the LORD powerfully took control of him” ( Judges 14:6). Samson’s superhuman strength came from God. Four times the Spirit took control of Samson. With his bare hands, Samson ripped apart a lion’s jaws. He killed 1,000 men with a donkey jawbone (15:14–16). And he set 300 foxes on a fiery rampage through Philistine fields to destroy their crops (15:3–5).

Samson, a man of muscular feats, also had moral defeats, largely due to his whopping weakness for women. He married his first love, though she was a Philistine (Judges 14:3). At the bachelor party, Samson challenged his bride’s friends with a riddle (14:8–15). It so stumped them that his wife, under pressure, nagged him for the answer (14:17). When she snitched, Samson paid off her friends by giving them the clothes of thirty Philistines he killed (14:19). Then he went back to live with Ma and Pa.

A gal from Gaza conquered the strong man next. While spending the night with her, Samson found himself locked inside the city gates, courtesy of the city fathers. So he picked up the gates and dumped them about forty miles away (Judges 16:3). Good-bye, Gaza girl.

Delilah was more than a one-night stand (Judges 16:4–20). Her charms were deadly, however. She worked on Samson until she found the secret of his strength. He let down his hair to a woman, and she chopped it off. The human colossus was reduced to a sideshow freak minus his hair, eyes, strength, and dignity.

In grace, God brought triumph out of tragedy. Propped against the posts of the Philistine temple, Samson brought the house down with his bare arms. The central columns of the temple collapsed, crushing thousands of Philistines. As Judges 16:30 says, “He killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime.”

Like Samson, we must submit God’s gift of sex to God’s Spirit. If we don’t, a few minutes of fun might squander the potential of a lifetime.

The profile on Samson from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
It takes courage to speak the truth and say what must be said—especially when no one else stands with you. Standing for God and answering his call sometimes brings self-doubt, pain, and persecution.

Unique among the biblical prophets for his transparency and self-revelation, Jeremiah shows us how to find a meaningful relationship with God, how to find strength in a transformed heart, and how to endure despite a world filled with pain and suffering.

Men of Integrity Lesson #3

Scripture:
Jeremiah 1:1-19; 12:1-4; 31:31-37

Based on:
The profile on page 905 of the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
PART 1

A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article “Jeremiah: A Man Who Feared but Was Faithful” from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible, included at the end of this study.

Read Jeremiah 1.

When thinking of Old Testament prophets delivering scathing speeches of doom and gloom, we imagine them as bigger-than-life, wild-eyed men with thundering voices just inches from a meltdown. But when God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, he was a mere boy, still searching for his identity.

Jeremiah knew he didn’t have what was required for prophet-hood. After all, if you’re going to deliver doom-and-gloom speeches to nations and kings, it helps to have the voice of James Earl Jones, the eloquence of Winston Churchill, and the cock-eyebrow of Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. Right?

“Nonsense!” God says. “From now on, you’re like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. Even though everybody else will be against you, they won’t win—because I’m with you, and I will rescue you” (see 1:6–8, 18, author’s paraphrase, emphasis added).

From Jeremiah’s view, God had the wrong guy. But God had big plans and had laid the foundation for those plans before Jeremiah was even born.

Jeremiah became the remarkable man God planned for: far from being wild-eyed, he was tenderhearted. Crunchy outside but soft inside, he was at once a fierce patriot and a weeping prophet. Though not always happy with his circumstances, he was even unhappier being silent (20:9).

Discussion starters:

[Q] Consider the adage, “God equips those he calls.” If true, why does God work this way? What would happen if God only called the equipped?

[Q] What other biblical examples show God calling his people to do jobs beyond their ability?

Leader’s Note: Consider any of the following: Moses’ speechlessness (Exodus 4:10), David’s youth (1 Samuel 16:3–16), Amos’ lack of education (Amos 7:14–15), and Mark’s desertion—the person many believe gave us the Gospel of Mark (Acts 15:35–41).

[Q] God calms Jeremiah with his presence: “I am with you and will rescue you.” He also says he made Jeremiah a “fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall.” Why did God make these specific promises? Why are they important? What does this say about the character God formed in Jeremiah?

[Q] What does this passage teach about finding and following God’s will?
[Q] Read Jeremiah 1:5. What does it mean for you that God knew Jeremiah before he was born? Does God also have a similar plan for you? How can we know what God has set us apart for?

PART 2
A Man’s Word

Teaching point one: The right career won’t give me meaning, but the right relationship will.

When God calls Jeremiah, the future prophet offers two objections: his lack of age, and his lack of skills. But Jeremiah already has the one thing he needs to succeed: a relationship with his creator. Through that relationship he can tap into a wellspring of meaning, purpose, perseverance, strength, and hope that will carry him through the darkest nights.

In Searching for God Knows What, Donald Miller describes his own boyhood search for identity:

I’ve always been the kind of guy who likes to be seen as smart. It’s not as bad as it sounds because I don’t go around saying all kinds of smart-guy stuff to make other people feel like jerks or anything; it’s just that I was never very good at much of anything else. You know, like I would try basketball for a while, and when I was a kid I played soccer and tennis, but I was never very good at any of that. And then I learned to play the guitar, but got very bored because what I really wanted was to be a rock star, not to actually play the guitar.

So about the time I told God he didn’t exist, I was desperate for an identity.

While this was taking place in my life, I happened to attend a lecture by the chairman of the American Debate Team, who was about 25 or so, and there were a lot of girls in the audience because he was very rich and good-looking. The people at the school were going to videotape him talking about China or something, but the video camera was having trouble. The chairman of the American Debate Team had to stand on the stage for about 20 minutes with his hands in his pockets like an idiot, so what he did while he was standing there was recite poetry. I’m not making this up; this guy recited about a million poems, such as Kipling’s The Vampire and parts of Longfellow’s The Song of Hiawatha.

He was very good at it and said the poems with the right spacing so it sounded like he was speaking beautiful spells, and all the girls in the audience were falling out of their chairs on account of their hearts were exploding in love for him. So then the people at the school got the camera working and the chairman of the American Debate Team gave his lecture about China, but the whole time I was sitting there, I wasn’t thinking about China; rather, I was wondering how I could get my hands on some poetry books and start memorizing them right away, on account of how much the girls liked it when the chairman of the American Debate Team recited poems. What I really began to ponder, I suppose, was whether or not coming off as a smart guy who knows poems could be my identity, could be the thing that made me stand out in life.

Now I didn’t realize it at the time, but I would come back to this moment much later in life and realize something very important about myself—namely, that I felt something missing inside myself, some bit of something that made me feel special or important or valued. This thing missing inside me, I realized, is something God would go to great length to explain in his
Like Jeremiah, Donald Miller found his calling by discovering a relationship with God.

**Q** How would you describe Jeremiah’s relationship with God when he’s called to be a prophet?

**Q** Why is the idea of “meaning” important to discerning one’s calling? What is Jeremiah’s source of meaning? What became Donald Miller’s source of meaning?

**Q** Frederick Buechner wrote, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” How is it possible to answer God’s call, find gladness, and yet still suffer?

**Q** What are the signs someone lacks a sense of meaning or calling? What signs do you see in Donald Miller’s story? What reveals Jeremiah’s lack of meaning and identity?

**Optional Activity:** Ask everyone to write down on one side of a piece of paper everything and anything that provides a sense of purpose and meaning in their life. Keep it quick and fun, and after a couple minutes, ask everyone to circle the one or two things that provide their greatest sense of purpose.

Then turn the paper over and ask everyone to imagine his own funeral. Ask, “What will your closest friends and family remember you for? What kind of character do you want them to describe? Of your life, dreams, hopes, and aspirations, what will remain? At the very least write down what you would hope your children or family might say. “

Finally, ask for volunteers to share insights they gained in these two exercises. Did their sense of what gives them meaning survive both portions of the exercise? Did it change? Ask for volunteers to share what they want their mourners to say about them. Is there a common theme? How often do relationships show up in the purpose statements? Of all the things that give us a sense of meaning, which ones can we take with us into eternity?

### Teaching point two: God is with me, even when I suffer.

Read Jeremiah 12:1–4.

If God is all-good and all-powerful, why is there pain?

In the Old Testament, few suffered as deeply as the men and women God called to serve as judges and prophets. Jeremiah was no exception. Called “the weeping prophet,” he knew his share of pain, affliction, and rejection (9:1–10; 13:17; 14:17). Betrayed by his family and cursed by his countrymen, even Jeremiah’s friends anticipated his failure (9:10; 12:6; 20:10). He was beaten and shackled (20:2), given a death sentence (26:11, 38:4), and left to die in a muddy well (38:6). Ridiculed, ignored, and contradicted, he longed for vengeance (9:15; 10:15–16; 13:17; 16:17–20; 19:1; 20:1; 21:11–16; 22:11; 23:17; 26:11, 38:4).  

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12:3) and complained bitterly. Forbidden to mourn, rejoice, or even marry (16:2,5,8), Jeremiah felt certain his pain was incurable and would never end (9:18).

It’s no surprise then that he openly questioned God’s justice and wondered why evil people enjoy reward while the good suffer. Does God want us to suffer? Jeremiah even wonders if God offers false hope: “Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?” At his worst, Jeremiah simply wished he had never been born (20:14–18).

From our perspective, God can seem like a mean kid sitting on an anthill with a magnifying glass. But this view forgets that God suffers on our behalf. He bears all our suffering, pain, sin, and shame in the person of Jesus Christ.

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright related a moment she shared with Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Eli Wiesel. While serving on a panel with Albright, Wiesel asked his peers to name the unhappiest character in the Bible. Albright relates:

“Some said Job, because of the trials he endured. Some said Moses, because he was denied entry into the Promised Land. Some said the Virgin Mary, because she witnessed the Crucifixion of her son.

“Wiesel said he believed the right answer was God, because of the pain he must surely feel in seeing us fight, kill, and abuse each other in the Lord’s name.”

Jeremiah understood this. In Jeremiah’s view, only the God who knows us before we are born can love his people for all eternity with a love that never, ever ends (1:5; 31:3). The very thing that gave Jeremiah the strength and purpose to endure his own trials is the very thing that gives hope to all nations: the reality of a relationship with an intimate creator.

In *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl observed that those who survived in concentration camp conditions all shared one trait: a sense of purpose. Frankl wrote, “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how.’”

How did Jeremiah come to his sense of purpose and meaning? (See chapter 1) How does the promise of God’s new covenant answer the question of “why?”

What gives you a sense of purpose and meaning? How do your own hopes and dreams connect with your sense of purpose? Do they give you a sense of meaning, or are they unrelated?

How have you endured times of trial and suffering? What examples of others making it through difficulties have inspired you?

What do you think would be some of the consequences if believers never suffered? What would be the consequences if nobody ever suffered despite the nature of sin and the human heart?

**Teaching point three: God’s love for me never ends.**

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34.

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In *Marriage by the Book*, Bob Russell retells a conversation Gordon Clinard once shared with a truck-stop waitress who sported a tattoo on her arm that read, “Charlie.” Curious, he asked her about it.

“How’s Charlie?”

She said, “Pardon?”

He said, “How’s Charlie?”

“Oh,” she said, “that. Well, that was years ago and I was high and it was night and... You know, I haven’t seen him since.” But then she went on to say, “But you know, I’m married to a wonderful man named Richard. We’ve been married for ten years, and he’s great.”

Clinard said, “What does Richard think about Charlie?”

She said, “Oh — you know — from the first time I explained it, he’s never mentioned it again. I don’t think he even sees it anymore.”

God loves us with a love that never ends. And in his love, God’s forgiveness erases all memory of it (31:34).

This is the promise that gives Jeremiah hope, meaning, and a purpose to live and die for. Jeremiah knew with great pain that the human heart is fickle, but that God provides the cure: he will write his law on our hearts and minds (31:33). Then we will no longer be fickle and adulterous in our relationship with him; we will be his people and he will be our God.

**Q** What does it mean to say that the law of God will be written on your heart? We know it doesn’t mean that we’ll be sinless. Does it mean you’ll be able to obey better? Does it mean you will be more holy and godly? Explain.

**Q** Devout Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus follow rigorous and disciplined faith practices—often making Christian discipline look anemic by comparison. If the law of God is written on believers’ hearts and minds, why aren’t we better at living holy lives? What role does grace play in this new covenant?

*Leader’s Note:* Consider Jesus’ words, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17, see also Matthew 9:12 and Luke 5:31). Unlike many religious, Christianity recognizes that the human condition is fallen and prone to sin. As Dallas Willard wrote in *The Great Omission*, “The true saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff.” Also see Romans 5:20–21.)

**PART 3**

**A Man’s Work**

Jeremiah surely was not the prophet of zipped-up emotions. Far from it, he suffered mightily and felt the freedom to complain about his plight in the strongest of terms. He regretted his birth, he wondered whether God had tricked him into service, he called for vengeance on his...
accusers. Yet, through it all, one thing remained absolutely rock-solid with Jeremiah: his undying reliance on a relationship with God.

But God gave Jeremiah hope: The promise of a new covenant, the promise of unremembered sins, the promise of undying love. And in Jeremiah’s misery, God strengthened him: he made him a stone wall, an iron fortress. But for all his strength, Jeremiah still wept like a baby at the thought of Israel’s rejection of God’s love.

We desperately need men like this at work, at church, and at play. This is the kind of manhood that perseveres, that endures, that stands for God’s truth despite whatever culture, friends, family, or our enemies throw at us. It hurts enough to make us cry when we think nobody’s looking: but when we’re done weeping, we stand firm in God’s embrace and know that we continue in his strength—that he makes us rock hard and strong. That the call to speak the truth, to live the truth, to serve with humility, to love unflinchingly, and to be transformed is hard work and it takes hard, crunchy men with soft hearts to do it.

May God help us be that kind of man.

Action Point: Describe one area where your relationship with God is growing cold due to suffering, misguided priorities, or mental habits that have not yet been transformed. Break into pairs and pray for the other person’s issue and promise to follow-up with them in one month.

Study by Rich Tatum, editor with Zondervan publishers

Additional Resources

- ChristianBibleStudies.com
  - Men of Integrity Studies

Relating to God

- **Man’s Search for Meaning,** Viktor L. Frankl (Beacon Press, 2006; ISBN: 978-0807014295)

The Good News


Jeremiah

Jeremiah
A man who feared but was faithful

If I say I’ll never speak in his name,
his word burns heart like a fire.
JEREMIAH 20:7

The Western world teaches that real men don’t show pain. Jeremiah didn’t go to that school of zipped-up emotions.

Jeremiah was born near the end of the long reign of Judah’s most wicked king, Manasseh. When God called him, Jeremiah answered, for he had planned that Jeremiah would be a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:4–6). He touched Jeremiah’s mouth, put words in it, and ordered him to “stand up against nations and kingdoms” (2:10).

The job wasn’t easy. Israel had already been defeated and carried off into captivity; now it was Judah’s turn. And basically what the prophet told his countrymen was that they had brought destruction on themselves so they should accept it. “You must submit to Babylon’s king and serve him,” he said. “Put your neck under Babylon’s yoke!” (27:8).

People turned on the messenger. The prophet was whipped, put in stocks, stuffed down a well, and condemned to die. Jeremiah didn’t react like a stoic. His book, at times, reads like a personal journal of suffering. “My heart, my heart—I writhe in pain!” he cried when he heard God’s judgment on Jerusalem (4:19). “My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken,” he said as he wept for sinful Judah (8:18). He felt like “a lamb on the way to its slaughter” when he heard plots against his life (11:19). He felt so betrayed that he cursed the day of his birth. “Why was I ever born?” he wailed (20:14).

With friends, countrymen, leaders, priests, and kings conspiring against him, it’s no wonder people began calling Jeremiah “The Man Who Lives in Terror.”

So what kept “the weeping prophet” going? First, his unmistakable call from God. “If I say I’ll never speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire,” Jeremiah said (Jeremiah 20:9). Second, his trust in God. When he stopped questioning God and truly reconciled himself to his role, Jeremiah learned to rejoice in the midst of adversity. “Your words are what sustain me,” retold God. “They bring me great joy and are my heart’s delight” (15:16).

God protected his prophet. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah, he let Jeremiah out of prison, sent him home, and gave him everything he needed (39:9–14).

The profile on page 905 of the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
LEADER’S GUIDE

An Uncommon Obedience

Matthew: Sacrificial choices that changed the world

Of the 12 disciples Jesus called to “follow him,” perhaps none had as much to lose, in a worldly sense, as Matthew. As a tax collector, he was among the wealthier citizens of his day. But the call of Jesus was unconditional. Matthew must leave everything behind—all of his acquired possessions, a lucrative profession, and a position of influence in the political and social arenas. These very achievements are what many of us work hard throughout our lives to obtain. Yet Matthew made the difficult decision to leave it all and follow Jesus. His example serves as inspiration for what can be gained by letting go of earthly pursuits and in turn storing our treasure in heaven.

Men of Integrity Lesson #4

Scripture:

Based on:
The profile on Matthew from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
PART 1

A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with “Matthew: Sacrificial Choices that Changed the World” from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible, included at the end of this study.

Most men who are followers of Christ want their lives to reflect biblical values. But the intention to live a radically obedient life in an age of rampant consumerism is easier said than done. It’s not for lack of insincerity or willpower that we often fail to act in a countercultural manner. Rather, it is simply that we are caught up in tending to the minutiae of our lives—earning a living, paying bills, and saving for retirement. But over time our vision of an obedient life can become so narrow that we only see the particulars and miss the larger picture. Here’s a story that drives home the point.

Experienced customs officers are highly trained to spot characters who might be trying to transport illegal contraband across the border. One day, a particularly conscientious border officer saw a truck driver pulling up to his post. Immediately suspicious, he ordered the driver out and spent an inordinate amount of time searching the vehicle from bumper to bumper, inside and out. But in the end he found nothing.

The next week, the same driver arrives. Again, the same official searches, and again finds nothing illicit. This routine inspection of the same driver continued for years. The customs officer even went as far as performing full body searches, X-rays, and sonar tests to determine how the driver was getting illegal goods across the border. But the searches always ended the same way, with the border official reluctantly waving the driver across.

Then one day, as the customs officer was preparing to retire, the driver again pulled up. By this time the search process was almost a game for both the customs officer and the driver. But the border official confronted the truck driver and said, “Look, I know you’re a smuggler. Don’t bother denying it. But I haven’t been able to figure out what you’re smuggling. I’m retiring from this job today and I promise you that whatever you tell me at this point can’t be used against you. Won’t you please tell me, for my own peace of mind, what you have been smuggling all these years.

The driver looked the border officer straight in the eyes and with a wry smile said, “Trucks.”

Discussion starters:

[Q] Read Matthew 19:21. Putting yourself in Matthew’s (the tax collector) shoes, what would have been hardest for you to leave upon Jesus’ call—possessions, a secure and lucrative job, or the political/social status? Why?

[Q] Do you think any of those three factors currently keep you from being more radically obedient to God? If so, how might they hinder you? If not these factors, are there others that might act as obstacles?

[Q] Would you agree or disagree with the notion that a strong cultural emphasis on consumerism makes it difficult to live a life based more on faith than self-sufficiency? Explain your answer.

[Q] Drawing upon the story of the customs officer, what obvious parts of your life might be overlooked that need attention in order to sharpen your ability to hear God’s voice?

[Q] How would you define your purpose in life?

PART 2

A Man’s Word

Teaching point one: The measure of success is faithfulness, not material gain.

Ask the average businessman if he is “successful” and invariably the question will be interpreted as inquiring about his financial prosperity. The reason: we’ve come to equate success with winning and material gain. We land the deal, increase shareholder value, or buy at a discount. These are worthy accomplishments, but there is more to being a successful man than winning or accumulating possessions. In God’s economy, success is measured primarily by faithfulness to what he has called us to do. Read Joshua 24:14–15.

Former Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield tells of touring Calcutta years ago with Mother Teresa and visiting the so-called “House of Dying,” where sick children are cared for in their last days, and the dispensary, where the poor line up by the hundreds to receive medical attention. Watching Mother Teresa minister to these people, feeding and nursing those left by others to die, Hatfield was overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the suffering she and her coworkers face daily. “How can you bear the load without being crushed by it?” he asked. Mother Teresa replied, "My dear Senator, I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful."

[Q] What first comes to mind when you are asked the question, “Are you successful?”

[Q] What does being “faithful” imply as it pertains to your work and life? Be concrete and specific.

[Q] How much time and energy do you spend trying to measure up to the societal standard of success through winning or the accumulation of material possessions? Where do you think these narrow societal standards come from and how are they continually reinforced?

[Q] Is it difficult for you to feel successful if you haven’t solved a particular problem or been able to bring closure to the situation? If so, why might this be the case?

[Q] What do you think the disciple Matthew struggled with as he contemplated leaving his successful profession as a tax collector to follow Jesus?

[Q] What would be your greatest challenge if you were faced with the same decision as Matthew?
Optional Activity:

Ask each group member to create three evenly spaced columns on a piece of paper. In the first column ask them to write out three different ways they normally equate success with winning or material gain. In the second column, ask them to identify how each item differs from God’s economy of success. In the third column ask them to create a concrete, measurable means of changing their approach to each of the items in column one and doing it in the near future. Then have each member share one of their items with an emphasis on holding each other accountable to putting their plan into action.

Teaching point two: The measure of a good name is character, not social standing

There are many men in society who have reached enviable social status only to be quickly forgotten. Social status these days often has more to do with being a celebrity than character. Do you recognize these names: Owen D. Young, Pierre Laval, Hugh S. Johnson, James F. Byrnes, Mohammed Mossadegh, Harlow Curtis? Most people can’t describe what these men have done to give them an enviable social standing. But all of them were at one time designated Time magazine’s “Man of the Year,” an honor bestowed on those deemed to have the greatest impact in that year of all persons living on Earth. Social status is a public position, but “Character,” as D.L. Moody put it, “is what you are in the dark.” Read Matthew 6:16–18.

Billy Graham is considered by many to be one such person of strong character. “He is one of those rare people who is the same behind closed doors as in public, and ironically it’s his humility that so attracts people to him,” say Jerry Jenkins, who assisted Mr. Graham with his memoir Just As I Am. He gives an eyewitness account of this humility during their time together.

While working together on the book in Florida, Mr. Graham was getting a haircut in the hotel barbershop. The manicurist, seemingly just to make conversation, said, “So what do you do?”

In his inimitable voice and accent, Mr. Graham said, “I’m a preachah.”

“Oh, you’re a preacher,” she said. “I don’t care much for preachers. In fact, the only one I listen to is Billy Graham.”

“You like Billy Graham, do you?”

“Oh, yes. I watch him on television and love to hear him.”

“Well, thank you. I am Billy Graham.”

“Oh,” she said laughing, “you don’t even look like him.”

The barber mouthed to her from behind Mr. Graham, “It’s really him.”

“Oh my God,” she said.

“No,” Mr. Graham said, “but I work for him.”

6 Jerry Jenkins, Writing for the Soul, 2006.
Q: If those who know your work well were asked to describe your reputation, what words might they use?

Q: How important is social standing or esteem to you in your work, community, or church? How would your life be different if you did not hold certain positions?

Q: What cultural forces can you think of that encourage social status over character? What role, if any, does character play in these arenas?

Leader’s Note: If participants are uncertain of how to answer this, suggest some obvious examples such as those seeking celebrity status on American Idol, reality television, Facebook, etc.

Q: What is your interpretation of D. L. Moody’s quote that “Character is what you are in the dark?”

Q: How could character be emphasized more than social standing in your workplace? What could you do to take the lead in modeling this?

Q: How would you describe the character exemplified by Matthew for his decision to follow Jesus and the lifestyle it required?

Teaching point three: The measure of obedience is a willingness to sacrifice and resist the status quo

It is one thing to know the truth and quite another to live it. Some Christian scholars have observed that for many people, modern-day faith increasingly resembles a narrow concern for one’s private beliefs over the obligation to publicly live out one’s convictions. But, this separation between private faith and public works was never part of God’s plan. Read James 2:14–26.

To live out your faith requires sacrifice. It’s the sacrifice of time, wealth, self-indulgence, and safety. Charles Swindoll sums it up well.

The world needs men:
who cannot be bought;
whose word is their bond;
who put character above wealth;
who possess opinions and a will;
who are larger than their vocations;
who do not hesitate to take chances;
who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;
who will be as honest in small things as in great things;
who will make no compromise with wrong;
whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires;
who will not say they do it “because everybody else does it”;
who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as
in prosperity;
who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning, and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning success;
who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth when it is unpopular;
who can say “no” with emphasis, although all the rest of the world says “yes.”

Q Do you split your beliefs from your actions? If so, how does it affect your relationship with God in daily life?

Q How do you interpret the passage from James that says, “…faith without works is dead?”

Q Which line from the Swindoll excerpt above do you find most challenging? Why?

Q Why do you think Swindoll directs his comments to men instead of to both genders? What is unique about a man’s decision to take these positions as an extension of his faith?

Q How well do you think Matthew met the criteria listed above in his choice to become a disciple of Jesus? Which criteria stand out as having been met?

PART 3

A Man’s Work

As D.L. Moody walked down a Chicago street one day, he saw a man leaning against a lamppost. The evangelist gently put his hand on the man’s shoulder and asked him if he was a Christian. The fellow raised his fists and angrily exclaimed, “Mind your own business!”

“I’m sorry if I’ve offended you,” said Moody, “but to be very frank, that IS my business!”

Moody understood well that he would not always receive a welcoming response when telling others about Christ. In fact, history is full of stories of men and women who were martyred for their faith because they made it their business to speak out about God. Matthew and the other disciples paid a similar price. All, save one, died a martyr’s death. But Matthew is perhaps best known for having written the Gospel that bears his name, which ends with the passage we’ve labeled as The Great Commission. Read Matthew 28:16–20.

Action Point:

Write down at least two areas of your life that you identify as needing work along the lines of this study. What risks are you willing to take in order to break out of the status quo and see radical change occur? Who could you share your findings with to hold you accountable to a short-term timetable for implementing your desired changes?

7 Living Above the Level of Mediocrity, 1989.
Additional Resources

- Study prepared by Gary A. Gilles, adjunct instructor at Trinity International University, freelance writer and editor, and a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in private practice.

ChristianBibleStudies.com
- Men of Integrity Course
- Men of the Bible Course
- Acts: How to Have an Eternal Impact


Matthew
A Man Who Witnessed to Friends

Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his
dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors
and many notorious sinners.
Matthew 9:10

As a tax collector, Matthew had a bad reputation. Tax collectors were considered
traitors for
working for the occupation-force Romans. They also were notorious for gouging
the Jews, charging more than the Roman government required and pocketing the
profit.

One day, as Matthew was working at his customs booth near the lakeside, Jesus
came by. “Come, be my disciple,” Jesus said (Matthew 9:9). Matthew was being
recruited for a new kind of collection agency. When Matthew opened his life to Christ,
he said good-bye to a plush past. But he must have been concerned about his buddies,
because he immediately threw a big bash for them and “many other notorious
sinners” so they could meet Jesus and his disciples. Matthew initiated group
evangelism by natural affinity.

Matthew’s name means “gift of God,” and one of Matthew’s gifts to the world was
his Gospel. Since Matthew’s Gospel came from the pen of an accountant, it contains
more language about money than any other Gospel. His is the only Gospel to tell how
Jesus paid the temple tax out of a fish’s mouth (Matthew 17:24-27). Only Matthew
recorded the parable about the man who refused to forgive his debtor (18:21-35) and
the parables of hidden treasures, including the pearl of great price (13:44-46). And
only Matthew showed how God’s pay scale is at odds with earthly standards, for we’re
dealing with a God of grace (20:1-16).

Matthew was also the only Gospel writer to tell about the net that caught all kinds
of fish, good and bad (13:47-50). Like people at the end of the world, the fish were
then separated; only the good were saved. Matthew took that message to heart in his
witness to “notorious sinners.”

Matthew closed his Gospel with the Great Commission, in which Jesus
commanded his crew to “go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).
Matthew not only affirmed friendship evangelism, but the old tax collector gave out
good news for the whole globe.

Matthew Had Been Recruited for a New Kind of Collection Agency.

From the profile on Matthew from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
Civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was known for saying, “Eleven o’clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America.” For many Christians, it can be hard to reach out beyond comfort zones to embrace those who are not much like them—whether it be in race, age, or social or economic status. However, the Book of Acts features one early evangelist who reached across racial barriers to those different from himself, and had great influence. This study will look at the qualities that made Philip the Evangelist successful.
A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with “Philip: A Man Who Reached Across Racial Borders” from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible, included at the end of this study.

Tracy Goen, M.D., was working as a physician in Louisiana when he and his wife heard that Nigeria’s Egbe Hospital had lost its doctor and was about two weeks from closure. They both felt God leading them to serve at this missionary hospital.

When they arrived, most patients at Egbe Hospital were Yoruba, a Christian farming people. Another people group in the area, Islamic cattle-raising nomads called the Fulani, typically did not use the hospital but sought their own traditional healers. Also, the Fulani tended to stay away because of a long and bloody land feud with the Yoruba. Patty Goen told Christianity Today magazine that Christian Yorubas view the Fulani like Jonah did the people of Ninevah: “There was so much animosity, they didn’t even want the Fulani in heaven.”

Early in the Goens’ hospital ministry, a comatose boy was miraculously healed days after his grandfather promised Goen that the doctor could visit their Fulani camp. Then, the parents of a seemingly brain-dead girl brought her to Egbe, saying, “We heard this was a Christian hospital, and there’s power praying in the name of Jesus. We want you to pray she’ll be healed.” After giving the family the bad news that she would not recover, Goen was so shocked by her complete turnaround that he could only write on her chart, “miraculous recovery.”

Word continued to spread among the Fulani of supernatural healings at Egbe hospital. That was just the beginning. In Goen’s six years in Nigeria, intertribal violence between the Fulani and the Yoruba greatly decreased thanks to Goen-orchestrated peace talks. He was invited by Fulani leaders to talk about Christ. The first Fulani school was built. And the Muslim-sensitive Jesus film began to be regularly shown at Fulani cow camps.

In 2004, Fulani King Magaraji honored Goen—known as pollo bodajo or “the white Fulani”—by making him an honorary Fulani king for life.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What most jumps out at you in this story of Tracy Goen’s outreach to the Fulani?

[Q] What can you suppose about the Goens, their ministry, and their faith from this story?


Leader’s Note: In addition to God’s use of miracles, both men’s stories involve people groups who hated one another. From Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan, Christians know the animosity that existed between the Jews and Samaritans. Yet Philip went to tell Samaritans about the Messiah. Philip seemed to gladly witness to his enemies—unlike Jonah in Jonah 1–4. However, God used both men—no matter their attitude—to bring people to him.
[Q] Why do you think God uses miracles to draw people to him?

➢ Other than Acts 8, what examples of this can you think of in Scripture?
➢ Have you personally seen miracles, or unexplained works assumed to be by God, lead people to faith?

[Q] If you have missions or ministry experience, share your experience in cross-cultural evangelism (even in your hometown). What challenges did you face? What triumphs did you see? How did God work?

PART 2

A Man’s Word

According to ancient historians, the first Gentile convert to Christianity was an Ethiopian eunuch who served as a minister of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. Tradition holds that this eunuch was the founder of the Ethiopian Church.

This would not have happened without Philip the Evangelist, who met this Ethiopian minister of finance on a dirt road and led him to Christ. Philip was Christianity’s first cross-cultural evangelist, and in Acts 8:26–40, he demonstrates three key characteristics of successful outreach.

Teaching point one: An evangelist must be open.

Mark Adams, a pastor at Hillside Free Methodist Church in Illinois, gave a sermon on Philip in which he addressed the issue that, typically, the average person is most comfortable with others like him. For instance, he said, white Americans prefer to talk to white Americans. It’s not just a matter of race. Teens typically prefer to spend time with other teens. Blue-collar workers are more comfortable with those in similar fields. This carries over into who believers share Christ with.

Philip, one of the seven chosen by the apostles to distribute food to the needy in the Book of Acts, seems to show great openness to others. After Stephen was martyred, the believers scattered and Philip went to Samaria. Most Jews wouldn’t walk through Samaritan territory or even speak to a Samaritan. This didn’t stop Phillip. While Scripture does not detail what Philip thought of others unlike himself, he seems to have no reservations. In fact, witnessing to Samaritans was just the beginning for Philip.

Read Acts 8:26–30.

[Q] In what ways do you see Philip’s openness in these verses?

Leader’s Note: Other than Philip’s simple obedience to the Holy Spirit, there is not much indication in Acts regarding how he feels about the people he is sent to. However, in verse 30, Scripture says he ran up to the chariot. He was not in the least hesitant.

[Q] What is harder for you: 1) Being open to reaching out beyond your comfort zone to people unlike you; or 2) Being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Explain.
The man Philip met was not just of a different race. He was also a eunuch, a castrated man. He would have undoubtedly had obvious hormonal changes because of that, and Philip would have known that Deuteronomy 23:1 forbids emasculated men from entering the assembly of God. What contemporary people groups might give you pause if the Holy Spirit said, “Go to them and stay with them?” Why would that be hard for you?

Why are humans generally more drawn to those similar to themselves?

Think of your closest friends. How many of them are like you—in terms of life stage, economic status, race, age, political affiliation, etc.? What does this tell you?

In what ways could you be more open to those unlike you (and to the Holy Spirit’s leading, as Philip was)?

If you, like Philip, spend time with “Samaritans and Ethiopian eunuchs,” how do you cultivate these relationships?

If you’ve shared Christ with people different from yourself (at home or on the mission field), how was it different than witnessing to others like you? How was it the same? What did it teach you?

Teaching point two: An evangelist must ask questions—and listen to the answers.

In an article for Intervarsity, writer Shawn Young wrote:

It recently dawned on me (much to my nausea) that I’ve thought of evangelism as a sales job. … The problems with this paradigm are obvious. Jesus is not a product. … Is it my job to “sell” Jesus? Is an evangelist basically a used-car salesman for the Lord?

Jesus wasn’t a slick salesman—he wasn’t selling himself, or the kingdom, or God. … He was giving substance to the indescribable hunger that true seekers have. He was putting words to their deep thirst. He was explaining why they felt strangely drawn to him. As an evangelist, I do not have the responsibility to create a hunger for eternal life. That’s not my job. I am only sent to point people to Jesus, let them hear his words of life, see him as he is, and check for signs of spiritual life.


How would you describe Philip’s “evangelistic method” here?

How do you see Philip doing what Young calls “check[ing] for signs of spiritual life”?

It’s been said that “good evangelism is custom-made.” What does that mean to you?

How does Philip’s method compare or contrast to what Young wrote about Jesus’ outreach?
In what ways have you considered evangelism as a “sales job”? Have you witnessed in ways that you’re now not proud of?

How might this practice of asking and listening be different in cross-cultural evangelism than with those like yourself? Does it become any more or less important with this kind of witnessing? Explain.

You won’t often find a non-believer reading the Bible in a chariot, but what are a few ways you could ask questions to point to Christ?

Teaching point three: An evangelist should be prepared.

In the real life-inspired football movie Invincible, Vince Papale (Mark Wahlberg), is a 30-year-old down-on-his-luck bartender. His life hasn’t gone anywhere since high school football days. While there’s really no reason to—despite his passion for the game—Papale still works out, knows the Philadelphia Eagles football team backward and forward, and plays backyard football constantly.

The years of staying fit and practicing his pigskin skills pay off when new Eagles coach Dick Vermeil makes an unconventional move: He holds open tryouts. Papale tries out and, somehow, this bartender becomes a National Football League player.

Had Vince not been working out and playing football, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity would have passed him by because he wouldn’t have been ready. But his preparation—with no idea that a door would actually open to use it—made all the difference.

Likewise, Philip was prepared for an Ethiopian eunuch on a deserted road to ask specific scriptural questions. And it, too, made all the difference.

Read Acts 8:32–38.

What, in your own words, does Philip do here? What helped Philip witness to the eunuch?

Leader’s Note: For the most part, the key to Philip’s outreach was knowing that the Scripture in question, Isaiah 53, was a prophecy concerning Christ.

Why do you think Acts specifically uses the phrase, “Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture”? What does that say about witnessing to others?

What does “being prepared” for evangelism look like?

Pretend that Philip did not know what Isaiah 53 was referring to. What then?

What is your experience with non-believers or seekers asking spiritual questions? Any examples of encounters you wish you could do over now that you understand faith better? Or times you were able to answer and point toward Christ?

How do you handle seeker’s questions if you don’t know the answers?
On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rank your confidence in being able to answer spiritual questions? What practical steps could you take to increase that confidence?

Optional Activity: As a group, read John 4:1–39. Compare Jesus’ approach to reaching out to the woman at the well with Philip’s approach to the eunuch. If you were critiquing Philip based on how Jesus handled evangelism, what would you suggest or recommend?

PART 3
A Man’s Work

One of the amazing things about Philip’s story in Acts is the result of his work in Samaria and on that dirt road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Of course, he brought people of other cultures to Christ, but look at how the Scriptures describe those touched by Philip: Acts 8:8 reads, “So there was great joy in that city [Samaria],” and 8:39 says the eunuch “went on his way rejoicing.”

This man, in spite of being different from those he spoke to, brought great joy. That’s a key thing for Christians to remember as they make the intimidating choice to leave their comfort zone to talk about Christ: They are not forcing beliefs or selling a product. They bring joy and new life as they “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Action Point: Come up with one way to reach beyond your comfort zone to someone unlike you in the next month. It doesn’t have to be a short-term missions trip to Africa; it could be speaking to that “weird” guy at Starbucks. Record these action steps, and as a group continue to pray that God would use this group to break boundaries like Philip did.

—Study by Todd Hertz, managing editor of Ignite Your Faith magazine

Additional Resources

ChristianBibleStudies.com
-Men of Integrity Course
-Men of the Bible Course

ChristianityToday.com/outreach/

“Witnessing: Philip the Witness,” Pastor Mark Adams
http://www.hillsidefree.com/sermons/philipevangelist.html

“The Missionary King,” Deann Alford (Christianity Today)
http://www.christianitytoday.com/outreach/articles/missionaryking.html

“You don’t have to sell Jesus,” Shawn Young (Intervarsity)
http://www.intervarsity.org/evangelism/article_item.php?article_id=2153

One Thing You Can’t Do In Heaven, Mark Cahill (Biblical Disciples, 2000; ISBN 0964366584)

Let the Nations Be Glad, John Piper (Baker, 2003; ISBN 080102613X)

Philip
A man who reached across racial borders

He met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of Ethiopia.
Acts 8:27

Like Stephen, Philip was chosen to distribute food to needy widows. And like other believers, he fled Jerusalem during the brutal persecution following Stephen’s death. But Philip couldn’t stop testifying about his Savior. He broke racial, ethnic, and gender barriers to do it.

Philip began in Samaria. Though Samaritans and Jews seemingly worshiped the same God, the Jews regarded Samaritans as foreigners and barred them from worshiping in the Temple. Most Jews wouldn’t walk through Samaritan territory, much less speak to a Samaritan.

Yet Philip went to Samaria to tell people about the Messiah. And the Samaritans crowded to hear him, mostly because of the miracles he did, such as casting out evil spirits and healing the lame. Philip also attracted the attention of Simon, a sorcerer, whom Samaritans called “The Great One” but were now bypassing in favor of Philip. In addition to many others, the magician “believed and was baptized” (8:13).

From Samaria, Philip went south of Jerusalem, where he met a man who had traveled 300 miles to worship in Jerusalem. We don’t know how the Jews there treated this eunuch from Ethiopia, but Philip didn’t snub him. When the Ethiopian asked for help with a passage in Isaiah, Philip climbed into the carriage and began explaining how the “sheep led to the slaughter” was Jesus Christ. The eunuch asked to be baptized, and Philip did so. And the encounter between a Greek-speaking Jew and well-educated African became God’s beachhead into Africa.

After meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip went north, where he continued teaching until he came to Caesarea. That’s where we find him about 15 years later, when Paul and others stayed at his house. By that time, “Philip the Evangelist” had “four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy” (Acts 21:9), presumably following in the footsteps of female prophets such as Deborah (Judges 4:4–5) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).

No barrier could dissuade Philip the Evangelist. He broke through all to obey Christ’s command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The profile of Philip from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
LEADER’S GUIDE

A Man of Character

Timothy: A man who modeled his teacher

Paul the apostle trusted no one more than Timothy, a man he called his spiritual son. Yet even though Timothy was well trusted—some would say he had “arrived”—his need to be instructed, disciplined, and encouraged didn’t end with the endorsement of the early church’s most famous and prominent leader.

Men who want their character and life to be transformed and shaped into Christ-likeness have much to learn from Timothy and from Paul’s instructions to him. In this study we’ll consider what Timothy can teach us about trust, studying the Word, teachability, relationships, and models for faith.

Men of Integrity Lesson #6

Scripture:
1 Timothy 4:11-16; 5:1-2, 17-22; 2 Timothy 3:10-4:4

Based on:
The profile on Timothy from the Men of Integrity Devotional Bible (Tyndale, 2002)
A Man’s World

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article, “Timothy: A Man Who Served the Church” from THE MEN OF INTEGRITY DEVOTIONAL BIBLE, included at the end of this study.

Timothy played a special role for the apostle Paul—more than an assistant, far beyond a “gofer” guy, more trusted than even a troubleshooter—he was Paul’s spiritual son and personal ambassador. When the apostle wanted to assure the Corinthians of his fatherly love for them and strengthen their faithful obedience, he sent Timothy:

I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I urge you to imitate me.

That’s why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go. (1 Corinthians 4:14–17, NLT)

Imagine having that kind of trust! Imagine being the kind of man whom the most influential and godly man in church history could point to and say, “Just listen to whatever he says! I trust him implicitly.” If anybody knew Paul intimately, Timothy did. Led to faith and mentored by Paul, Timothy traveled with him, labored alongside him, and suffered with him in prison. And if anybody knew the true character and nature of Timothy, it was Paul. When Paul boasted about Timothy to the Philippians from prison, he wrote:

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But … Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (Philippians 2:20–22)

For Paul, there simply is nobody else like Timothy. Not only is he remarkably humble and truly concerned about others’ welfare (rare character qualities in themselves!), but Timothy is literally “equal-souled” with Paul (“I have no one else of kindred spirit,” 2:20, NASB; the Greek for “kindred spirit” is literally “equal-souled”).

Who are you equal-souled with?

Recent studies have uncovered a disturbing decline of relational trust in America: we have fewer friends to confide in than ever before. In 1985 the average American could share confidences with at least three people. But within 20 years, most of us only had two friends—and one out of four of us have absolutely nobody we are “equal-souled” with.¹⁸¹⁸

Character is formed, proved, and revealed in relationship. No man can be a mentor who is not also a friend, and no friend escapes the influence of his companions. Paul mentored Timothy, Timothy found guidance, and together they became like-minded with Christ even as they became like-minded with each other.

¹⁸ Janet Kornblum, “Study: 25 Percent of Americans Have No One to Confide In,” USA Today, 06/22/06 [viewed 05/10/08].
Discussion starters:

1. Paul refers to Timothy as his “spiritual son,” and it’s clear Paul is Timothy’s mentor. What is it about fatherhood that makes it such a natural mentoring relationship?

2. Many popular movies feature an older, wiser man giving sage advice to a naïve younger man (Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars*, Professor Xavier in *X-Men*, Uncle Ben in *Spider-Man*, Rocky’s Micky, Mr. Keating from *Dead Poet’s Society*, or “Red” from *Shawshank Redemption*). In what ways do you think Paul’s relationship with Timothy was like (or unlike) these famous movie relationships?

3. What makes being both a mentor and a father difficult? Which is easier?

4. Which do you think comes first, the mentor or the disciple? In other words, should mature believers seek out younger believers to mentor, or should they sit back and wait for future disciples to seek them out? How do mentor and disciple get together?

### PART 2

**A Man’s Word**

**Teaching point one: Men of character need to study the Word.**

Read 2 Timothy 3:10–15.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he notes that despite the value of physical exercise, spiritual training is far more important. “Train yourself to be godly,” Paul wrote. “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:7, 16). Reading this, the obvious question is: How? How, exactly, does one get this training, and what standard do we measure our life and beliefs against?

Training implies there is a goal—some point to the exercise and something to measure ourselves against. A runner tracks course times and heart rates to measure improvement. A body builder tracks poundage and recovery times. A swimmer times his laps. In the world of ideas and belief, it’s tempting to measure ourselves against other people’s standards. It’s easy to feel we’re way morally superior to a murderous dictator, and maybe just a wee bit better than that guy at work who cheats on his timecard. Unfortunately (or, rather, fortunately!), we don’t get an easy out like that. We must measure ourselves against the absolute standards of God—his holiness, his character, and his revealed will.

Any other standard of measurement, especially one that’s relative, will lead to destruction. Christian apologist and philosopher Ravi Zacharias illustrates this with the story of an elderly woman on her first flight:

The aircraft she was flying encountered some “moderate” turbulence—a euphemism encouraging the last rites while making us wonder whether even the pilot is still in his seat. Naturally, the poor lady panicked and began screaming. Her despair was so great that, after clearing the turbulence, the pilot stepped out of the cockpit to kneel in the aisle beside her. Pointing outside her window, he asked, “Madam, do you see that light on the end of the right wingtip?”
“Yes,” she stammered.

“No, look through the other window at the left wingtip. Do you see that light out on the left wingtip?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“You know what, Ma’am,” the pilot assured her, “as long as we stay exactly between those two lights you have no reason to worry.”

Unfortunately, as Zacharias notes, using such a self-referential guide is neither safer nor wiser than having no guidance at all. After all, one could stay exactly between both wings and still dive nose first into the ground. What we need in order to measure our standards and grow in maturity is an absolute, unchanging reference outside of ourselves. And that is the standard Paul directed Timothy to. It was a standard Timothy knew and loved from childhood (see 2 Tim. 3:14–15).

But like us, Timothy needed to be reminded to stay grounded in what he knew as a child was true, right, and good. He had been taught by his mother and grandmother to trust the Word of God, not his own intuition. And like many of us, Timothy had to reject his father’s religious example, because his father was an unbeliever (Acts 16:1).

Someone has said, “Character is what you do when no one’s looking.” If we want to be the kind of men who can be trusted to the level that Timothy was—men who can be relied on to do the right thing even when nobody will ever know about it—we must ground ourselves in and be shaped by the Word of God. While Timothy had an advantage that many of us lack, knowing the Scriptures from his infancy (an advantage we would do well to provide our children!), it’s never too late to start.

We must become men of the Word.

Q In an age of information overload, ever-shortening attention spans, longer workdays, and a growing list of church-related activities we must attend, how can one carve out time to spend reading, studying, memorizing, or just thinking about God’s Word? What are some strategies you have used?

Q Why is it so difficult to get men (especially men) engaged in reading the Bible? What are some ways you have approached the Scriptures that have helped make it more engaging?

Q What are some of the best ways fathers can help their children see the Bible as an exciting and life-transforming book?

Q What are some of your most loved and most frequently recited Scripture passages? Why are they so important to you?

Optional Activity: Some of the men in your group have been reading and studying the Bible for years and have a handful of favorite passages they’ve underscored and memorized to help them through difficult and challenging circumstances. Some of the men in your group haven’t cracked a Bible open outside of the Sunday morning sermon. Without embarrassing anyone, ask the men in your group who have favorite Bible passages to

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