

LEADER'S GUIDE

RE-CREATING YOUR MIND
IN A CRAZY CULTURE

SEXUAL
SANITY
FOR
MEN

DAVID WHITE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE // HARVEST USA



Leader's Guide

**SEXUAL SANITY
FOR MEN**

RE-CREATING YOUR MIND
IN A CRAZY CULTURE

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HOW TO LEAD A MEN'S SMALL GROUP ON SEXUAL ISSUES

Although there's certainly benefit in working through this material on your own, the importance of community in helping us overcome our struggle with sin can't be overemphasized. One option is to go through the workbook in a mentoring relationship, but the best context is a small men's group, with no more than twelve men. Limit your meeting time to two hours, and provide a break halfway through the evening. Start and end your meeting on time.

It's crucial for men to know that “what's *shared* in the meeting, *stays* in the meeting.” Confidentiality is essential in order to build trust. Your men won't be open and honest if the group isn't safe. Throughout the material are repeated reminders for you to set the pace for the sharing. If you're not willing to expose your weakness, no one else will either. Your men will follow your lead. (*Important note:* Although confidentiality is crucial, your men need to be aware that sexual behavior with a minor is an exception. It is an illegal offense that must be reported if disclosed.)

This guide is designed so that you can cover one week of material in your two hours together each week. But if you would like to move more slowly, feel free to divide the week into two sections. This way the whole study will take you twice as long—twenty-eight weeks, instead of the scheduled fourteen weeks. In your time together, allow the reflection questions to guide your discussion. Plan to give a brief synopsis of each day's material leading into the reflection questions. Even if you repeatedly encourage your men to work through the lessons each week, many won't. The leader notes for each daily reading contain discussion points to help you walk men through the material. Also, after the leader notes for each section, are the “For Reflection” questions (in italics) and answers. In most cases, you won't have time to discuss all three questions from each day. Pick one or two of the questions that most impacted you that day, or pick the ones you think will be best for your men to wrestle with together.

Challenge your men not to give “Sunday school” answers. Unless they're willing to honestly reveal the places they struggle with doubt, fear,

disappointment, anger, etc., they won't grow. The workbook will repeatedly challenge them to get real with others—and as facilitator, you need to make sure this is happening in your group.

When leading a discussion group, you need to be more like Miles Davis than Mozart. In other words: Be ready to improvise. Some of the questions will reveal places where men are struggling with their faith. You need to trust the Spirit's leading and follow him when the conversation goes off-script—as long as the discussion is profitable for searching and exposing your men's hearts. (But if the discussion moves into airy theological discourse, without any connection to real life, rein it in!) I'm always amazed by the issues God brings to the surface as men work through this material. It is faith-stretching as a leader, training us to listen for God's voice. We risk losing control, but we're used by God in ways we couldn't otherwise imagine.

So if the Spirit's clearly addressing an issue that's outside the scope of a given question, step back and give him room to do his work. Use the facilitator notes and answers to help prompt discussion, or to steer things back on track. And may God take all of you deeper as you work through these issues together.

BEFORE YOU START

Leading a group of sexual strugglers isn't for the faint of heart! But it *is* a place where you'll see God work in powerful ways. Because group ministry can be very intense, it's crucial that you have the necessary support around you.

The first thing you need to remember is: This group isn't primarily for *you*. God will encourage, teach, and bless you as a leader, but this group is not meant to be a place of *direct ministry* for you. Prayerfully examine your heart and life to make sure you're ready to lead. Seek the affirmation of wise and trusted spiritual leaders or mentors who know you well.

Second, you need to have accountability and resources outside the group, including spiritual support and oversight from others. A key way to ascertain your readiness for leadership is whether you already have all the necessary

relationships and accountability in your life prior to beginning the group. Are you walking in the light with others? Is your life marked by sexual and relational integrity?

Attempting to lead a group before you're ready will be detrimental to your own soul and to the men who attend. Again, a leader can't use the group for his own personal healing. If you haven't begun to grow significantly in these areas, leadership will only exacerbate your struggle. You may be tempted to hide behind serving and helping others as a way of avoiding the Lord's dealing with your *own* heart.

GETTING STARTED

First, determine a venue for the group. Often, groups meet off church property to give group members a greater sense of safety and confidentiality. If you decide to meet at church, be sure to take steps to preserve participants' anonymity. For example, don't advertise the location/time/day of the group meeting; meet in an out-of-the-way location; and use a separate entrance to the church building.

Next, decide on the frequency of the group meetings. We have found that it's most effective for the group to meet weekly. If this isn't feasible, provide some additional avenue of support for group members between meetings, such as a check-in phone call or e-mail.

How will men find out about your group? Some people will only feel comfortable attending a group where they'll be anonymous, and therefore they won't attend at their home church. Others will feel comfortable at their own church setting, especially if they know the leader is a "safe person." Either way, it's wise to allow other local churches in your area to be aware of the group, and invite them to refer their members.

Along these lines, we recommend a *modified closed-group format*. This means that new members can't simply walk in off the street and join the group. This curriculum isn't built for a drop-in-when-you-want format. There needs to be a gatekeeper who receives calls from men and meets with them prior to joining the group. Ideally, the gatekeeper helps lead the group and is a

wise lay leader ... not a pastor! No matter how warm, approachable, and safe a pastor may be, men are still intimidated to call him directly and discuss these issues. Members should be ready to commit to attending the group for the fourteen-week duration. This will help group members build cohesion and trust. Having new men coming in and out every week will dramatically decrease the effectiveness of your group.

As mentioned above, it's crucial to have necessary oversight. Your church's leadership needs to support you in this work, and give you opportunities to discuss the challenges you're facing as you minister to your group—both in terms of your group and your own soul care.

GROUP LOGISTICS

Begin each new group cycle by having leaders share the story of God's work of sexual redemption in their life. Over the next few weeks, invite participants to share their stories with the group. This helps group members begin to know one another and gel as a group. It enables them to see the many similarities in experiences, emotions, and fallout from sexual sin—all of which help group members to see they're more alike than they are different.

It's important that group members know their confidentiality is protected in the group, and *by the group*. At the outset of each new group cycle, clearly state the importance of men being free to share, knowing that “what's said in the room, stays in the room.” Without confidentiality, your group will be ineffective, because none of your men will be ruthlessly honest. That said, it's important that all the men know that their confidentiality can be broken if they demonstrate that they're a danger to themselves or others—for instance, if there's been a confession of sexual activity with minors.

Along these lines, it's very important that men are sensitive to the nature of one another's struggles. For instance, men dealing with same-sex attraction often feel ostracized in the church. It's imperative to make clear at the outset of the group that all sin is sin. No form of sexual sin is worse than another; therefore, men need to be warned against making disparaging comments.

A way to guard the hearts and minds of the men in the group is to give

guidelines for how they're to share about their sin struggles. Some men, having never shared about their sexual temptations and sin patterns, can go to the other extreme and over-share, giving graphic details that leave images in the minds of other group members. Be ready to "throw a red flag" and cut someone off if they're going in that direction. It would be terrible to have men attend your group, seeking freedom from sexual sin, only to be spurred on in their unholy desires and sin as others fan unholy imaginations.

There may be men from other churches or theological backgrounds. Be careful to avoid thorny theological issues that bring division among Christians. Make it clear to your group that the focus is for men to let Christ deal with their hearts, and that debating theological issues may distract them from what's most important. Having said that, there may be times when it's necessary to step in and gently correct unbiblical statements. Pick your battles wisely.

FACING CHALLENGES

As leader, you must be willing to have the difficult conversations with men in your group. As just mentioned, you may need to gently interrupt men from sharing too much graphic information or from taking the conversation in unhelpful theological directions. But it goes deeper. You must be willing to meet one-on-one with certain men concerning unhelpful and perhaps damaging behavior they're showing in group. Some continually take the conversation off-track in theological directions, or draw attention to their personal problems. If so, you need to help them see how they monopolize the group. Others will talk about pain and trials, but not share honestly about their struggles with sin; in this case, you need to be willing to ask them direct questions about their behavior. Yet others may share prayer requests focused on the people who've sinned against them, relatives who are sick, or job challenges, but may not want to walk in the light regarding their current temptations. You, brother, need to challenge them that this group is for them to discuss their battles with sexual sin and relational idols—*not* a generic church prayer meeting.

Many people wrestling with sexual sin also have deeply broken ways of

interacting with others and are usually blind to their own behavior. You must be willing to speak the truth in love, so they can begin breaking these patterns of behavior and addressing the deeper roots in their hearts.

It's also wise to safeguard men's interactions outside the group. At Harvest USA, we don't forbid members of our biblical support groups from getting together, but they must commit to making group leaders aware of their contact and respect the leader's counsel if told that a relationship outside of group would be unwise at this time.

You may also face the challenge of ministering to someone with a history of sexual contact with minors. Exercise wisdom about bringing men with this history into the group. Many of your men will be survivors of sexual abuse, usually by other men. The presence of a perpetrator can make their time in group extremely painful and unproductive. Even more importantly, many abusers of children have extremely calloused consciences (which greatly exacerbates the above issue). Unless a man has had extensive counseling, demonstrates profound remorse, and shows no signs of blame-shifting, be very hesitant to admit him into the group. You also need to be aware that if sexual contact with a minor has been confessed to you, you are mandated by the government to report it. Even if it is many years prior, you should anonymously contact your state agency to discuss the circumstances. One exception: If someone confesses to viewing child or teenage pornography you are not mandated to report it (unless they're actively engaged in the production of the pornography).

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

Remember: It is not your job to fix anybody. The surest way to burn out is to take God's responsibility on your shoulders. But you *do* need to be diligent in prayer! Because we are dependent on the Spirit of God to transform lives, we must be committed to interceding for the men in our group.

We need to learn to listen well and demonstrate the love of Christ. As men, we want to "fix" things. You are called to prayerfully listen and faithfully point your men to Christ. You will have a natural affinity to some of your men and ministering to them will be "easy." But others will be much harder to love

well and listen to patiently. This is one of the key ways God wants to transform *you* in the midst of leading this group!

Be ready to ask questions about men's lives, both current and historical. Listen carefully to the beliefs they express about God, themselves, and life expectations. Be willing to enter their experience. Pray for a heart of compassion, especially as you interact with others whose struggles are different than your own. Pay particular attention to the places of pain, disappointment, rejection, fear, and anger. Be willing to model vulnerability by opening up about your own life story and current places of struggle. This study will help your men begin to see ways their worldview is out of line with Scripture. Come alongside and help them see this clearly, especially if their answers to the reflective questions are too superficial.

This study will guide you in helping men identify the idols and motivations behind their sexual sin. It will demonstrate the hope we have in the work of Christ and lead them to establish accountability and structures to safeguard their souls. You can't force men to grow and change, but you can challenge them with the importance of processing the material openly and honestly, and encourage them to take the practical steps necessary to make lasting life change.

Finally, it's crucial that we model a dependent trust and repentance. Men need to see how to return to God and rest in the gospel, in the face of their current life challenges. We need to model the centrality of repentance in the Christian life. You can only do this if you're willing to be vulnerable and honest with your men! Men need you to model what it looks like to rest on God and wait on him in the midst of life's ups and downs. And they need to see how you return to him when you fail. This is the most important aspect of your leading.

Brother, God is calling you to a significant work. On your own, you are insufficient for these things, but God promises to give you more grace as you humble yourself and seek his face. Be prepared to see him do amazing things through you—as well as change your own heart through this process!

SECTION 1: LIFE IN EXILE

WEEK 1: LIFE IN THE WASTELAND

DAY 1: THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL SIN

It is extremely threatening for most men to walk into a support group because of fear of exposure, shame, etc. It also goes against our innate male tendency toward self-sufficiency. With this in mind, welcome the men to the group and affirm them for taking this huge step toward finding freedom.

Begin your group time by reading Psalm 32, and then pray through its themes, acknowledging the consequences of sexual sin, thanking God for his forgiveness, and asking for faith to turn from sin and embrace him.

Then, take a few minutes to lay down the ground rules for your group. Whatever other rules you have, make sure you include this one: What gets said in the group, *stays* in the group. Period.

Begin the meeting by sharing your own story with the group. Give the broad strokes of your life and share about your personal struggles with sexual sin. Be honest! Don't pretend you're further along in your healing than you truly are. If you have a coleader, ask him to share his story as well. If the men are willing, go around the room, asking them to share their names and the nature of their struggle with sexual sin.

The intent of Day 1, and our entire opening section, is to help the men grapple with the consequences of their sin. Acting out sexually has a price tag that, in our self-deception, we don't see. Most Christian men also labor under a deep sense of shame, because it appears that they're the only ones in church struggling. Examining Romans 7 will help them realize that all Christians continue to battle with their flesh. The problem is, most people in the body of Christ aren't acknowledging this reality.

Some people may have been taught that Romans 7 refers to Paul's struggle before becoming a Christian. Point out that the language is present tense (this is true in the original Greek text as well) and that he is clearly referring to his experience as a Christian because he talks about the tension in his soul between his delight in God's law and the sin in his members. In Romans 8 Paul makes clear that it is impossible for anyone "in the flesh" (meaning,

someone who's not a Christian) to delight in God's law, because apart from the Spirit's presence we are naturally hostile to it.

For Reflection:

This is the place where your leadership is most crucial. Be ready to answer honestly and thoughtfully. Your willingness to open up your own life and heart will set the tone for the group. The men will follow your lead!

1. Describe the pain sexual sin has caused in your life. What does it feel like to be a slave of a behavior or desires? How has it affected your behavior around others?

Encourage men to be honest about their own experience of "slavery" to sexual sin. For example, are they slaves to specific behaviors or thought patterns? This may be a stretch for many, but try to get them to talk about how that feels. At the very least, most men will acknowledge that their powerlessness makes them angry.

2. What has sexual sin "cost" you? Be specific.

Have the men give specific examples of things they've sacrificed in order to pursue sexual sin, such as money, time, or relationships. This is an extremely important step, as most of us live under the delusion that we're not hurting anyone, including ourselves.

3. What "encouragement" can you gain from Paul's struggle with sin in Romans 7?

Most men have felt all alone in their exasperation over their sin. Paul's experience encourages them that they are not alone. But even more importantly the men need to see that, in the midst of being utterly confounded with himself, Paul embraces the gospel, clinging to the hope that Jesus has dealt with his sin and still offers forgiveness. Paul knows that he has a deliverer, and so launches into the glorious praise and worship of Romans 8!

DAY 2: THE REALITY OF GUILT

Day 2 is designed for men to see that: 1) they experience guilt because they're truly guilty of sinning against a holy God; 2) guilt will always come out in our relationships; and 3) their ability to deceive others and "get away with" their sin not only compounds the problem but places them in grave danger.

This is another opportunity for men to grapple with the reality that sexual sin creates all kinds of fallout in their lives. The experience of guilt is palpable. Because of this, we respond in a variety of negative ways toward others—anger that ranges from minor irritability to outright rage, isolation from others, etc. The main point the men need to understand is that their sexual sin is not a victimless crime, even if it doesn't physically involve others. It is deeply destructive to every one of their relationships. Although this is particularly true in marriage, single men need to be challenged with this reality as well.

Finally, most men don't realize that pride is their biggest enemy, the deepest sin of their soul. (That's why our final week focuses on humility.) Today's lesson should help them begin to see that reality. Most men think they're pretty smart. For years, they've successfully hidden their behavior, always turning the tables and pointing their fingers at anyone who questions their inexplicable behavior (late from work without reason, in front of the computer at 2 a.m., etc.).

Your men need to be warned against this grave danger. They cannot pull one over on God and get away with it. The truth is, most men are in your group because they were caught; and even if they weren't, others have been aware of a problem even if they couldn't put their finger on the specific issue. There is no perfect crime. There is no way we can remain in sexual sin and get away with it. God knows. Those who love us know there's a problem, and only our commitment to deceit keeps them in the dark.

For Reflection:

1. Describe your experiences with guilt. How does it break into your life, sending a dark cloud over the places that should be sunny?

Men should discuss what guilt feels like, and how it impacts their ability to enjoy life. It's important for them to begin wrestling with the reality that sexual sin costs them in all kinds of ways.

2. What other sinful behaviors are clustered with your sexual sin? Be specific.

This question should help men to see that they are culpable for more than their lust, and that their guilt goes much deeper than their sexual acting out.

3. How do you tend to respond to others when you feel guilty? Do you become angry, impatient, or withdrawn? Who tends to be on the receiving end of these behaviors, and how do you see them affected by your behaviors?

The previous question helped men to see the deeper ways they've broken the first Great Commandment to love God; this question will help them begin to see the deeper ways their sexual sin violates the second Great Commandment, to love others.

DAY 3: THE REALITY OF SHAME

The goal of Day 3 is for men to realize that they are not only contending with their sinful behaviors and the guilt associated with them, but also with the shame they feel over their sin. Shame occurs when guilt over sin becomes their identity.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this lesson, it's important to note that we often feel guilt and shame because of what others have done to us. This is particularly true of those who have suffered sexual abuse. The shame of being sinned against creates a deeply entrenched, broken sense of identity, often leading to very destructive behaviors. Because of this, it is crucial for men with this history to seek additional counseling and resources.

However, addictive behavioral patterns are much easier to see than the broken relational patterns resulting from shame. The whole idea of intimacy as “being known” might be new to men and require further discussion. Encourage the men to consider the ways they present different façades at work, church, and home.

It’s important for men to wrestle with the reality that shame not only affects their identity but also damages their relationships. If we’re holding back the truth of ourselves—past and present—in any close relationship, it undermines the ability to develop genuine intimacy. The importance of walking in the light is examined at length in Week 12, but it is important for your men to begin wrestling with this issue because it is the *only* path to freedom from our struggle with sexual sin and shame.

For Reflection:

1. How does shame manifest itself in your life? Are you outgoing-but-hiding, withdrawn, or something in between?

The goal of the first two questions is for men to consider the specific ways that shame impacts their relationships. It always results in some form of isolation—sometimes in actual physical isolation, but always in some form of emotional “pull back” and separation.

2. In which relationships are you most hidden? Why? What forms does your hiding take?

It is important for the men to consider which specific relationships suffer most, and how. Don’t be surprised if men are reticent to answer or even oblivious to the impact of shame on their relationships. Try to have your own answers ready, just in case.

3. What do you think would happen if people truly knew you? What are you afraid to lose?

Men need to face their fear of exposure and count the cost of walking in the light. This will be particularly terrifying for married men whose wives are unaware of their struggle.

4. On the other hand, what would it be like to be free of hiding—to no longer fear exposure? In what ways would it be a blessing to be “known”?

The goal is for men to realize that honesty frees us from the cycle of progressive isolation. Bringing their sin into the light means there is no longer anything to hide. Help men to consider the blessings they would experience if they didn't go through life under the dark cloud of guilt and shame in their closest relationships.

DAY 4: SEXUAL SIN EMASCULATES US!

The goal of Day 4 is to tear down the world's lies about sexual sin and to give a stark, honest picture of the reality. Men need to unlearn the lie that sexual sin is a sign of strength. Rather, they need to embrace the truth that it makes them a slave and completely undermines their true calling as men.

The reality that sexual sin is emasculating is radically countercultural, so expect that men will struggle to accept it. Remind them of what they previously shared regarding their experience of slavery. Living as a slave is completely counter to the experience of strength.

Using the examples given and your own experience, help your men examine the impact of sexual sin on their calling as men. Help them wrestle with the broader implications of their sexual sin and how it undercuts what God says it means to be a man. This is true for both single and married men, but the latter need to see the horrific cost of their sin on their wives and children.

Your men will all be able to identify with the bait-and-switch reality of sexual sin. Because this is God's world and only works his way, pursuing sexual satisfaction apart from his design always leaves us ultimately empty and dissatisfied. Encourage your men to share their experiences of feeling like a donkey chasing the carrot on a stick.

Discuss the contrast between the strength to “stare down an erection” and the weakness of being a slave to one's desires, left to clean up the mess after the fact.

For Reflection:

1. *What cultural messages have impacted your understanding of masculinity and sexuality? Do you believe your manhood is determined by your sexual activity? Why or why not?*

Your men know the “right Christian answers” to these questions. Get them to dig deeper. Help them consider the ways cultural messages have impacted them. Another way to address this would be to ask what they believe makes sex truly satisfying. It’s likely their answers will focus largely on the physical.

2. *Do you believe that sexual sin is emasculating? How does the man you are in your fantasy life compare to the reality of your experience of slavery? Be specific.*

Lead in vulnerability with this question. Be honest about the shame of your own sin, in contrast to the delusion of your fantasy life.

3. *Describe your own Ephesians 4:19 encounter with the “insatiableness” of certain desires or behaviors. How have you experienced this downward spiral?*

The reality of our insatiable desires is a poignant picture of both our slavery and the folly of our sin.

DAY 5: JESUS RESTORES OUR MANHOOD

Day 5 begins to recast your men’s expectations of the Christian life. Jesus offers abundant life, but that life is very different than what we expect. The goal is for your men to wrestle with the tension between their desire for sexual sin and the reality that their pursuit of sexual sin has not worked. Jesus’ call to sexual purity seems oppressive to their natural desires, but in their sin they have experienced deeper, far more destructive oppression.

At this point your men should resonate with the reality that sexual sin does not deliver on its promises. Still, it’s important to acknowledge that the Christian life is more challenging than most of us anticipated. Particularly

given the sexual and materialistic idols of our culture, some of your men might have a very warped perspective on what is meant by “abundant life.”

Further, all of us face suffering and trials that don’t fit with our expectations of what life as a Christian should look like. Some of your men may have been exposed to health-and-wealth teaching, leading them to expect that God promises material, temporal blessing in this life, even though the New Testament makes clear that the Christian life means carrying a cross. Your men need to learn the paradox of the Christian life—that we are called to die to what we want, in order to discover the rich blessings we never knew to ask for.

Hopefully your men will become indignant as they consider what sexual sin has cost them, and be excited to face the hard but rewarding life Jesus offers instead. Discuss the contrast between being emasculated by our out-of-control desires and living in the strength of the Spirit.

When we experience the same frustration Paul expresses in Romans 7, we typically don’t respond with worship as he does in Romans 8. It is important for your men to begin considering how they’ll respond to God in the face of their sin. Do they remember the gospel and cling to the hope they have in Christ, or do they begin a campaign of good works, excuses, and empty promises? Make it clear that the only way to respond to our sin and grow beyond it is to remember the work of Christ, and the wonder of our redemption. As we’ll examine later, Titus 2:11–14 teaches it’s the grace of God that enables us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

For Reflection:

1. How do you define abundant life? In other words, what would make your life really worth living? How might this view lead you to believe that God’s “holding out” on you?

This question should expose some of their deeper, cultural idolatry that unwittingly feeds their discontent in Christ, fanning the flames (and justification) of their lust. Help your men to wrestle with their unbiblical expectations of life.

2. Do you doubt that Jesus wants you to experience abundant life? Why, and how? In what ways has your experience betrayed the idea of abundant life?

It is important for men to give voice to the places where they feel life, or God, has wronged them. They desperately need to learn the importance of bringing their hearts honestly before God. Make it clear that you're not suggesting they rage at God. Still, the Psalms are filled with expressions of deep doubt and frustration with the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, and the people of God pouring out their questions and doubt. The Bible is far more honest than most Christians are willing to be. However, the experience of God's people hasn't changed, and your men need to honestly articulate their wrestling before God and their brothers. Remember: "Israel" means "one who wrestles with God."

3. What would it mean for you to carry a cross sexually? What would you need to sacrifice? Do you believe that Jesus truly offers you life on the other side of that death? Why or why not?

Jesus taught us to count the cost of discipleship. Likewise, your men need to consider what following Jesus in this area of life will cost them. Help them to consider again the contrast between sexual sin's emasculation and the reality that Jesus will empower them to "stare down an erection." This is real strength and genuine manhood.

WEEK 2: THE PATH INTO THE WASTELAND

DAY 1: LIFE IN A FALLEN WORLD

Day 1 will help your men begin to glimpse a bigger, biblical view of the world. Their struggle with sexual sin isn't just about them; it exists in the context of an infinitely greater, cosmic brokenness. As mentioned at the end of last week, the Christian life is painful—life is not supposed to be this way. But it's crucial that men avoid a victim mentality and own the fact that they're invested in perpetuating the curse through their own sinful behavior.

Your men should begin wrestling with the truth that there is always a context for their sin. Later this week, we'll look more closely at the fact that sexual sin is ultimately an issue of idolatry. For now, help them begin considering the context surrounding their last fall with sexual sin.

Because it is truly an act of worship, in the deepest, most profound sense, sexual sin becomes a religion. Functionally speaking, our desires are the god we serve. Until your men accept that reality, they'll fail to fully grasp the wonder of God's grace and mercy in Christ.

For Reflection:

1. In what ways have you experienced the brokenness of this world? Give a brief description.

This is a huge question. Giving your men the opportunity to share their stories usually brings these experiences to the surface, but you'll need to draw some men out. This question will definitely bring out the talkers in your group. Therefore, be prepared to intervene if someone's input goes beyond what's socially appropriate.

2. What current circumstances cause you stress, anxiety, or pressure? What is the connection between the challenges you face and your sexual struggles?

Help your men begin to connect their acting out with their context. They

need to recognize that there are situations, people, and experiences that act as triggers, and make their idols look like plausible solutions.

3. What's your response to the statement: "Your religion is what you delight in?" In what ways does your sexual behavior reflect what you find worth living for?

Your men should begin to see the connection between their behaviors and the condition of their hearts. As we'll examine shortly, all of our behavior and speech begins in the heart. Thus we're called to delight ourselves in the Lord, and promised that when we do, *he* will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). When God is our delight, our desires are rightly ordered; all good gifts we receive deepen our joy and pleasure in him rather than being ends in themselves.

DAY 2: REJECTION OF THE LIVING WATER

The goal of Day 2 is to starkly expose the idolatry behind sexual sin. As your men wrestled with their folly and the cost of sexual sin last week, hopefully they've begun to see the devastating effects of sin on the surface level. But in order to facilitate deeper repentance and cultivate a greater love for Jesus, your men need to understand the reality that their behavior is radically anti-God. The more they see that their behavior isn't just breaking one of God's rules, but actually spitting in his face and choosing to serve a false god, the more they'll be overwhelmed by his love and mercy for them in Christ.

Help your men make connections beyond sexual sin to other areas in their life. There are innumerable created things we embrace, hoping to find "life." Discuss the cost of following those other idols. Although sexual sin is probably the most devastating, all idols make false promises, fail to satisfy, and lead to diminishing returns.

Your men need to hold together these two realities: 1) Our idols don't satisfy us, but only bring emptiness and destruction; 2) God created pleasure and promises to satisfy our souls. Your men need to understand that God knows the depth of their spiritual thirst and promises to quench it. Their desires are insatiable because only his infiniteness truly satisfies!

Beginning in Eden, humanity craved independence. Our desire to stand on our own two feet led to the fall. As men in American culture, we are fighting both our own hearts' bent toward independence and the cultural idolatry of rugged individualism. Particularly as men, we're programmed to function on our own.

True, the Bible clearly teaches that we should plan for tomorrow. Only a fool doesn't plan for the future. But our demand for independent control isn't the same as wise planning and good stewardship. Wisdom plans for the future, but holds it loosely, saying, "If the Lord wills ..." knowing that God often throws his "sovereign wrench" in the works.

First Thessalonians 4:3–8 is a significant passage for us. More clearly than anywhere else in Scripture, God makes a direct connection between our spiritual life and how we comport ourselves sexually. Your men must get this point: Who they are *sexually* reveals who they are *spiritually*. One of the key ways that Christians distinguish themselves in a pagan culture is the stewardship of their sexuality. This should be one of the ways that the church is radically countercultural. Your men should be sobered by the harsh reality that the way they're living is what characterizes people who *don't* know God.

Pray that the Spirit would impress this reality on your men's hearts—not to compound their guilt but to deepen their repentance. Remind them that the depth of their sin should fill them with greater awe at the wonder of God's grace. You want your men to honestly and poignantly face their guilt, but remind them that these struggles aren't new. This passage was written to us because Christians have always wrestled with sexuality in need of redemption.

For Reflection:

1. *Do you agree that sexual sin is idolatry? When do you turn to sexual sin instead of to God, and in what ways?*

Hopefully your men will accept that their sexual sin is an act of false worship. The second part of the question requires more reflection—when are they tempted to sin? What is the typical context? Help your men make the

connection that in the hard places in life they turn to sex for deliverance, instead of turning to God.

2. How does it make you feel to realize that your behavior characterizes that of pagans?

This is not to heap on guilt, but to enable men to really wrestle with this biblical reality. Remind them of God's goodness and mercy in Christ!

3. Can you identify other places in your life, besides sex, that function as "leaky cisterns" for you? Consider things you delight in. Do these activities lead you to worship the Giver of good gifts, or become objects of worship? Give examples.

Help your men see that idolatry is a bigger issue than they imagine. John Calvin described the human heart as an "idol factory." Sex may be the biggest and most destructive idol, but it's really just the most obvious!

DAY 3: LEAKY CISTERNS AND BROKEN MASCULINITY

In Day 3, men will make the connection between the two great commandments, and see that sexual sin not only weakens and emasculates them but actually violates the created order, radically twisting what it means to be a man.

Your men need to see that the ultimate idol they worship is self. Discuss this idea, and pray that your men will see that this idol of self-worship is radically anti-God. Many of them have probably never considered their sin in this light.

If your men are in Christ, the idea that they were created with a distinct role as men is hopefully not a new concept. However, they have probably not considered how their sexual sin violates this calling. This may be a hard sell. Some of your men might balk at the idea that they're oppressing others—especially those not engaged physically with others or in a relationship with a consenting adult. Help them to consider the call to lay down their lives for others and to see the opposite, radical self-focus of their actions. Your men

need to be challenged in their view of others as a commodity. Many have made the point that those we exploit are someone else's children, siblings, parents, and grandchildren.

Having faced the reality of our exploitation, we shift gears to briefly consider who the Bible calls us to be positively. Your men need to see that in their sin they become the exact opposite of who they're created to be. Also discuss the idea that when we live contrary to our design, we functionally become less human. Again, this is a radically countercultural idea, as most men believe their sexual exploits affirm their masculinity. As men, we uniquely reflect God's image, as those who serve as head, to cover and protect. We serve as his stewards, entrusted with those he deeply loves.

This is why God takes our sin so seriously. Your men should be sobered by the truth that God will avenge the exploited. Some theologically astute men may push back on this point, saying that the exploited are the church. Help them see the folly of debating theology when considering the stark danger to their souls. Theology devoid from love for Jesus and a changed life is utterly worthless and actually a detriment. James, while challenging us that faith without works is dead, warns that even demons are good theologians (James 2:19)!

Pray for wisdom regarding how far to push this last point. It will likely be different for each group and specific individuals. As leaders, we need to be careful to always point our men to Jesus and remind them of the simplicity of our faith, expecting that those who are in Christ will grow. Be sensitive to the various faith backgrounds of your men; this will help you determine what to emphasize. We need to be wary of men who are in constant fear of losing their salvation, but also the danger of giving false assurance to men who profess faith but have hard, stony hearts.

For Reflection:

1. How has your sexual sin eroded your calling as a man? In what specific ways are you "devouring" others rather than "feeding" them? Which relationships have been most affected by your behavior?

Help your men face the reality of their sin head-on. Ask them to be specific—in both the “devouring” and “failure-to-feed” categories. Their ability to grow is connected to their willingness to honestly stare their sin in the face.

2. How would your relationships change if you fulfilled your calling and design as a man to selflessly serve and protect others? Give examples.

Help cast a vision for your men of what transformed relationships can look like. Share your own experience of Christ’s work in your heart, and the blessings of serving rather than exploiting. Be honest about the continuing challenge of laying down your life, but affirm the reality that when we follow Jesus, he teaches the blessedness of obedience through our deepening intimacy with him.

3. What’s your reaction to the fact that God is an avenger of the exploited? What does your sexuality say about your spirituality?

Many men view their sexual sin too lightly. They believe they’re essentially good guys, with just this one little problem in the little box on the closet shelf. Your challenge is to help them see that the little box gives a more honest assessment of the state of their hearts than their Christian service, coaching Little League, etc. God cares deeply about our hearts and what we do in secret (see Matthew 6:1–18).

DAY 4: THE EROSION OF INTIMACY

Day 4 challenges your men to realize that sexual sin destroys the ability to develop deep intimacy in relationships. Since deceit is always the close companion of sexual sin, our lives become oriented around guarding what’s most precious to us. Everything else in life, including family, is secondary to that ultimate goal.

Your single men need to be directly challenged about what they’re looking for in a spouse. Most don’t consider how their marriage will serve the kingdom of Christ, or consider who God is calling them to selflessly serve. Our culture generally, and pornography specifically, trains us to seek a mate who we believe will satisfy our desires—the exact opposite of God’s calling on our lives to focus on serving him and others.

Our peer relationships are deeply impacted as well. Ask your men about their closest peer relationships, and to what extent they've shared about their struggle with sexual sin. Discuss the ways they hide the truth about themselves and ask what their specific façade looks like.

Married men need to be directly challenged on how their sin undermines emotional intimacy. Discuss how deceit grows, taking more and more ground as we guard our secret sin. Help men think of specific areas where they keep their wives at arm's length. Pray for your men to experience conviction over the ways they have both shut out their wives and neglected to pursue deeper intimacy with them.

The fallout with our children is similar. Even if they're engaged in good things—playing catch, coaching, helping with homework—sexual sin prevents men from serving in the way that's most crucial: pursuing their children's hearts. Discuss how their sense of failure with sexual sin impacts their ability to talk about the Christian faith with their kids. Ask them to share how they'd like to grow as fathers.

For Reflection:

1. In what ways has deceit impacted your closest relationships? Describe specific instances where your hiding has inhibited real conversation with others.

Your men need to wrestle with how deceit is destroying their relationships. Encourage them to be specific about ways they wall out others to guard their sin, including recent conversations.

2. What does your façade look like? How does it differ from who you are in secret?

Your men also need to wrestle with the contrast between the person they present to others and the man secretly battling sexual sin. Help them to see how this deceit (and pride!) keeps them trapped in their shame.

3. What do you believe would be the cost of rebuilding intimacy, allowing those closest to you to know your deepest struggles—letting go of the sin you love, losing your image, facing the possibility of significant fallout in your

relationships?

Building genuine intimacy is never easy. It means becoming vulnerable and bearing others' burdens—both of which are things we try to avoid. For some men, it will mean letting those close to them know about their struggles for the first time. Affirm this huge, important step! Help your men to honestly count the cost of building intimacy. From your own experience, share the blessing of both being truly known and pursuing others' hearts.

DAY 5: REBIRTH IN THE WASTELAND

We finish this week where we started it—the reality that we live in a fallen world—but we now bring home the point that we're not innocent victims. We're accomplices. Discuss ways your men have experienced this in their lives. Perhaps as boys they showed others pornography for the first time, or introduced a friend to masturbation.

Be aware that this may stir up deep pain for men who have suffered abuse. It's important for them to consider how they too have “passed the poison on,” but you can only address this issue if they know you truly love them and understand their pain on some level. Depending on their situation, you may want to discuss this section privately with certain individuals prior to your group time.

Many men have lived a defeated Christian life for a long time. Discuss whether they have hope for change. In other words, do they believe that the gospel is truly big enough to deal with their sexual sin?

Weeks 5–7 will look specifically at the work of Christ. Begin helping your men right now to see that faith is not only about eternity. Ultimately, it's about the kingdom of God. This will only be brought in fullness on the last day, but as Jesus walked the earth he declared it had already come. We're invited to live *now* as citizens of his kingdom. Discuss the Lewis quote. Do our men really believe that God is a God of pleasure? Help them see how programmed we are to believe that first lie from Eden—that God's holding out on us and doesn't have our best in view. Help your men to consider what their lives would be like as husbands, fathers, neighbors, and coworkers if they lived as

citizens of the kingdom, extending the blessing of Christ rather than perpetuating the curse in their sin.

For Reflection:

1. In what ways have you passed the poison on to others? Be specific.

Help your men consider how they've contributed to the brokenness of this world. Encourage them to think particularly of men or women they have engaged with sexually. Drawing on the theme of thwarted intimacy from Day 4, help them to see ways that they are perpetuating broken relational patterns.

2. Do you believe that God is truly offering you "a holiday at the sea"? Do you believe he is a God of pleasure? What experience causes you to doubt this?

Your men know the right Bible answers, but help them to see that their sexual sin reveals a belief that radically counters their theology. Help them focus on the reality that they doubt this truth and to consider why. Which of their desires has God thwarted? What do they believe would be different in their lives if he truly cared about their pleasure? Pray they will see the self-focus of their agenda, and help them consider what it would look like to submit instead to God's plan.

3. What do you think it would be like to pass on the blessing of Christ's kingdom instead of the curse? What concrete changes would happen in your relationships, behavior, work habits?

Give examples from your own experience. Help your men envision a life that's radically altered from the pattern of their enslaving sin. God wants them to experience joy, contentment, excitement through him, as they serve to extend his kingdom.

WEEK 3: THORNBUSHES IN THE WASTELAND

DAY 1: THE FRUIT

This week gives a brief overview of how we cultivate patterns of sexual sin. The main point your men need to grasp is that our behavior ultimately flows from our functional theology. We become what we believe. We touched on this idea last week, but the tree model should make even clearer how our functional beliefs are formed.

Given the scriptural backdrop, the metaphor of behavior as fruit should be easy for men to grasp. However, they may need your help to connect this idea to their words and thoughts as well. Help them to again consider the impact of their fantasy lives on their real lives. Our thought lives affect how we interact with others, but it doesn't stop there. Help men to comprehend how much time they've given away to their fantasy life, and contrast it with how this time could be spent investing their thought life in worship and blessing the lives of others—wooing their wives, engaging their children, enriching their friendships.

Last week, we began addressing the presence of other idols in our lives. Often we indulge one of our less destructive idols before turning to sexual sin. Men may sit in front of their computers for hours on social network sites, watching movie trailers, checking sports stats, but when these don't satisfy they progress to their preferred mode of sexual sin.

This is not to say that any of the above activities are inherently idolatrous. However, what your men need to understand is that idolatry flows from the heart. In other words, *why* we do something is as important as *what* we do. Titus 1:15 teaches “To the pure all things are pure ... ” Do we use the blessings of life to try to satisfy our souls, or do we receive them as gifts from God and allow them to lead us to right worship? Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” This is a snapshot of the Christian life rightly lived. We live consciously in Christ, honoring him as

Lord and responding to our Father with thanksgiving in all things. That is the invitation of the Christian life.

The idea of artificial fruit might be difficult for some of your men to grasp, particularly if they're not very self-reflective. Use examples from your own life when you've been involved in ministry for selfish reasons (maybe even leading the support group!). The longer we're in Christ, the more we realize how deeply sin taints even the good things we do. Again, this should lead us to deeper wonder at his love and mercy, further softening our hearts, but for some men this may be a foreign concept.

Help your men see specific ways they produce artificial fruit, beyond the examples given. As we discussed last week, a façade is a pattern of behavior developed over time to hide who we are inwardly—a whole crop of artificial fruit. Help your men target specific instances and particular behaviors. Then give them a vision of how their lives could be radically different—a life characterized by extending the blessings of Jesus rather than the curse.

For Reflection:

1. Does your life resemble a flourishing tree or a briar patch—or a combination of the two? Explain.

In Christ, all of us are complicated fusions of flesh and Spirit. Your men need to face their sin, but be hopeful about how God is already at work. Be sure to affirm in them the good, Spirit-born fruit currently in their lives, and pray they'll be spurred on to desire this more and more.

2. Besides sexual sin, what other false comforts do you pursue? Consider activities or hobbies that tend to cause friction with your spouse, family members, or friends.

Last week, we viewed this question from the standpoint of what we delight in. Help men consider how they use things in life as a source of comfort or escape.

3. Where are you cultivating artificial fruit? How does this manifest itself? In which relationships are you most prone to do the right things for the wrong reason, and what does that look like specifically?

Help your men to be very specific about particular behaviors and affected relationships, and why they're cultivating artificial fruit in those areas.

DAY 2: THE SEED

The goal of Day 2 is for your men to consider the biblical truth that their hearts drive all their behaviors. Discuss the passages, and ask your men to consider a recent occasion when their hearts overflowed with words. If they're having trouble, ask them to talk about their most recent disagreements with their spouses, children, or coworker.

Most of your men should resonate with the idea of original sin, but some may struggle with the doctrine of total depravity. Help them see that it refers to the all-encompassing nature of the fall in our lives, not the depth of our actual sin. That said, when we truly understand the nature of our hearts, we realize that the seed of every sin is in there and just needs the right context to germinate. Total depravity doesn't mean that we're all as bad as we could be—it means that it's only by God's restraining grace that we're *not*!

Our tainted good works tie in to yesterday's discussion of artificial fruit. This discussion should transition from specific behaviors to the motivations behind those actions. If your men have trouble getting specific, remind them of the examples they used earlier and ask them to reflect further upon them. The point men need to grasp is that one of our worst enemies lives inside our own chest. This is why the cultural focus on trusting our feelings or following our hearts is so dangerous. Feelings are our most untrustworthy guides! Encourage your men to share times they've been led astray by their feelings, even when it seemed like a good thing at the time.

For Reflection:

1. Do you believe in original sin? Why or why not? Whether you believe in it or not, what evidence do you see in your own life that would support the idea?

This should help you identify any man who may not understand the gospel

and his need for God's mercy in Christ. Help him to consider the evidence of original sin in his own life, and think again about Paul's example in Romans 7.

2. Do you believe in the idea of total depravity? Why or why not? How would this doctrine explain the world, and your own life?

This should help you get a sense of the depth to which the gospel has penetrated your men's hearts. If they struggle with this doctrine, they significantly underestimate the depth of their need for Jesus!

3. In what ways are even your "holy works" tainted? Describe an occasion when you did some "good" thing more for the sake of self than for others.

Hopefully wrestling with this issue will open your men's eyes wider to their need for Christ and the wonder of his mercy. Even our service to him is not purely motivated.

DAY 3: THE SOIL

Today, we examine the aspects of life that are outside our control—the things that happen to us. This is a huge category. Remind your men that this is an overview, an opportunity for them to begin telling more of their stories. Encourage them to follow up with each other about details that require more time than you have together as a group.

Part of the soil relates to who we are as men. Discuss what it means to be male. You might need to be careful with this part of the discussion, because it's something men tend to feel strongly about! Ask your men to share what things they wish they could change. Acknowledge that sharing about our perceived weakness is something we're not used to doing.

The other aspect of soil—the outside forces at work in our life—is an even bigger category. Here again, be careful not to let the discussion take on a life of its own. Some of these issues will come out when the men share their stories. Feel free to kindly remind someone if he's taking you through an extensive family history you just heard about last week. But be aware that these are hard issues to talk about—and just as hard to bottle back up once the cork's off. Speak the truth in love!

Some believe all problems are the result of others' sins, or societal ills. Others say that our lives are the result of our actions, apart from anyone else's role. As men we tend to take responsibility for our lives and downplay what's happened to us. Challenge your men with the importance of looking at these issues and why they tend to resist them.

For Reflection:

1. Which soil conditions specific to your person have most impacted you—understanding of maleness, physical characteristics, personality and gifts? Which ones do you wish you could change? How have you tried to change them?

This may be a hard question for your men to answer. Their honesty will depend on how safe they feel in the group and whether you're willing to be vulnerable about your own insecurities. This is another crucial place where you need to lead by example.

2. Briefly describe life in your home growing up. Were both parents present? How did they demonstrate love and affection toward one another—or did they? What was your relationship like with your dad and mom? Did you have siblings, and if so how did you get along with them then, and now?

There is no way to succinctly address family issues! Encourage your men to focus on the one relationship, or incident, they believe had the most significant impact on them. Be prepared to follow up personally with individuals as necessary and have counseling referrals for those who need them.

3. Which of the remaining soil conditions—cultural or societal influences such as specific ethnic group, where you lived, socio-economic factors, peer pressure, or spiritual oppression—most impacted your life? In what ways?

Again, time won't permit a full discussion. You may choose to focus on peer relationships—this tends to be very significant for men dealing with same-sex attraction. If there is a brother in your group from a unique cultural background, encourage him to share that experience with the group. However, if he's insecure about the differences, don't push it.

DAY 4: THE ROOTS

Day 4 examines the desires that drive our hearts. In a fallen world, our default is to attempt to satisfy these desires apart from God—even with good things. But as we’ll examine shortly, when our will is thwarted, our desires become demands and we turn good gifts into mini-gods.

The first desire is a longing to impact our world. Discuss with your men whether they desire to make a difference in the world and how they hope it will happen. Ask for personal examples of how they’ve seen this desire go astray.

Admitting a desire for community will likely be harder for men. From a young age, we’re trained that we should make life work on our own. Our experience of community is often limited to camaraderie at work, the corner bar, playing or watching sports, church work, etc. Ask any who have experienced deeper community life to describe their experience to the group. Discuss the reality that God exists in the community of the Trinity and that he created us to live in community. Share your own experience of placing too much hope in a relationship, and ask men to share their experiences. Note that men struggling with same-sex attraction often have nonsexual but emotionally dependent relationships with other men. These relationships are not necessarily romantic, but certainly represent a similar false hope.

We’ve already discussed the reality of shame and how it radically undermines our ability to build genuine intimacy. Even though we fear it, we desire to be known. Discuss Psalm 139—how do your men feel when they consider God knows every word and thought? Can they imagine that his knowledge of us flows from love, not judgment? How does their view of God need to change, so they join David in worship over this reality? Pray that your men would come to understand the true nature of God so they will learn the freedom of praying, “Search me and know me... .”

For Reflection:

1. In what ways has your life made an impact? How do you seek to make a difference—or have you given up hope in your ability to do so? Explain.

This is a hard question for men to face. Many feel deeply unfulfilled, and this is often a factor in their pursuit of sexual sin. At the same time, they need to develop an understanding of what truly matters, brought into conformity with Scripture. Many of us long to do great things with our lives, but God is calling us primarily to impact the world by loving the people he's *already* put in our lives!

2. Have you ever experienced rich community? What circumstances or life situations helped create depth in those relationships?

Hopefully some of your men have had positive experiences of community in the body of Christ. Encourage them from your own experience of community that it is possible, even though it is always hard and often painful ...

3. Do you believe that God's knowledge of you flows from love, not judgment? How do you react to the idea that he shares every thought?

This question may evoke feelings of discomfort among your men. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). The next question will address both their godly and ungodly fears.

4. How does our hope in Jesus change our perspective of what it means to live under God's gaze, and what God thinks about us?

This should help you gauge how well your men apply the gospel in practical ways. Remind them of the glorious hope of the gospel that in Jesus there is no condemnation and that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:1, 39)!

DAY 5: THE SHOOTS

With Day 5, we pull together all the components of the tree model. The main point your men need to grasp is that their behavior flows out of their functional beliefs. It is important to consider our soil, because factors outside our control influence our beliefs. Not all of us are controlled by the same desires, or to the same extent, but everyone has desires that rule their hearts and demand to be satisfied.

This diagram shows how a desire for a good thing progresses into an idolatrous demand. Help your men see how we come to conclusions about God, ourselves, and life, as we go through this process. When we believe comfort is our greatest need, we avoid painful situations and real relationships at all costs. If our hope is in control, we can become tyrants to those we love, even as we attempt to protect them from perceived dangers.

Share a situation when one of your desires trumped your official theology. Ask your men to comment on which desires most control their hearts, and encourage them to give specific examples. Help them to see that when our desires rule our hearts, there will always be fallout in our relationships.

This discussion should help your men see how their functional theology flies beneath their radar. Most of them have probably not considered that they yell at their kids because what matters most to them in that moment is not the glory of Christ, but peace and quiet, control, etc. Usually we are blind to the idols in our hearts.

Help your men begin to make the connections between the various components of the model. Begin asking individuals to share how specific instances from their life have influenced their view of God, themselves, and their expectations. It's particularly crucial that your men see their false beliefs about God. Challenge your men to describe some of the lies they believe about themselves. What were they taught would lead to success? Did they meet the qualifications for manhood? What labels have others put on them throughout their lives?

The following weeks will go into much greater detail regarding the work of

Christ and how it applies to our struggle with sexual sin. What your men need to see at this point is that through Jesus, God has accomplished what was utterly impossible for us to accomplish alone. Apart from Christ, we live in slavery to sin. In Christ, our chains are broken and we are free to live obediently in the power of his Spirit. Although we're never perfect in this life, God is committed to conforming us increasingly to the image of his Son, so Jesus will be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:28–29).

For Reflection:

1. What two or three life experiences cause (or could have caused) you to question God's goodness, love, or power?

This question should help your men target specific life situations that have shaped their understanding of God. Be wary of other men in the group ready to attack their bad theology—the whole *point* of the question is to identify these things!

2. Which past relationships have been the most painful? How do they continue to impact your ability to move toward others?

Your men need to make connections between past experience and current circumstances. As men, we tend to compartmentalize and assume that the past isn't breaking into our present. As you're able, help them connect the dots.

3. Where do you most find your identity—job, status, wife, salary, possessions? Why?

We learn from family, culture, etc. where to place our identity. Help your men consider the false identities they embrace to find value, or the ways they are oppressed by shame because they don't measure up to the standards.

WEEK 4: THE WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND

DAY 1: IN THE BEGINNING ...

The goal this week is to enable your men to begin seeing their lives from the perspective of God's story and his work of redemption in the world. Most of your men will be familiar with Israel's story, but might not be used to seeing their lives as part of that story. Help your men make those connections. We are also a chosen people, called out of the world as Abraham was called out of Ur. We too are the result of a miraculous conception, having received new birth in Christ. Most importantly, we are people who have experienced a greater exodus than the people of Israel.

In the weeks to come, we'll examine the work of Christ in greater detail. He is the ultimate deliverer from our greatest enemies—sin and death. Discuss the importance of building our identity on what Jesus accomplished. Most of your men know intellectually that salvation is solely by the grace of God, but continue to respond to him as if it's based on *their* merit.

Discuss how our approach to the Christian life often reflects Israel's response to God during the exodus. Like them, we struggle to part with our idols. We too want to have Jesus, but with sexual sin on the side. None of us enter the Christian life wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus. As I think of my own initial zeal in embracing the gospel, I see how much immaturity and blindness was present, even though I thought I was obediently following him. Move the discussion to focus on how glorious God is in his mercy to us.

For Reflection:

1. *As a Christian, you have experienced an exodus from the slavery of sin and death. How real does that fact seem to you? Explain.*

Your men will likely have mixed responses. All of us have places where God has worked very powerfully, where his deliverance was evident, and

other places where we're still confounded by our sin. Build on your men's positive experiences. Encourage them to see that God is at work in the places where they're still waiting for deliverance.

2. Israel's identity was based upon the exodus. Where do you find your identity? Is it rooted in what Jesus has done for you, or in something else? (One way to think about this is: What do you want others to know about you? What's important for you to communicate about yourself when you first meet someone?)

This is a huge and complex question. Help your men to begin considering where they build their identity outside of Christ. Jobs, wealth, toys, sexual exploits, wife or girlfriend, and athleticism are primary places where men seek to establish their identities.

3. What encouragement can you gain from the fact that Israel continued to rebel against God, even as he delivered them from Egypt?

Your men need to know that they're not alone in struggling with obedience. This is particularly important for those who have been taught that the Christian life is all about victory, with no focus on the reality of our ongoing battle against sin.

DAY 2: THE ORIGIN OF EXILE

The intent of Day 2 is to draw men further into the experience of Israel. The exile is a poignant metaphor for us. Just as Israel was brought out of Egypt into the Promised Land, we have experienced deliverance from sin and death. We're delivered from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the beloved Son. But, like Israel, we still love our idols—and they betray us. As we embrace our sin, we lose the joy and contentment we experienced in Jesus when we first believed.

Discuss what it would be like to experience the events described. Does this seem unfair to your men? How do they balance God's mercy and justice? Do they see one God in the Old Testament and a different one in the New Testament? God's judgment demonstrates the gravity of sin and idolatry—something we're often too ready to casually dismiss. At the same time,

Romans 3:25 (NIV) tells us that God had left former sins “unpunished,” in anticipation of when Jesus would drink the cup of his wrath to its dregs.

Hearing the horrors of the exile may not seem like mere discipline to us. However, we need to consider the infinitely deeper horror of God’s ultimate, eternal judgment against sin. Compared to damnation, the exile—inasmuch as it led God’s people to repentance—is truly a demonstration of God’s kindness and mercy.

For Reflection:

1. How do you respond to Israel’s experience of exile? Does it make you fearful? Do you think you should be afraid or not? Explain.

Some of your men will be filled with fear. All of them should be sobered—our sexuality *does* reveal our spirituality—but they need to be pointed to the hope we have in Jesus! Remind them that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). Because of his sacrifice, they are invited to come boldly before the throne. They are “now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present [them] holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Colossians 1:22). In context the verse is conditional, but the condition is to continue clinging to the hope of the gospel—simply to continue believing that in him we are completely forgiven.

2. Does it seem unfair to you that God did this? Why or why not? How do you reconcile Israel’s experience of God’s wrath with your understanding of him through Jesus?

Many men may wrestle with seeing God’s judgment, even seeing a disconnect between the portrayals of God in the Old and New Testaments. Again, point them to Jesus. Some men need to see the severity of their sin. We are reconciled only because Jesus was exiled for us. He was driven out of the city, stripped bare, and crucified, so that we could know mercy. God’s grace was infinitely costly to him—and he suffered it for us!

3. How is your experience of the Christian life similar to Israel’s experience—which not only included the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan, but also idolatry and exile?

Hopefully your men have experienced God’s grace and growth in holiness in different aspects of their lives. Like Israel, most of us experience deliverance from some sin areas when we come to faith. However, there are other places where we refuse to relinquish our idols, and eventually we experience a sense of exile.

DAY 3: EXILE DIDN’T START WITH YOU

Although Day 2 touched on these issues, the intent of Day 3 is to draw a connection between Israel’s experience of exodus, conquest, and exile with the experience of conversion, growth in Christ, and ongoing struggle with sexual sin. Just as Israel was conquered by Babylon and driven from the Promised Land, our struggle with sexual sin brings us to a spiritual wasteland, robbed of joy and delight in the Christian life.

Discuss the reality of God’s mercy to Israel. Although his judgment seems unbelievably harsh to us—living as we are on this side of the cross and resurrection—help your men consider the patience of God during the centuries of Israel’s idolatry prior to the exile. On Day 5, we’ll look more deeply at the reality that Jesus suffered the most extreme exile, and that Moses’ prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in him.

Have your men discuss their “exilic” experience. In what ways have they experienced deliverance from sin since their conversion? What was it like as they continued to wrestle with sexual sin, or when the struggle returned? How has this experience rattled their faith? Ask your men to also describe how they’ve battled this issue. Have they included others or tried going it alone? Ask if they’ve experienced the double-edged sword of feeling like hypocrites even while delighting in their sin.

For Reflection:

1. What was it like when you first believed in Jesus? How did it feel to know that your sins were forgiven, that you were free from the fear of death ... that the Creator of the universe actually cared about you?

Hopefully this question encourages your men as they consider the ways Jesus met them early in their Christian lives. Help them to embrace the reality that he still wants to meet them and give them the grace to grow beyond their struggles with sexual sin.

2. Did you experience initial freedom from your struggle with sexual sin when you came to faith? If so, when did the struggle begin to come back? How have you responded?

Answers will vary. Most of your men likely experienced some kind of “growth spurt” when they came to faith. Focus particularly on the last part of the question, discussing the ways your men have attempted to address this issue in their lives. Help them see the ways they have attempted to live the Christian life apart from honesty and openness with brothers in Christ.

3. In what ways do you find yourself doubting God’s power, love, and goodness because you’re still facing these same old struggles? Explain.

Many assume that the Christian life will be easier—that with “God on our side,” freedom from sin should be relatively painless. Sanctification is a rude awakening! Help your men to consider the problem isn’t that God hasn’t delivered on his promises, but that their own selfish expectations have been thwarted.

DAY 4: JESUS’ MISSION: RECONCILIATION AND RESTORATION

The goal of Day 4, and the next three weeks, is to expand your men’s understanding of the work of Christ. Many Christians believe that the main point of the Christian life is to get to heaven, as if life after conversion is just wasted time. Although the forgiveness of sins and entrance to eternal life with God is our glorious hope, Christianity is about learning to experience that eternal life now.

Discuss what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus. Expect lots of correct, Sunday school answers, then push them to be specific. What difference does Jesus’ presence make in their lives on a daily basis? What does it mean to abide in Christ? How would they like to see more fruit in their

lives?

Many of your men are likely experiencing broken relationships because of their sin. Encourage them with the reality that just as we have been reconciled to God in Christ, he is committed to healing our relationships. This may be hard for men dealing with divorce to accept. Remind them that God is committed to changing them, even through that painful process, to become men focused on loving him and others from this day forward.

Discuss Jesus' "mission statement." What does it mean to your men that they're called to be ambassadors of Christ, bringing about his renewal in a broken world? Discuss how their lives would be changed if their focus was participating in Jesus' work of re-creation, instead of indulging their pleasures.

Likely your men have heard the passage from Jeremiah 29 quoted out of context. Point out that these wonderful promises were written to God's people on the eve of the exile *after* they sinned and fell under judgment. Ask them if they doubt God will bring healing and restoration to their lives. What situation or relationship seems beyond repair? How might God bring redemption in a way that's different than what they anticipate? Remind your men that God's plan is usually very different from ours, therefore we need to be careful about our expectations of what healing will look like. For example, Jesus' redemption does not mean that all your men's marriages will be restored or that men with same-sex attraction will live free from temptation. Be careful not to offer false hope, but to focus on God's promises and to challenge your men's expectations and demands.

For Reflection:

1. How has God disciplined you? What consequences have you faced because of your sin? How has God intervened to expose your sin despite your attempts to keep it hidden? Where do you see his love in all this?

Help your men to see God's purposes in the consequences they're facing. Many of your men are likely in your group because they got caught. Let them know that God loves them too much to let them persist in their sin and is

relentlessly committed to bringing them to repentance. All of your men have wrestled at some point with assurance of salvation because of their sexual sin. They can be encouraged! Hebrews 12:7–11 teaches that God’s discipline is proof of our legitimacy as his sons.

2. How have you experienced God’s mercy? In what ways have you not received what you deserved?

We usually can see what’s broken in our lives, such as the painful consequences of our sin. Help your men to see the ways that God has protected them from even greater fallout. Often when we get away with sin, our pride is bolstered because we think we’re smarter than others. Pray that your men will see the consequences of their sin as a demonstration of God’s love and mercy that they might repent.

3. How does Christ’s description of his mission in Isaiah 61 fit with your understanding of the Christian life? How does it change it?

If you have time, examine each aspect of Jesus’ mission. Help your men consider the implications both for Jesus’ work in their own lives and for the ways he’s calling them to be engaged as his ambassadors, extending his kingdom.

DAY 5: THE END OF EXILE

In Day 5, your men will see how Jesus is the answer to their exile. The work of Christ is radically connected to what God has been accomplishing in human history since the garden of Eden. Most Christians desperately need to see how God’s purposes are so much greater than their personal salvation. This may seem like an insignificant point, but our inclination to reduce Jesus’ sacrifice to our personal ticket to heaven reveals the condition of our hearts. Our salvation is radically personal, and yet nothing less than the renewal of the entire universe is in view. Coming to terms with our extreme self-focus is crucial to overcoming our struggles with sexual sin.

Some men may struggle with the relevance of this section, with its focus on Israel’s restoration. Help them see that Jesus is the ultimate climax of this story. Israel’s story was far from complete at the end of the Old Testament.

They were still waiting for a deliverer to free them from the pagan rulers. Your men need to see that Jesus is God's answer, but as we'll examine going forward, he was radically different from what people expected. Similarly, his kingdom continues to expand in our lives in a way that's very different than we expect.

Discuss what your men think the first-century Jews anticipated. How would *they* have responded to Jesus? How can they be encouraged as God works in their life in ways that are radically counter to the script they'd have written?

Although your men may have heard much of this before in church, hopefully they're gaining a greater perspective on Jesus' death and resurrection, and a greater sense of the breadth of God's promises that Jesus fulfilled. Again, your men need to realize that salvation isn't just about *them*! Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of the great work of re-creation. Through his resurrection, Jesus conquered the enemies of God and became the new Adam—the beginning of a new humanity. He poignantly fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament and ushered in the kingdom of God with power.

Discuss how your men's lives would be impacted if they lived in the light of this reality. How would their lives be different if they lived as citizens of the kingdom in the here and now? Do they believe that the kingdom of God is here, and if not, why not? Where do they need to submit their lives to their King?

For Reflection:

1. List some specific activities in your life that reflect "exile living." Are you willing to leave that exile and return to the Promised Land? If not, what holds you back?

Make sure your men get specific about their behaviors and the places they need to grow. Ask them to consider what obedience will cost them. Remind them that either way they're a servant—exile promises freedom, but makes us slaves to sin. God says straight out that he will rule over you as King, but it is for your blessing and he offers a greater freedom than all your sin.

2. If you've never understood your need for forgiveness and cried out to God for mercy, I pray your heart will be stirred as you consider Jesus' sacrifice for you. Will you ask him for forgiveness and to fill you with his Spirit, giving you resurrection power to live differently?

This question is obviously for any men in the group who don't know Jesus. This is the first and crucial step. Stress the reality that unless we are filled with the Spirit of Jesus it is impossible for us to make lasting change. Even the ways we do change will only feed our pride and lead to new forms of brokenness.

3. If you've already trusted your life to Christ, where do you need to repent and return to your King? If you entered the Christian life with joy years ago and have grown disenchanted due to the trials and temptations of this life, are you ready to get up and get back in the race? List a few specific ramifications of this decision. What would this renewed allegiance to God look like in your life? What positive changes need to take place?

Some of your men are really seeking after Christ, even though they're struggling with sexual sin. Others have a life that is radically oriented around self in a variety of ways. Help your men to consider what it would look for them to surrender their careers, finances, toys, leisure time, relationships (or hope for relationships)—to lay all their hopes and aspirations at the feet of Jesus. Are they willing to do this? Be honest about places in your own life outside the sexual realm where you need to be constantly vigilant in surrendering to Jesus.

SECTION 2: THE CONQUERING KING

WEEK 5: THE DELIVERER

DAY 1: HE'S NOT WHO YOU THINK ...

In Day 1, we examine some of the skewed views of Jesus within the church. Ask your men to describe how the church has represented Jesus over the years. Do they tend to see him as gentle and/or effeminate, “The Ultimate Fighting Jesus,” or something in between? Discuss how perceptions of Jesus might also impact men’s responses to the challenges they face with sexual sin. Apart from knowing they’re forgiven, does the gospel seem relevant to their struggle?

For men who see “Jesus on steroids,” discuss how a hyper-masculine view of him might feed their own preconceived notions of what it means to be a man. Do they see how much their perspective is culturally driven?

Be particularly sensitive to those who aren’t “typical men.” They need you to speak against the cultural stereotypes that have made them feel like outcasts their whole lives. Be prepared for the conversation to get a little messy, as men on both sides will likely have strong feelings!

For Reflection:

1. When have you encountered the caricature of the flannelgraph Jesus? How does it impact your faith to think of Jesus solely as “the one who came to die”?

Your men need to wrestle with the ways they’ve diminished Jesus as King. We’ll look at this more in the next couple weeks, but for now help them to consider how this perspective affects their hearts. For example: A Jesus who’s only a “cosmic savior guy” doesn’t expect much from us.

2. Have you been attracted to “The Ultimate Fighting Jesus”? What makes this view of Christ more attractive?

It’s likely that some of your men have been influenced by the masculine-Jesus movement. Affirm their frustration that the church does not connect

well with men and usually communicates that we should all just be nice guys. Then take it a step further: How does this point to ways that the church fails to invite us into the life Jesus offers?

3. How does what you know of Jesus from the Gospels challenge both of these perspectives?

The Jesus we meet in the Gospels gloriously holds together every aspect of maleness. He is bold and courageous, never backing down from a necessary confrontation. But he is also tender and gentle, ministering in compassion to those who are weak and hurting. He weeps during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, then proceeds to thrash everyone and chase them out of the temple. He shatters all of our preconceived molds!

DAY 2: JESUS CONFORMED TO *OUR* IMAGE?

Any men who have been strongly influenced by the masculine-Jesus movement are going to struggle with this section. Affirm what is good, but help them think biblically about their assumptions. Discuss the contrast between the “Boss, Bold, Brash, Bully, Blunt” approach to the Christian life and the calling of Colossians 3:12. Do they see the difference? Do they agree? What circumstances might call for us to be boss, bold, etc.? How can we discern which response is appropriate?

It’s important for men to know they can still “act like men” with one another. However, they also need to become more aware of how their words and actions impact others. For married men, this means wives and children in particular. But all of your men need to learn to think more carefully about how they impact others. Discuss the idea of sharing emotions with one another. Is this okay for men to do? Do they think this makes them weak? How do they respond to the emotions demonstrated by various biblical characters?

Again, be aware of how your less traditional men are processing this information. This group needs to be a safe place for them to be different, not to fit the cultural mold and still be welcomed and affirmed. If any of your men have strong personalities and tend to say disparaging things about “less

masculine” men, this is *your* time to be bold. Pull them aside and let them know it’s not acceptable. Your group needs to be a healing place for men who have felt rejected by other men—not yet another source of shame!

Ask your men to describe their relationship with their fathers. This will be difficult, but important. Did they feel affirmed as men? How are they doing at building up and affirming their own sons? Are they battling to make a break from bad patterns established by their fathers? How is the strength Jesus calls us to demonstrate different than what the world prizes? Is this the strength your men are working to build?

Discuss how we can hide behind the effeminate Jesus. Seeing Jesus only as Savior often means I don’t need to submit to him as King. If my only hope of deliverance is after I die, I can’t really be held responsible for my ongoing struggle with sexual sin. Ask your men whether they have ever wrestled with these ideas. How does a biblical understanding of Jesus challenge this caricature?

For Reflection:

1. Have you struggled with “cheap grace”—the idea that because Jesus died for your sins past, present, and future, you don’t need to sweat it? Has anyone—spouse, friends, parents—ever challenged that view in you?

Cheap grace is likely an issue for some of your men—this is the idea that since I love to sin and God loves to forgive, everything works just fine. Ask your men to identify the specific people who have challenged their sense of cheap grace. Do they believe the challenge was just? Pray for wisdom to discern their hearts, and how to exhort them if it seems their loved one is not being heard and needs to be.

2. How do you interact with women and children? In what ways do you need to change in relating to your wife as the “weaker vessel”? Where are you in danger of frustrating or exasperating your children (see Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21)? Do you have the courage to ask them these questions and really listen?

This is a huge issue that we’ll discuss further going forward. Pray that your

men are convicted in the ways they need to grow in their relationships.

3. How does the Jesus of the Gospels challenge our natural maleness? Where is he calling you to be bold? Where do you need to grow in humility?

Just as we can't fit Jesus in a mold, so he wants to break us out of our natural modes of relating. Some of your men need to grow in boldness and start asserting themselves; others need to learn to listen and not automatically react. By now you should have some sense of where each man is coming from. Pray for loving boldness to help your men see patterns they're blind to. This may need to happen over coffee, outside your group time.

DAY 3: NOT "SAVIOR"—DELIVERER

The goal of Day 3 is for your men to see that the deliverance we have in Jesus applies to life today. The Christian faith is not just about eternity. In Jesus' death and resurrection, his people have the power to overcome their struggle with sin.

Avoid allowing the conversation to turn into a Bible-trivia contest, but discuss the meaning of Jesus' name and title. Last week we examined Jesus' mission statement from Isaiah 61—do they *believe* he binds up broken hearts and sets captives free? What causes them to doubt or be cynical? Likely many of your men have tried unsuccessfully to overcome their struggles alone. Help them to see that their failure isn't God's fault, but the result of trying to deal with their sin on their own. As it was with Israel, deliverance happens—and looks—differently than we expect.

These illustrations are intended to help your men think differently about their salvation. Jesus' advent, and especially his death and resurrection, ushered the kingdom of God into our temporal existence. It marked the beginning of the great work of re-creation that will be completed on the last day. Our hope is that while we wait for the physical cosmos to be remade, we are already part of God's new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) as his kingdom advances in our temporal lives.

For Reflection:

1. *When you think of Jesus as Savior, do you tend to focus more on otherworldly (heavenly) ideas? What does his sacrifice mean to you beyond “you get to go to heaven when you die”?*

This question is intended to get your men wrestling with their understanding of the Christian life. Do they believe that the work of Christ has relevance today, particularly in their struggle with sexual sin?

2. *The Jews of Jesus’ day expected their deliverance to look differently. What are your own expectations of deliverance? In what ways might they need to be changed?*

Many of us expect that the Christian life should be easier, and that deliverance should mean freedom from temptation. Your men need to realize that their battle with the flesh will be lifelong. Freedom means that we are able to follow Christ in humble, dependent obedience, despite the relentlessness of temptation.

3. *How have your former attempts to overcome sexual sin diminished your understanding of Jesus’ work of deliverance? Do you still believe victory over your sin is possible? Why or why not?*

This question will help you discern your men’s hearts and see where they need to be encouraged and spurred on. Many have been living a defeated Christian life for a long time. Help them to see that, by letting others into their struggles, they’re finally facing their sin the way God calls them to.

DAY 4: THE COVENANT FULFILLED

Day 4 may be hard for men who don't like to talk theology. Still, it's important for them to see that our redemption in Jesus was God's plan from the very beginning. Discuss what it means that God submitted *himself* to the cross, taking the full responsibility of both the promise and the curse of the covenant. If you have time, read through the covenant ritual in Genesis 15. Point out the imagery of the dread darkness descending, a picture of judgment anticipating the day of the Lord (see Joel 2:31)—Jesus' death outside the city, in the darkness.

One very important point your men need to understand: The Father is not somehow detached from the suffering of his Son. It's not as if Jesus cries out from the cross in desperation and the Father's heart is calloused toward him. The entire Godhead suffered the pain of this broken relationship. Though they had lived in perfect, glorious communion from eternity, they were cut off from one another—in order to be reconciled to us! Ask your men to discuss their experience with an estranged relationship. How have they sought reconciliation—or have they? Mending a broken relationship is always costly—a tiny glimpse of what God did for us in Jesus. For reconciliation to occur, at least one party must be willing to absorb the pain of the offense and offer mercy.

Discuss what it means that Jesus triumphed over the forces of darkness. What does this say about our struggle with sexual sin? How does it give us hope to know that Jesus rules the universe *right now*? Too often, our focus is on all the ways this world is still broken—the evidence that the devil is still wreaking havoc broadly and in our lives specifically. Ask your men to discuss their understanding of Jesus' current reign. We'll look at this more closely next week, but our ability to lay hold of this truth by faith makes all the difference in our fight against sin. We do not cry out to a weak Savior hanging on a cross—we bring our petitions before a mighty King, seated on the throne, ruling over all things, who has promised to meet us in our weakness and enable us to live victoriously for him.

Ephesians 1:19–23 is huge! God promises that the same resurrection power

that brought Jesus back from the dead is working in us to give us power over sin. Jesus united himself to us. His power is at work in us. Our union with him is our hope for change. By the Spirit, he is at work in us, changing us from the inside out and promising to complete the work he's begun.

For Reflection:

1. How does it encourage you to know that God is completely responsible for every aspect of the covenant? What would it look like for you to believe that, and to rest in the work of Christ?

The irony of the Christian life is that change never begins with our striving, but with our ability to believe and rest in God's promises. "[Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). In John 6:29, Jesus said that the work of God was to believe in him. Pray that your men see the importance of developing a childlike faith.

2. How does the idea of Jesus as deliverer change your perspective on his relevance to your life right now? How would your life be different if you fully believed that?

This addresses the reality that Jesus is the reigning King of the universe. How would your men's lives look different if they lived in the reality of this truth? Do they believe that his resurrection power is available to them?

3. Where do you need to experience deliverance in your life—an exodus from slavery to sin? What would be different if Jesus brought you out of exile and back into the Promised Land?

Continue to encourage your men to open up about current struggles and where they need deliverance this week. It might be sexual struggles, problems at work, or a difficult relationship.

DAY 5: THE RADICAL KING

In Day 5, we begin to investigate what it means to live as a citizen of the kingdom. The reminder from the garden of Gethsemane should help your men realize that Jesus surrendered in strength, not because he was overpowered. Every moment of his life was an act of humble submission to the will of his Father. It was a conscious setting aside of his glory and his rights (see Philippians 2:5–11). Likewise, God gives us strength to live for him, but it often looks very different than how we'd like.

In future weeks we'll look at God's positive calling on our lives and what it means to live as his ambassadors. For now, briefly discuss how Jesus' way of doing things differs from how the church often functions. For example, do our enemies (even within the church) feel our love or self-righteous indignation?

Discuss the passages listed. How do these truths convey a better hope for change? Does Jesus' resurrection power seem real to your men? Our hope is ultimately in our union with Jesus, by his Spirit. It is his life flowing in us that brings change.

Discuss what it means that the Spirit has been poured out and intercedes for us. How does it encourage your men to consider the extent of God's care? The Spirit's intercession is another demonstration of how thoroughly our salvation is the work of God alone. We need him even to pray for us!

Along with the Spirit, Jesus intercedes for us. John describes him as our advocate before the throne, who defends us when we fall (1 John 2:1).

Discuss your hope in the incarnation, and have your men consider that Jesus knows their temptations exactly. How does that reality change the way they can approach him in their struggles? Think of a home-improvement project, like installing a new sink. The first time takes all afternoon; the next time you know what you're doing. You impress your buddies when you go over and help them. Now, consider that Jesus endured all our temptations already, perfectly. He knows exactly the grace your men need to face their temptations and still remain on their feet. He offers real transforming power because he knows what it takes to respond righteously in the face of

temptation.

Your men need to see that in every way, God is carrying us through this life. As men, we really don't like being needy, but if we're honest we know that we are. Discuss whether this encourages your men or frustrates them. How do they feel about being so dependent on Jesus? Where do they need to repent of their self-sufficiency and pride? Are they bold enough to admit their fears and weakness? Paul gives a significant key to our victory when he declares, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9b).

For Reflection:

1. Do you believe you're stronger than Samson? Why or why not? Have you ever experienced this kind of strength? What was it like?

Because the Spirit of Jesus is inside us, we're in a place of greater strength than Samson, who remained a slave to his sexual appetite. It's likely that some of your men, early in their lives in Christ, experienced victory in this area. Remind them of this, and pray they'll see that he's still able to deliver them.

2. In what contexts are you most prone to posture and pretend like everything's fine? What does it look like when you do?

Lead by sharing your own struggles with the "fear of man." Ask your men to be specific about their own people and situations. Help them begin to see their patterns. Our tendency to bolster our self-confidence in these situations ultimately feeds our insecurities (if we fail) or pride (if we succeed). Both results keep us stuck in our sexual sin.

3. Are there places in life where you feel like an orphan? What would it be like to live in the knowledge that you're not alone?

Even though we hate it, God created us to be dependent. We need him, whether we acknowledge it or not. Encourage your men to be honest about places in their lives where they've encountered fear or loneliness. It may be hard for them to be vulnerable about these things. Lead by example.

WEEK 6: THE REIGNING KING

DAY 1: REMEMBER—THEOLOGY MATTERS!

Day 1 addresses our shoots—how our functional theology impacts our struggle with sin. Ask the men how they're dealing with the increased focus on theology in recent weeks. As "fixers," most men want very clear steps, and we'll get to those soon. But apart from understanding how to live in the reality of what Jesus has done for us, all our attempts at change will be focused on self-effort.

Can your men relate to the boa constrictor or quicksand examples? Ask them to share similar lies they believe about their sin. Do they believe purity is impossible? Challenge them to see how pretending to put up a good fight turns into an opportunity to surrender to their flesh after it fails.

Also discuss how we often allow our experiences to define truth. How have your men allowed guilt to cloud their experience of the Christian life? Where do their feelings eclipse God's promises? What would it look like for them to walk by faith in their struggle against sexual sin? Spend a few minutes discussing the difference it makes to embrace the truth in the midst of temptation, when we're confronted by the enemy's lies.

For Reflection:

1. What lies do you believe about your struggle with sin? Does ongoing victory over temptation seem impossible? Do you believe it's only a matter of time before you fall again? Explain.

Ask your men to provide their own metaphors to describe their experience with ongoing sin. Ask Jesus to clearly show all of you how the truth of Scripture counters the lies they believe.

2. How has your experience negatively informed your understanding of what's ultimately true?

Again, help your men to see how their understanding of life and God is

often filtered through their experiences. Even if they know all the right answers, help them see that their functional theology is very different than their official theology.

3. How do your conclusions dictate the outcome of your struggle against sin? What connections can you see between your functional theology and your behavior?

Help your men see that their hearts are active. They don't have to be victims of their functional theology, but by letting themselves be victims, they enable themselves to continue pursuing their sin. We all live in a love-hate relationship with our sin. If we believe that "resistance is futile," we have an excuse to fall, even if we're able to hold out for a period of time. But because the gospel *is* true, your men can walk out the door and never act out in the same way again. They will always struggle with sin in this life on some level. However, Jesus is committed to changing us and rooting out sin, as our eyes are opened wider to him and his kingdom expands in our hearts.

DAY 2: JESUS ESTABLISHED A KINGDOM

In Week 4 we discussed that Jesus' mission was to overturn the effects of the curse. In so doing, he established the kingdom of God, bringing life and healing to this sick and dying world. The goal of Day 2 is to make clear that despite our experiences of feeling enslaved to sin, the heart of the gospel message is that Satan's reign of tyranny is over and Jesus has ascended the throne.

Discuss the image of Satan as the bound strong man. How is this truth demonstrated by the global spread of the gospel? What does that reveal about the kingdom of Christ? How does our own conversion demonstrate the reality of the power offered to us in our daily struggles?

We'll look at this more in a later week, but this section highlights the reality of spiritual warfare. This world has been Satan's dominion since the fall. He has been allowed to rule over it (although God sets his boundaries—see Job 1:12; 2:4–6). Sexual sin is one of his greatest tools to keep us enslaved. Addressing this issue in your life means you're directly challenging the

kingdom of darkness. We should not be surprised at the fierceness of the battle.

Much of the American church has a very individualistic “Jesus and me” approach to the Christian life. One of the ways this plays out is seeing the gospel as purely about personal salvation instead of realizing that Jesus’ mission encompassed the renewal of the entire cosmos. Romans 8:20–22 describes all of creation as languishing under the curse. A significant point of growth for us is to realize that Christ calls us to be part of a bigger story—God’s great work of redemption. Your men not only need to be delivered from their sexual sin, but from their tiny view of what God is doing in the world. There is a glorious life for them to embrace if they’ll turn from their folly and pursue the kingdom of God.

For Reflection:

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus came to establish God’s kingdom? How does this change the scenario for our daily life?

As discussed in Week 4, the kingdom going forward means that Jesus is overturning the effects of the curse. How have your men experienced this in their lives? Help them to consider this reality, especially against the backdrop of lies they believe about the futility of the fight.

2. How does it make you feel to consider that seeking freedom from your sexual sin is a frontal assault on Satan’s kingdom?

You’ll probably get a variety of answers. Some men will be itching for a fight; others will be scared by this reality. Either extreme needs to be balanced by both the seriousness and cost of this fight, but the great hope is that the One in us is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4). Hopefully they will be excited to go to war for the sake of their King.

3. In what ways are you tempted to see the Christian life as about your personal salvation from hell rather than God’s huge, cosmic purposes? What would change if you embraced the bigger picture?

Help your men to consider the ways they approach the Christian life with a self-focused perspective. Just as sexual sin reflects our inherent selfishness,

we approach our relationship to God (and others) with the same brokenness. God is calling them outside themselves in every aspect of life.

DAY 3: KINGDOM OF THE BELOVED SON

The goal of Day 3 is to help your men see that redemption is bigger than their personal salvation. Today, we look at the tangible ways Jesus demonstrated that the kingdom of God had come in him. This anticipates where we're headed in future weeks, when we look at the importance of our role as Christ's ambassadors to extend his kingdom.

Discuss John the Baptist's experience of doubt. Does this surprise your men? Talk about the honesty of the Bible in facing the challenges of life. The Psalms are filled with the lament of God's people, wrestling to cling to faith when life gets hard. Discuss what sustains us in the midst of our trials, suffering, and brokenness. There's a reason the Old Testament constantly looks back to the exodus. We too need to fix our eyes on the redemption we have in Christ—our exodus from sin and death.

Encourage one another with the ways that the curse is being overturned in your lives here and now—freedom from various sins, ways that God is changing your relationships, use of money, struggles with substance abuse. We need to recount his faithfulness to us in the big picture of redemption, as well as in all the smaller ways he's transforming our lives.

Redemption is cosmic in scope, yet it is radically focused on humanity. As the bride of Jesus, we are central to God's plan of redemption. Our purity and presence with Jesus for eternity was a huge part of the joy set before him as he went to the cross. How do your men respond to this hope? We never want to lose focus on the fact that God's plan of redemption is both cosmic and radically particular. Jesus chose each one of your men individually, loves them desperately, and is eagerly looking forward to celebrating the wedding feast in heaven. The human experiences of falling in love, marriage, and the ecstasies of sexuality ultimately give us glimpses into this awesome reality!

For Reflection:

1. *What are some ways you see the world “groaning” personally? culturally? globally?*

This question should help your men look beyond their own struggle with sin to see how the curse has thoroughly infected this world. Ask them to be specific about both personal and global fallout.

2. *Do you believe that Jesus’ death was for you personally? How does it encourage you to know that gathering a people was central to Jesus’ plan—or does it? Explain.*

We always need to hold in tension that redemption is infinitely bigger than us, yet radically personal. Your men know the correct answer to this question, but dig deeper. Discuss what it *really* means to them, and pray they’ll embrace this reality more deeply.

3. *How does the truth that we’re a people for Christ’s own possession change our approach to God? What hope can we draw from the fact that this is “the kingdom of the Beloved Son”?*

This question anticipates where we’re headed in Day 5, looking at our union with Christ. Your men probably understand the judicial reality of their justification, but they need to embrace the wonder that it was in love that the Father sent Jesus to redeem them. He is not emotionally distant in our redemption and through our union with Christ we are now his beloved sons as well!

DAY 4: THE REIGNING KING

Day 4 emphasizes the Bible’s teaching on the current reign of Jesus, while acknowledging that this often doesn’t seem to fit our perception of the world. Discuss Hebrews 2:8–9 and the Abraham Kuyper quote. What situations in your men’s lives, or the world, cause them to question the reality of Christ’s reign? In what ways do they think the world (or their lives) should function differently? How does this cause them to question God’s care for them?

This is a repeated theme, but one that's necessary to revisit with your men. There will be weeks when they're not wrestling with their faith and circumstances, and others when this reality will connect poignantly with their current experience. This reality has two sides—one is that Jesus is reigning, the other that Satan is doomed. Are your men encouraged by this reality, or do they feel like Satan is an unbeatable foe? Encourage them with the hope of Romans 16:20: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." We will join Jesus in crushing the head of our enemy!

For Reflection:

1. What causes you to question the present reign of Jesus? How would you expect the world to be different if this were true? Where have your desires become demands? In other words, when do you find yourself saying, "If Christianity were true then I would/wouldn't ... "?

Encourage your men to articulate where they're discouraged, frustrated, and anxious. Urge them to describe ways they want their lives to be different and help them to process their desires biblically. Help them to consider God's bigger purposes in the challenges they face. You need a lot of wisdom here. Your men need to know you truly care and aren't just trying to stick a Bible verse on their problems. Helping a brother process an abusive childhood is radically different than talking to him about a pet that just died.

2. What does it mean to you that Satan's kingdom is destroyed? How would your struggle with lust change if you believed that Jesus was reigning, and that through the Spirit victory was within your grasp?

Do your men believe that the domain of darkness is broken? Tomorrow's reading looks at the truth that our ability to fight sin comes from our union with Christ. For now, help them see and receive the hope that our enemy is defeated.

3. In what ways are you resistant to let go and live in the freedom offered by Jesus? How do you believe you'll "miss out" if you surrender?

This is important! Your men need to consider whether they're stuck in their sin because they actually love it and are afraid to let it go. What are they

afraid to lose? What will obedience cost them? Remind each other of the devastation caused by sin and the blessings you've experienced when you trusted Jesus and let go of sin.

DAY 5: UNITED TO THE KING

Day 5 reminds your men of the hope that they are united to Jesus in the Spirit. The Christian life is much harder than any of us anticipated. And, as we learn in our struggle with sexual sin, it's impossible to live in our own strength.

Discuss Jesus' promises from John 14 and 17. Do your men believe they're united to Jesus and the Father? Jesus described us as being one with them, just as he and the Father are one. Remind your men that the most frequent command in the Bible is "fear not," and the most frequent promise is "I am with you." Share your own experiences of feeling like an orphan. Where are you most prone to feel fear and abandoned by God?

The image of Jesus as the true vine, and our calling to abide in him, holds together both our responsibility and his activity in our lives. Wrestle with the warning that branches that don't bear fruit will be discarded. Don't be too quick to dismiss your men's concerns. The last thing you want to do is disrupt the conviction of the Holy Spirit! Discuss the call to moment-by-moment dependence. Does this seem impossible? Do your men see this as an invitation? God is not calling them to a duty, but to live consistently within their design as dependent creatures. This is the only way to experience peace and contentment in him!

Discuss the back-handed encouragement that God uses impossible situations in our lives to demonstrate his power to us. Ask your men to share ways they've experienced this in other areas of life. How have they received God's blessings in the midst of their trials? Encourage one another that God is at work in the same way through your struggles with sexual sin. How is he calling them to deeper dependence and surrender?

Discuss the difference between artificial fruit and genuine fruit. Remind your men (from Week 3) that artificial fruit is doing the right things for the wrong reasons—guilt, pride, trying to hide the truth about our sin, etc.

Ask your men to describe their experience of dependence on Jesus when they first came to faith. Did they experience greater victory over their sin than they do now? Encourage your men to see that Jesus offers the same deliverance they've experienced in the past. Ask them to articulate where they're self-reliant. Widen the net so they're looking at everything from sexual sin to the workplace and relationships.

For Reflection:

1. What other circumstances in your life have brought you to your knees? How can you apply the lessons learned through those experiences to your struggle with sexual sin?

It's important for your men to see that God is with them in the middle of their struggle with sexual sin, to draw them closer to himself. Encourage one another with God's faithfulness during past trials. Obviously this doesn't mean that every story has a happy ending. Often we see the depth of God's goodness when situations don't work out the way we hope.

2. How do we abide in Christ while laboring and toiling? How can you know whether you are producing genuine or artificial fruit?

The quick-and-dirty answer is the result in our hearts. Whether the issue is sanctification or service, labor done while abiding produces a deeper love for Jesus and humility in our hearts. Pride in our accomplishments—especially if we're comparing ourselves to others and have no perspective of Jesus' power at work in us—is a clear indication that we're laboring in our flesh. Both fruit might look the same, but their true identity will be revealed on the last day (see 1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

3. Do you need to return to your first love? In what ways have you returned to self-reliance since first coming to Jesus? Consider this broadly, beyond your struggle with sexual sin.

Consider reading the letter to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7). Pray your men will be able to connect with this reality. Our self-reliance completely short-circuits our walk with Jesus. The constant battle of the Christian life is to live in humble reliance on our Father, just as Jesus did.

WEEK 7: SURRENDERING TO THE KING

DAY 1: GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY

This week, we focus on the call to surrender our lives to Jesus. He calls us to lose our lives for his sake in order to find them, “and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Revisit the reality that we often diminish what it means that Jesus is our Savior. Do your men see how they can use this to minimize the presence of sin in their lives? If Jesus’ primary function is to save us from our sins, to serve us as an atoning sacrifice, then there is very little direct call for change. But if, as the New Testament repeatedly attests, he is Lord of all, there are huge ramifications for how we live.

Do your men wrestle with the idea that Jesus can be our Savior but not our Lord? This might have been an attempt not to create anxiety over eternal security when believers, or family members and friends, were struggling with ongoing sin in their lives. It’s far better to acknowledge that growth in grace is a fundamental reality of the Christian life and call brothers to run with perseverance.

Where do your men struggle with autonomy? What does it mean to them that they’ve been created by God to be humble, dependent servants? Satan’s biggest strategy is to have us focus on serving self. Discuss ways your men have experienced the reality that we’re always serving someone or something.

For Reflection:

1. *Do you believe that “you gotta serve somebody”? How have you experienced this reality?*

Your men’s struggle with sexual sin is an obvious place where they’ve found themselves enslaved to an idol. Where else have they experienced this?

Other addictions, work, sports, hobbies—there are innumerable ways we serve our passions.

2. Does it make you feel like less of a man not to be autonomous? What does this reveal about your understanding of what it means to be a man?

We are constantly bombarded by the idea that men should be self-sufficient, able to stand on their own two feet without support. Commanding our own lives, making our own choices, is seen almost as an inalienable right. Help your men see the lies we believe about masculinity and about humanity in general.

3. If you can accept this hard truth, can you imagine what it would be like to serve your King with joy? How would life be different if serving Jesus was a delight and not a burden? Describe times you've experienced this.

One of the great ironies is that we want to be autonomous and at the same time live in fear because we poignantly feel our limitations. To let go of the illusion of autonomy includes the invitation to enter into Jesus' rest in deeper ways. Ask your men to share times where they've experienced joy in serving, or times when they've realized that Jesus' call to turn from their sin was an invitation to life and not death. To live as servants of Christ is to experience life to the fullest—the way God intended for us to live.

DAY 2: WHY DO YOU OBEY?

Day 2 looks at some of the fallout from our wrong views of Christ's work. On one level we may reject the idea of obedience altogether, but there are also a host of reasons why we obey for wrong reasons.

For example, lots of people claim to be saved but never demonstrate tangible fruit of the Spirit's presence in their lives. Discuss how the Savior-only mindset undermines true obedience. Do your men feel like God is holding out on them? Is their obedience begrudging? Do they feel like they know they should obey, but in doing so they're really missing out? This attitude may be particularly present in men wrestling with same-sex attraction. Even if they're married and able to express sexuality as God designed, it will be counter to their natural desires and could leave them

feeling like God is holding out on them. Discuss how this view of God is twisted from his true nature. In what ways will this attitude shape your men's hearts toward God? How might it lead them eventually back to sin?

Discuss the example of the brother who asked how we know when we've suffered enough and are allowed to self-medicate. In what ways do your men believe that they need to take care of themselves? Jesus promised not to leave us as orphans. Discuss the reality that we often live as if he had never promised this.

Do your men turn on the good works after they've acted out? What forms does their penance take? How does this impact their view of God? How does it affect their ability to believe the gospel and apply it to their struggle with sexual sin?

How have your men tried to make God their debtor? In what ways do they hope that obedience in one area of life will result in blessing somewhere else? Discuss the reality that Jesus described the Christian life as carrying a cross. Did they know what they were signing up for? How does their experience of the Christian life differ from what they anticipated?

Ask your men to discuss how they see pride at work in these various forms of broken obedience.

For Reflection:

1. How is your relationship with God characterized by slavish fear, seeing him as an angry judge, ready to slam down the gavel in condemnation?

Discuss how this view of God is radically counter to the truth of the gospel. Remind your men of the hope of Romans 8:1–4.

2. What does obligatory obedience reveal about your view of God? In what ways does this reveal that your relationship with God is focused on personal effort?

Rather than resting in the finished work of Christ, obligatory obedience tries to earn God's favor. Jesus said the Father is seeking people who worship in spirit and truth, and we can only get there through the joy and abandon of

the gospel.

3. *Are you guilty of toeing the line in order to receive blessing from God? How do you respond when life doesn't go the way you think it should, despite your obedience? What do you think of the idea that you're trying to make God your debtor?*

How your men respond to suffering and the denial of things they crave exposes *why* they obey. If they run to sin in their disappointment after a period of obedient, prayerful anticipation, it reveals how prone they are to obey in order to receive.

DAY 3: LOVE SO AMAZING, SO DIVINE ...

Day 3 focuses on the only source for genuine obedience—resting in God's glorious love for us in Christ Jesus. Discuss how your men have viewed the admonition that they've been bought with a price. Has this seemed like God is using guilt manipulation (i.e., since Jesus suffered, we'd better be good boys)? How does the focus of 2 Corinthians 5, on the love of Christ literally being the controlling factor for our obedience, make a difference?

It may be hard for your men to acknowledge the reality that they long to be loved. Most of us hide behind the façade of calloused emotions, pretending not to feel the impact of rejection or the withholding of love. Articulate your own longing for these things. An important aspect of your men's growth in grace is their ability to come to grips with their desires and to see that they haven't cut off their emotions, but choose to medicate them through idolatry.

Discuss what it means to your men that God loves them. If this question seems too familiar, ask if they believe God *likes* them, delights to spend time with them, experiences joy in their existence. There is a difference between believing you're loved by obligation and believing you're delighted in. No spouse wants cool, emotionally detached love. We want to be delighted in! The gospel demonstrates the delight of God in his people, even as it manifests his grace and mercy to us.

Discuss the two truths of the gospel: that we are worse than we ever thought, but more loved than we'd ever hoped. Are your men able to hold

these two things together? Some of your more theologically focused men may want to rankle over the issue of redemption being solely about the glory of God, without any regard for those redeemed. Don't dismiss these comments, but help your men to see that we tend to split theological hairs whereas Scripture holds multiple layers of truth and reality together. God's purposes are always greater than we can imagine, accomplishing deeper, richer purposes. If there are particular men who regularly enjoy pursuing this type of purposeless theological discourse, pull them aside and express that these conversations aren't profitable to the group—maybe even gently warn them about the danger of losing Jesus in the love of theology (see the exhortations in 1 Timothy 1:5–7 and Titus 3:9–11).

Discuss the contrast between pagans and Christians in Philippians 3. How are your men learning to reorient their lives around Jesus? It doesn't happen through their good works, but in having an identity rooted in what Jesus accomplished for them, the promises he's given to them, and resting in his delight and acceptance.

For Reflection:

1. Review your answers to yesterday's reflection section. How could a focus on the love of God in Christ change your approach to obedience?

One way to think about this question is to consider past employers your men have worked for. It makes a difference if the person we serve is kind to us, and genuinely cares about us. There is little joy in obligatory service.

2. How hard is it for you to believe that Jesus delights in you? How does it encourage you to consider that you were redeemed in love—that Jesus' love for you is like the delight and anticipation of a bridegroom (see Isaiah 62:3–5)?

Your men likely struggle with the image of Jesus as Bridegroom, as it's hard to consider the marital relationship apart from a focus on sexuality. Help them to connect with the emotional component of delighting. Remind them of the experience of falling in love. Help them to see that God created it for us to “see in a mirror dimly” the wonder of his love. Our human experience of

love, at its best, is intended to illuminate the glory of God's love for us.

3. What would change if your life were focused on worshipping by the Spirit of God, glorying in Christ Jesus and putting no confidence in the flesh? How does understanding Jesus' love make that more attractive?

Help your men to be specific about what changes would occur in their lives if they applied this definition of a Christian, especially against the backdrop of the Philippians 3 description of a pagan—which, sadly, characterizes even many of us in Christ. Your men need to grasp that the only way they'll see true life change is through the gospel!

DAY 4: A RADICALLY DIFFERENT KING

The goal of Day 4 is to show that Jesus is unlike any other king in the history of the world. Our natural reaction as fallen creatures is to rebel against authority. This is exacerbated by the world's experience with totalitarian regimes and our own cultural history as Americans. Given this background, your men need to see Jesus is a different King in every way.

Discuss the contrast between Jesus' conception and upbringing and that of other royalty. Ask your men to consider what it would be like for them to put aside their status and material possessions to live in a slum in a third-world country. Most of us struggle to give out of our abundance to the poor; very few are willing to do it in a way that actually affects their quality of life. It's not just royalty who won't surrender their status—*none* of us want to be humbled beyond our position. But Jesus willingly, for the joy set before him, set everything aside for us. This act in itself was a profound demonstration of submission and suffering.

Discuss the hope that Jesus understands the specific temptations we face. Do your men believe that he really understands their struggle with sin? What difference would it make if they believed that from his own victorious experience with temptation, he can give them the exact grace they need in each specific circumstance? Where do they doubt his experience with temptation? Do they believe that his temptations included real suffering? Discuss the prevalent belief that because Jesus was God, his ability to fight

sin was easy. How does the teaching of Hebrews counter this?

Help your men see the importance of embracing the full humanity of Jesus, not just his divinity. To be true to the Christian faith, we need to hold these two natures together, including the reality that Jesus' experience of temptation was genuine suffering—just as it is for each of us.

For Reflection:

1. In what ways is it hard for you to believe that Jesus suffered the exact same temptations you face? How would your struggle with temptation be different if you believed it?

Help your men to articulate their doubts about the depth of Jesus' temptations. What makes theirs so different? Encourage one another to see that Jesus knows what we need. Consider the difference of setting off on a wilderness hike with an experienced guide, as opposed to getting lost in the mountains alone.

2. Do you think obedience was easier for Jesus, that his temptations were less severe because he's God? How does this view undermine the reality that Jesus was also fully human?

Help your men to see that the belief that Jesus had it easier undermines their ability to perceive the depth of his love for them, and at the same time provides an excuse for their ongoing failure.

3. How does the suffering of Jesus—the reality that he willingly put aside his glory to enter our suffering—impact your ability to trust him with your own trials?

We put ourselves through needless grief when we fail to trust Jesus with the trials of life. He not only knows the suffering of temptation, but every aspect of life under the curse. He can give us the grace we need for every circumstance.

DAY 5: GENUINE OBEDIENCE

Day 5 brings together all the threads of the past week as we look at the ultimate source of obedience—finding joy and contentment in Jesus. Paul recounts that he discovered the secret of contentment regardless of his circumstances because he learned that Jesus’ strength sustained him (see Philippians 4:10–13). Ask your men if they see the connection between trusting God’s goodness toward them and their ability to obey. What will it take for them to believe that God truly loves them and promises to bless them?

Discuss the quotes from the Psalms. Do your men believe that God is good, and that if they seek him they will lack no good thing? What good thing do they believe he is withholding? Do they believe he will give them the desires of their hearts? Do they trust he is the fountain of life and a God of pleasure who wants them to experience joy and delight in this life? Help them examine their doubts, and pinpoint thwarted desires that cause them to question God’s goodness. This may bring up pain and brokenness from their past. Pray for wisdom in your responses and to know when to redirect the conversation and follow up with individuals later.

Discuss how the cross enables us to see the love of God, even when our circumstances seem to tell a different story. Although it’s important to realize that the Christian faith holds hope for today, not just eternity, our ultimate hope is the new heavens and earth—when God promises to wipe away every tear, heal all our brokenness, and make all things new. Discuss how this hope helps sustain us in our current trials. Do your men believe that God is a God of pleasure? What does it mean to them that Jesus designed the orgasm? How does the promise that our future pleasures are literally beyond our ability to comprehend help us face temptation now? Do they believe that knowing Jesus is of infinitely greater worth than the pursuit of sexual pleasure?

Paul considered all things “dung” compared to knowing Jesus (Philippians 3:8 KJV). Discuss Paul’s hope and what it meant for to him to know Christ—to be found in him, righteous because of his faith in Jesus, knowing his resurrection power in this life and the eventuality of literal resurrection. Of

course, resurrection life also involves sharing in Jesus' suffering. Do your men see the kingdom as a "pearl of great price" and hidden treasure, or does it seem like a mockery of the "real" pleasure they seek in their sin?

Discuss the idea that any object of our lust only draws our heart because it reflects Jesus, albeit exceedingly dimly. Discuss the reality that our desires seem insatiable because they are designed to be satisfied only by an infinite God.

For Reflection:

1. What does it mean to you that God invites you to drink from his river of delights? Be honest, and specific.

This question should help your men wrestle with their understanding of God and his desire to bless us with good things. Discuss the reality that God created taste buds, music, a beautiful world to behold, even the nerve endings in our genitals. Have they ever considered these things? How does it change their perspective of him?

2. Why is it hard for us to imagine that God is a God of pleasure? What might this reveal about our false beliefs about him?

This comes at the same issue from a more negative angle. Help your men articulate the lies they believe about God (the shoots from Week 3). Remind them that embracing the truth of God's character is a crucial step in overcoming their struggle with sin.

3. What does it mean to you that any object of your lust is merely a poor reflection of the infinitely greater glory and beauty of its Creator? If this is true, how can you turn temptation into experiences of worship?

Hopefully this will spur positive discussion about the wonder of God's glory and beauty. It also gives a radically new perspective to moments of temptation. An object of lust can become an invitation to worship the true God, who is infinitely more beautiful and who freely gives us himself to enjoy forever!

SECTION 3: A NEW BROTHERHOOD

WEEK 8: WELCOME TO BROTHERHOOD

DAY 1: RETHINKING THE MANLY MAN

This week, we examine the importance of community in the Christian life. Most men live very isolated lives, but God calls us to live in deep, interdependent relationships.

Discuss the contrast between the cultural messages we receive about masculinity and our experiences as men. How do *your* men describe what it means to be a man? Ask them to describe the cultural ideal: What are we supposed to look like? How do they measure up? Where do they fall short?

In what ways have your men disengaged from their emotions? What is the fallout of trying to make life work apart from relationship? Some men are probably frustrated by the cultural pendulum swing toward making men overly emotional. Help them see that there needs to be a balance. They don't have to walk around with their hearts on their sleeves, but they need to stop pretending they've got it all together and don't need anyone's help. By avoiding others, they deny the reality that God created us to live in interdependent relationships.

How do your men experience their limits? Where do they posture, pretending not to be overwhelmed by current or future circumstances? Help them see how this behavior deepens their shame and isolation, especially if they believe other men actually have it all together. Do they believe we're created for relationship? If so, how does this reality challenge the cultural messages?

For Reflection:

1. What messages have you heard that reinforce the idea that men should be self-sufficient? How do you try to handle life on your own?

Consider messages from media, church, or family. Ask men to be specific

about situations they try to handle alone. When have others encouraged them to ask for help (like the stereotypical scenario of stopping to get directions) and they've refused? How might this reveal their determination to make it on their own?

2. When is the last time you asked for help in dealing with a significant problem (spiritual issues, family relationships, work, etc.)? What happened, as a result?

Are your men reaching out to others? When do they seek help, if at all? For example, they might be comfortable asking the pastor theological questions, but refuse to seek help in the workplace.

3. How does a self-sufficient outlook impact your interactions with others? How might it prevent you from being honest about your struggles with sexual sin?

If we're committed to go it alone in silly, mundane ways (like asking directions), chances are we're going to tackle the really hard, potentially embarrassing life issues on our own as well. This is particularly true when our reputations are at stake.

DAY 2: RETHINKING CHURCH

Day 2 challenges the way we bring our "rugged individualism" with us to church. Some men are completely disengaged, only attending worship services. Others may be more involved, but only give the appearance of genuine intimacy. In reality, they're still hiding. No one knows who they really are, in their deepest struggles and pain. Ask your men to describe their relationships in the body. Are there men who truly know them? Have they shared their sexual struggles with church leadership? Do your men even *desire* deeper relationships?

Discuss the difference between fellowship in the early church and our experience in the church today. Acknowledging that there's a *huge* gap of time and culture, nonetheless, in what ways should Christians today strive to deepen their fellowship and their regularity of time together? What would it look like today for Christians to share their lives with one another? How

would consistent fellowship help us in our struggles with sexual sin?

In what ways are your men tempted to approach the Christian life as “me and Jesus”? How can this group help change the way your men approach the Christian life? God uses things like sexual sin to humble us and show us how desperately we need each other.

Discuss how the Bible uses various corporate metaphors to describe Christians. What does it mean to your men that they’re called to be parts of his body, members of a royal priesthood, etc.? Is this how they typically view the Christian life? Discuss the descriptions of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 and Ephesians 4:15–16. When have your men experienced being cared for by the body? Encourage one another with ways the church has been a blessing in the past. How have they experienced the “eye” needing the “hand”?

Do your men believe they need the body to reach maturity? Why or why not? Discuss how the Bible balances our personal responsibility to make our “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10) with the reality that we only reach maturity through the input of the entire body. How have your men experienced this reality? What role has the body of Christ had in your own personal growth? Encourage your brothers with how Jesus has used this in your life. Also discuss the way Colossians 2:19 describes our growth in the Christian life. How would our lives be different if we believed we needed others? How would this affect our priorities, time management, etc.?

For Reflection:

1. In what ways are you tempted to view the Christian life as a “me and Jesus” affair? How is that attitude encouraged in the church? How is it challenged?

Beware of church bashing as you discuss this question. There are ways that the church needs to take fellowship and corporate spiritual nurture more seriously, but your men also need to take full responsibility for their own sinful actions. Help them to consider the particular ways *they* choose to keep others at arm’s length.

2. Do you believe that you need the body of Christ to reach maturity? In what ways have you experienced this reality?

Given the passages above, hopefully your men won't debate the importance of the body in personal sanctification. Focus on your own experience with being mentored and disciplined in the body, and invite your men to share their positive experiences as well.

3. How would your life change if you embraced your need for the body of Christ? How would this impact your priorities, your use of time, etc.?

Encourage your men to be specific. We need to be intentional about making relationships a priority. This will probably be pretty countercultural for most of your men. Help them to recognize this, and to consider ways they need to readjust their lives.

DAY 3: ANYONE HERE BEEN IN THE ARMY?

Day 3 introduces an idea your men probably know intellectually but don't live out: we need the body because we live in a world at war. The Bible makes clear that we are surrounded by unseen spiritual forces bent on our destruction. Often individual churches tend to slip off one side or the other with this issue—which in itself proves the reality of this struggle! Some churches see demons behind every sin issue and circumstance; therefore, they cast out the “demon of lust” and think all will be well. Other traditions downplay or even dismiss the reality of spiritual warfare. Their goal is to make sure Christians are aware of their own heart motivations and keep the focus on personal responsibility for sin.

When confronted with temptation and sin, we ask, “Is it the work of the enemy, or the result of our own sinful hearts?” Again, the Bible's answer is “Yes!” The devil and his minions are always active in our sin—and so are we. We need to be careful to properly balance this issue.

Ask your men how their lives reflect the biblical reality of a cosmos at war. Don't focus on temptation at this point, but on how (or if) the reality of spiritual warfare affects their priorities and relationships. How are your men preparing for the battle that is the Christian life? Do they even see it in this

light?

Highlight the D-Day/V-E Day illustration. The reality that we're in the midst of battle does not diminish the truth that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered. He has purposes for us in midst of this battle and calls us to trust him.

For Reflection:

1. How would your life change if you were more mindful of this truth—that the devil is filled with rage because his time is short, and that he's literally hell-bent on destroying you and those you love? How would a deeper awareness of this reality impact your day-to-day priorities?

Ask your men to be specific about what would change if they lived in the reality of a cosmos at war. How would this impact their leisure times? Their prayer lives? Their approach to reading the Bible? How would a robust understanding of our wartime existence change their priorities?

2. Do your relationships with other men in the church demonstrate this reality? Are there men battling alongside you, or do your relationships look more like a peace-time barbecue? How would your relationships need to change in order to reflect life in a cosmos at war?

How would this perspective change their approach to relationships in the body? What would look different if your men realized that their souls are in one another's hands, just as if they were sharing a foxhole on the frontlines? How would this impact our time together? Our conversations? Note: Even soldiers in war take "R&R." This approach to life doesn't mean there's no room for kicking back and watching a game together, but there should be time spent talking about things that really matter—our struggles with sin, problems in our relationships, etc.

3. What's your reaction to the promise of Romans 16:20? How can this hope impact your battle against temptation? How would it feel to have Satan's head under your heel, instead of his claws around your throat?

There are two sides to living in this biblical reality. One is to embrace the severity of our circumstances. We have an enemy bent on our destruction; this

world is not our home. But the other crucial piece is that victory is sure. Despite the crazy, painful twists and turns of this life, we've been told the end of the story—Jesus wins! We are fighting a foe who must submit to the King. Jesus is greater than the one in the world. He has already conquered, and invites us to walk in his victory.

DAY 4: NO COMMANDOS IN THIS ARMY

In Day 4, we continue to address the reality of our warfare with sin. But today, we also circle back to the reality that we've often fought our flesh on our own, and that this is exactly the opposite of how God calls us to battle. Ask your men to discuss ways they've attempted to bring about change on their own. How did these experiences impact them? How has this approach contributed to a sense of hopelessness?

Ask your men to discuss the façades they present to others—what masks are they hiding behind? Be sure to lead by sharing your own struggle of hiding behind masks. How do our masks affect our ability to have genuine relationships with other men in the body of Christ?

Do your men question God's love for them or power in their lives because of their ongoing struggle with sin? Discuss how we seek change in isolation, while God's design is for change to be a community event. How does this reality impact our expectations and view of God's care? Help your men see that God's desire is to bring healing and change in our lives, but that we must be willing to submit to his process.

Discuss Proverbs 18:1. What desires do we protect in our isolation? This could be an unwillingness to let go of our sin, a refusal to allow our reputations to be tarnished, or both. What does it say about our faith when we hide our sin in order to preserve our image? The depth to which your men believe the gospel is revealed by their willingness to be known at their worst. Challenge your men pointedly that their willingness to genuinely pursue change requires the intentional pursuit of brotherhood in the body of Christ. If men aren't willing to pursue authentic, honest relationships with one another, they're not truly serious about giving up their sexual sin. And it actually reveals deeper idols of pride, reputation, and fear of man.

For Reflection:

1. How have you isolated yourself from others in your sin? What façades do you present to others—good husband, father, ministry leader, etc.?

We've looked at similar questions in the past, and will again, but it's important for your men to continue wrestling with the reality of this dynamic in their hearts. Make sure they give specific examples for ways they present façades and what relationships are most affected by them.

2. What positive examples have you seen in the church of people receiving spiritual care to help them overcome struggles with sin? What would make you feel safe to disclose your own struggles?

Keep the focus on positive examples. Some men may have been burned by people in the church after disclosing their past, but focus on encouraging others that this does work. If necessary, help your men to see that even when others respond sinfully, God wants to work in our hearts despite the pain of that experience.

3. How is pride at work in your isolation? Are you willing to sacrifice your good reputation to overcome your struggle with sin? What does your attitude reveal about your heart and the depth of your faith?

This is a huge question that we'll spend time looking at more closely in later weeks, but get your men wrestling with this reality now. One of the significant ways God is at work through our sexual sin is to humble us. Your men are coming to group because on some level they're finally realizing they can't do it alone. This is huge! That alone is the beginning of humility. But it needs to go deeper. God uses our repeated failures and personal inability to draw us close to him. Help your men to see that this is ultimately an encouraging truth.

DAY 5: ENTERING THE FRAY

Day 5 challenges men to consider what spiritual warfare looks like in 21st-century America. In our culture, we are lured to sleep through our pleasures. We are distracted by the “good life” in this world, like the seed that fell among thorns and was “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14).

Discuss the comments of brothers from other countries who see the comfortable life in America as a greater threat than outright persecution. Do your men get this? The whore’s seduction is much like the illustration of the frog in a kettle—because they’re cold-blooded creatures, you can set a frog in a pot over a low flame and he’ll sit there comfortably, oblivious of the danger, until he’s stew. The enemy often uses God’s good gifts to seduce us, taking our eyes off the Giver to focus on the gifts as ends in themselves. Discuss the call of Colossians 3:1–2 and the challenge we face living in such a prosperous culture. Many theologians have noted that given our material blessings, every American Christian is in the position of the rich young man (Matthew 19; Mark 10).

Share your own challenge with being seduced by the things of this world, and ask your men to share specific examples of earthly things that draw their own hearts. How have hobbies, toys, sports, etc. negatively impacted their relationships? Do they spend more time pursuing “innocent” pleasures than pursuing Jesus? Do they see the propensity in their hearts to make good things, like theology, into idols? Make the explicit connection between our struggle with sexual sin and the various idols that draw our hearts. Make clear that Jesus wants to become the sole object of worship in their lives and that this means toppling all of our idols—even the socially acceptable ones.

For Reflection:

1. In what areas of life besides sex are you most at risk of being led astray—sports/entertainment, stuff, success, food, money, hobbies? What keeps your eyes focused on earth instead of heaven?

Lead by example; share various ways your own heart is seduced by the things of the world. Help your men consider when their enjoyment of a good gift could become an idol. Ask them to get specific and to consider their motivations. Are they trying to medicate in some way, or avoid facing a situation? How do their pursuits impact their relationships? Our idols will always create relational fallout with God and others.

2. What good things in your life are you tempted to turn into idols—ministry, biblical/theological study, relationships, work?

The last question was focused more on tangible pleasures; this one looks at more abstract idols. Consider again the issue of artificial fruit—that's one way we use good things wrongly. For example: our pursuit of Bible study can be divorced from genuine communion with Christ, becoming an intellectual exercise that feeds pride rather than cultivating humility. Relationships can be selfishly focused on what I get from the other person, or even making them a "Jesus replacement."

3. What tangible steps can you take to combat the ways you're seduced by the world? Who can you recruit to join the battle? Ask God to show you two or three men who can be intentional about fighting alongside you.

Challenge your men to lay out clear, measurable action steps to combat their idols. Help them determine who can best support them—it could be guys from within the group, or other men in their churches.

WEEK 9: REDEEMPTIVE COMMUNITY

DAY 1: WORSHIP IN A COUNTRY CLUB

This week, we focus on our need for the body of Christ to help us rightly see sin in our lives. All of us have huge blind spots. Unless we have brothers willing to speak truth into our lives, we won't see our hearts rightly.

We begin Day 1 by challenging how many churches function—like country clubs. Discuss this with your men. Ask how it affects them to see others who look like they have it all together—while their own lives are a mess. Do your men believe others in the body struggle with sin, or do they think they're the only ones? Point out the obvious fact: The other men in the group are proof that they're not alone!

At the same time, remind your men that we're not passive outsiders, but coconspirators. Discuss how your men perpetuate this broken pattern through their own self-protective façades. In other words, their hiding encourages other men to continue hiding. Discuss how we deceive ourselves by doing this, to the point that we begin to believe our own lies.

Do your men believe their sexual behavior is a demonstration of spiritual allegiance? If necessary, revisit the discussion from Week 2, Day 2 on 1 Thessalonians 4. Remind them that who they are sexually is the clearest picture of who they are spiritually. Ultimately, who I am in secret is the real me. This is reflected in hidden sexual sin, but also by who they are behind closed doors with family, coworkers, etc. What are the inconsistencies between their public and private personas?

Lead them in a frank discussion about Jesus' teaching on hypocrisy. This is incredibly important. The genuineness of our faith is not demonstrated by moral perfection, but honesty about our flaws. At the heart of the gospel is the invitation to walk in the light because we're reconciled to God through Jesus' death and resurrection. His mercy means we have nothing to fear by the light. But first, we need to die to our pride.

For Reflection:

1. In what ways are you deceived by your own façade—minimizing your sexual sin and focusing instead on all the “good” things about you?

Help your men to see how they’re tempted to diminish the severity of their sexual sin. This is a significant way we are self-deceived. Remind them that often the good things we do are—at least partially—artificial fruit intended to cover our guilt and shame. A good gauge is to consider how they respond when they’re confronted with their behavior.

2. Do you believe that your sexual behavior reveals the spiritual allegiance of your heart? Explain your answer.

Stress the reality that our sexuality—and private life in general—is a clearer picture of our spiritual state than our behavior Sunday morning.

3. Does Jesus’ challenge to the Pharisees in Matthew 23 scare you? How does your life demonstrate hypocrisy? How are your private and public personas different?

Most of us are hypocrites to some extent. Challenge your men to acknowledge this reality, and to grow in their commitment to live openly and honestly.

4. Are there behaviors in your life that you are continuing to hide—even from this group? If so, what would make you willing to bring them into the light?

There may be sexual sin your men are scared to disclose (such as adultery) because of the potential fallout, but they need to be challenged to do so. Stress that the group is a safe place. Open the discussion further, to discuss private sin more broadly. For example: Most men dealing with lust have significant problems with anger and need to be honest about its impact on their relationships.

DAY 2: WORSHIP IN A HOSPITAL

The focus of Day 2 is on every Christian's need to live daily by the grace of God. Discuss this reality with your men. Do they sense that they're supposed to have it all together as Christians? How has this been communicated in the church? Is there a sense in their church that Christians don't have big sin struggles?

Your men are hopefully becoming aware of the reality that their struggle with sexual sin is not the biggest problem in their life, although it may be causing the most destruction. As we've discussed in past weeks, our struggle with sin and our rebellion against God is much deeper and more pervasive. Our sexual sin is only a manifestation of the deeper problem.

The more your men understand the depth of the sin "rabbit trail" in their hearts, the more they'll grasp their daily need for Christ. Discuss the statement, "*Christians* need the gospel." Does this make sense to your men? Is the gospel only relevant during an altar call, or is it a daily reality? Discuss Colossians 2:6–7. Is this how your men view the Christian life—a continual walking in Christ in the same way that we received him? How does (or would) this change their perspective on the Christian faith? Do they tend to view the Christian life as something more than a humble, dependent trust in God?

Discuss how Jesus' definition of the work of God from John 6 differs from our typical understanding. Simple, childlike trust is the beginning of our life in Christ, and is intended to be the consistent, lifelong practice of every Christian.

That said, trust in Jesus doesn't equate to kicking back until he returns, or make obedience easy. Do your men believe that God's grace means they're empowered to walk in obedience? On one level, the Christian life is always hard work—obedience is rarely easy—but God promises to meet us in the midst of the battle and give us grace to persevere.

If you're using this material in the context of your home church, be very careful how you lead the discussion. It's very easy for disgruntled members to

begin church/pastor-bashing. Despite ways that you might be sympathetic to specific grievances, it's incumbent on you to honor your leaders and not allow the conversation to go in sinful, destructive directions. If significant issues arise, challenge participants to follow Matthew 18 and speak directly to the church leaders, perhaps offering to go with them for support.

For Reflection:

1. Does your church focus on behavioral change and following the rules, or does it focus on lifting up Jesus as our only hope? How do you think your pastor would describe the process of life change?

Try to get a sense of what your men understand about the process of sanctification. What are they hearing in church? Realize, of course, that their perspective on things may not be accurate. Again, if they express concern over the teaching or preaching, challenge them to go to their pastor directly.

2. Do you remember a time when your response to your sin was to praise God for his great mercy in Christ? What prevents you now from overflowing with gratitude in the face of your sin?

One of the biggest challenges in the Christian life is to stay in the humble place of the repentant sinner. Believing we should be beyond where we are both denies the truth of total depravity and prevents us from entering into genuine contrition. As 18th century Scottish theologian Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "For every one look at your sin, take ten looks at Christ." Seeing our sin should lead us to rejoice in the hope of the gospel.

3. Do you view God's grace only as mercy? How would it change your perspective to realize that Jesus knows just what you need in temptation and offers you real power for the battle?

Help your men to wrestle with this reality. Many will have significant doubt in light of their repeated failures over the years. Once again, challenge your men's expectations of "deliverance," and pray they'd see both Jesus' power and their call to persevere through the pain.

DAY 3: REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY

With Day 3, we'll examine the importance of the body of Christ to address our ongoing struggles with sin. We've discussed how we need each other because we're in the midst of a spiritual war, but often we're oblivious to the depth of our brokenness and our need for others to enter in.

Discuss how the kingdom is bigger than personal salvation. How do your men need to be challenged to expand their vision of the work of Christ? How would this cosmic perspective affect their priorities and sense of purpose in the world?

Discuss the contrast between our interpretations of "good" in Romans 8:28 and God's definition in verse 29. Consider how the radical disconnect between these two definitions impacts our perspective on God and his goodness. If God's goal is ultimately to make us like Jesus—perfectly loving God and others, serving selflessly with joy, obeying in the face of relentless temptation, living in humble reliance on the Father—how will that change our priorities? Discuss what it means to be successful, and how God's ultimate goal for us reshapes our perspective on life and particularly the challenging circumstances we face.

For Reflection:

1. What's your reaction to the idea that the calling of the church is to spread the kingdom of Christ and overturn the effects of the curse? How can you be active in tangible ways to extend Christ's kingdom in your family, workplace, neighborhood, etc.?

Likely many of your men have viewed the Christian life in an overly personal, limited way, as if the focus is on their own personal salvation. Help them consider the worldwide proportions of the Great Commission, and the role they can have as ambassadors of Christ. There'll be more on this next week.

2. How do you define "good"? How do you respond to God and others

when your kind of “good” doesn’t happen?

Hopefully your men can laugh at their responses to the first half of this question. All of us want smooth sailing all the time. Focus on the second part—it’s crucial that your men begin wrestling with their responses to the challenges of life. Ask them how this affects their relationships with family, neighbors, coworkers, drivers on the road, etc.

3. What areas in your life would you personally label “not good”? How would life be different if you believed Romans 8:28–29 and allowed these circumstances and relationships to conform you to the image of Jesus? In what ways are God’s purposes radically counter to your own?

This is a great opportunity for your men to begin seeing their lives in a radically new light. Help them to consider the sovereignty of God over their circumstances, and that even the brutally painful places are included in “all things” working for their good to make them like Jesus. Discuss how their hearts respond to God in light of this reality. Does it make them angry, bitter, doubtful? Push for honest answers.

DAY 4: WE NEED A MIRROR

The goal of Day 4 is to help your men see the reality of their spiritual blindness and embrace their need to have others in the body help them overcome their struggles with sin.

Discuss the idea of spiritual bad breath. Does this resonate? Ask them to describe situations when they’ve observed this in others (like the party example), being careful to not let the conversation spiral into grumbling against individuals. Help them make the connection to their own lives. Do they believe that others know them better than they know themselves?

How do your men respond to the challenge that they’re worse than they think? Is this offensive? Some of your men, already struggling with self-contempt, may use this to further that agenda. Tomorrow’s lesson will look at this more closely, but acknowledge that the depth of God’s love is demonstrated to us through Jesus’ sacrifice. For any dealing with self-contempt, help them to see the pride masquerading behind their false

humility, realizing this may need to be one-on-one. Most of us hate to embrace the depth of our sin and need for God's mercy, but this is the only path to freedom. This is not merely a challenge for unbelievers. In some ways, this is an even greater struggle for Christians, after we come to faith and begin to see significant changes in our lives.

How has God brought about outward behavioral change in your men's lives? Discuss how this can become a stumbling block to embracing the depth of their sin. Do they see the described dynamic at work in their hearts? Help those men involved in various leadership roles in the church to consider how their pride and concern for reputation pushes their sin underground. Challenge them to consider that God sees all and declares that everything hidden will be exposed.

Discuss which relationships are most affected by this dynamic. How has your men's outward obedience affected their ability to listen to the concerns of those closest to them?

For Reflection:

1. Do you believe that others know you better than you know yourself? Who are those specific individuals? Are you listening to them? Why or why not?

The second question assumes agreement with the first. If there is disagreement, help your men to embrace this reality (there is further discussion in Day 5). But be wary of a long tangent if there are only a couple men who disagree; it might be more profitable to have one-on-one conversations with them at another time. Help your men target the primary individuals God has placed in their lives, and ask them to honestly consider whether they're willing to listen to them.

2. Can you remember a time when someone challenged you on a sin you were previously unaware of? How did you respond? Why?

Hopefully this question will help your men to examine their hearts about past experiences and see how others' feedback has been beneficial.

3. Outside of sexual sin, what patterns of behavior have friends and family challenged you about? Do they have a point, or do you think they're off-base?

Explain.

Help your men to get current. Unless they're living in isolation, there are likely aspects of their life that others want them to see. Be willing to hear them out—their loved ones *might* be off-base in some ways—but challenge them to consider the concerns expressed.

DAY 5: FACING OUR BLINDNESS

In Day 5, we focus on how a firm grasp of the gospel enables us to overcome our spiritual blindness. Apart from resting secure in the work of Christ, we will build our sense of self on our reputation and record of good deeds. But the “sandy” foundation of our own accomplishments can't bear the weight of criticism.

Discuss Jesus' parable of the log and speck. Have your men ever considered both sides of this teaching—in other words, the reality that we're able to rightly discern sin in one another? Obviously, Jesus wants us to see our own sin as the biggest problem in our relationships, but discuss how the truth that others see our sin more accurately than we do enables us to more fully take responsibility for our sin—if we're willing to listen and humble ourselves.

Do your men feel threatened by this challenge? In which relationships is it most difficult to honestly listen and receive feedback? Share ways that you've tried to bolster your reputation; ask men to share their experiences. Discuss how this focus subverts the truth of the gospel. Rather than resting in the work of Christ and believing what he says about us, we focus on proving ourselves and care most about our reputation.

Discuss Jack Miller's shorthand for the gospel—how the cross is simultaneously the worst news and the best news we could ever hear. In what ways is it hard for your men to believe God truly loves them? There may be issues from their past, guilt over current sin struggles, labels others have placed on them, etc. Can they imagine the blessing of being named by Christ and having an identity based on *his* perfect record, not their own?

Discuss how the gospel gives us the courage to listen to others. We understand that we're big sinners, and expect that we're blind to much of our

sin. Having our blind eyes opened to sin gives a broader vista to the wonder of God's mercy, increasing our understanding of the depth of his love for us. When we're secure in that ultimate relationship, we're free to listen to others and not be undone by the revelation of unseen sin patterns.

For Reflection:

1. How do you tend to respond when someone challenges you on sin— isolate, get defensive, make excuses, get angry, something else? What does your response reveal about how the gospel needs to sink deeper into your heart?

Help your men to wrestle with this question by considering a recent example. Who confronted them and how did they respond? Help them to see that embracing the two truths of the gospel enables us to receive criticism without being undone by it.

2. What prevents you from trusting the work of Christ? How does the disapproval of others (past or present) impact your ability to believe God's love for you?

This is a huge, open-ended question. Thus, your men's responses will probably vary greatly. Help your men wrestle with ways that guilt, shame, pride, fear, and reputation impinge on their ability to rest in the hope of the gospel. Help them grapple with how they've transferred disapproval and rejection from others onto their perceptions of God.

3. What would your life be like if you were free from worrying about your reputation? Free from the fear of others' disapproval? Free to own your failures honestly instead of making excuses for them?

Living with a façade is exhausting. To relinquish that would, by itself, give tremendous freedom. But most of us also live with the "fear of man"—worrying about our reputation and what others think about us. God would have us live in the confident freedom of his love and acceptance. Apart from trusting in Jesus' work on our behalf, we strive to prove ourselves. As a result, we don't respond well to correction. If my hope is in my record, I am desperate that nothing impugns it. Believing the gospel frees us to grow past

that.

WEEK 10: SERVANT SOLDIERS

DAY 1: THE CHURCH: HAVE IT YOUR WAY?

This week focuses on the call for each of us to have an active role in serving the body of Christ, and challenges your men that serving is a critical means of combating sexual sin.

Day 1 challenges our typical approach to selecting a church. Most people go church-shopping. They have a list in hand of the items they're looking for, ranked in order of priority. Although doctrine may matter to some—and to a few, it matters too much!—usually the selection is based on personal preference. Discuss with your men the things they look for in a church. Help them consider ways that their focus may lean toward personal proclivities rather than the deeper realities of the Christian life.

The focus in choosing a church should be the work and kingdom of Christ. Is the gospel at the heart of the church's teaching (i.e., not just at the “altar call”)? Is there a call to fellowship in the body and the important role of community in our growth as Christians? Are the saints equipped to minister? This is why God appoints leaders and teachers (see Ephesians 4:11–12). Discuss the ways their church equips and utilizes members for service. Are your men serving their church in any way?

For Reflection:

1. What do you look for in a church? How might this reflect a consumer mindset?

This is an important question, but be ready to rein in the conversation if it begins to take on a life of its own. You may also need to intervene if men hold strongly opposing views on things like baptism, worship style, or use of liturgy. Try to turn those moments into opportunities for men to examine their hearts.

2. What spiritual gifts has God given you? How are you currently using

your gifts in your local church?

There will likely be a wide range of responses to this question. Some men will have never considered this question before; others may have a lot to say. Especially for those for whom this is a new concept, point them to the reality that we are saved by grace to do the “good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

3. Can you recount a time when you felt used by God with the gifts he’s given you? Explain.

Help men to see the importance of their service in the body to overcome their struggle with sexual sin. Encourage them to contrast the blessing of serving God with the pleasure of sexual sin.

DAY 2: BEFORE YOU SERVE ...

In Day 2, your men will be challenged to consider the importance of examining their hearts as they consider Christ’s call to serve his body. Today’s section warns against two potential errors in our service to Christ—serving out of a sense of guilt, or using our service as a façade.

Consider our tendency to serve out of guilt. Where is this at work in their lives? Discuss how this undermines the gospel. If our response to guilt is anything but thanking God for his mercy, we’re not resting in the finished work of Christ. Conviction of sin should humble us and bring us back to the simple hope of the gospel. If our response is to try harder or serve more zealously, we’re refusing to embrace God’s abundant forgiveness in Christ. As we’ll examine in Week 14, acknowledging our pride is crucial to our growth in grace.

The other default is to use ministry as a fig leaf that hides our shame. When our private life is radically different than who we are publicly, we’re in danger of being indicted as hypocrites—and Jesus gives stern warnings to hypocrites throughout the Gospels. Discuss this danger with your men. Ask them to consider the motives behind their service. How much of their service is done quietly, behind the scenes? How much is public, for others to see?

Are your men truly known by the people in their lives? What makes

someone a hypocrite is the acting, pretending to be something they're not. In Week 12 we'll look at the importance of ruthless honesty in overcoming our struggle with sexual sin. Your men need to embrace the reality that their private lives are more important to God than their good deeds. Unless ministry overflows from our relationship with God, it tends to be more about our ego or quelling guilt and shame than his kingdom and glory. On some level, all of us wrestle with hypocrisy. Part of the walk of faith is the constant battle against unbelief—the challenge to walk consistently as if God is real and present. None of us do that fully. Talk about your own struggles in this area, and invite your men to be honest about where this is an issue for them.

Jesus' observation of the widow's gift reveals God's perspective on the ultimate worth of our actions. Discuss how this example demonstrates the importance of the heart behind our behavior. What does it mean to your men to worship God in spirit and truth? It is an immense burden to live a double life. Consider the blessings of being free from lies and deceit.

We end by looking at our ultimate hope for change: God's grace. Many of your men may conflate God's grace with his mercy. Grace is so much bigger. God's mercy is just one aspect of his grace. God's grace is the bestowing of his favor upon us in its fullness. God's grace means he is giving us himself. It is his presence and power at work within us by his Spirit that enables us to live radically changed lives, as described in Titus 2:11–12.

For Reflection:

1. When have you found yourself doing more ministry out of a sense of guilt? What's it like to be engaged in ministry when you're feeling guilty?

Leading by example, challenge your men to be honest about times they've served out of guilt. What other ways in their lives do they try to curry favor with God? Help them to see how destructive this is to their relationship with him.

2. Where have you used ministry as a fig leaf? Who are the brothers who honestly know the depth of your struggles? How would it feel to tell those you serve alongside that you're doing this study?

One of the key ways to determine if ministry is a fig leaf is whether those you serve with know about your struggles with sin. Remind them that the issue with hypocrisy is acting. If they're living honestly with others, they're not being hypocritical. (Note: It is important that they're known by the people they serve with, not just other men from the group.) Push your men to continue cultivating genuine, honest relationships with other men in the church outside the group.

3. How would you define God's grace? How does the Titus 2 passage speak to you? How does life change happen?

The intent of this question is to help men deepen their understanding of God's grace, and to see that his presence with us means that genuine life change is possible.

DAY 3: DYING TO SERVE

Day 3 introduces the radical paradigm shift of the Christian life: Rather than living for our own pleasures, God calls us to lay down our lives for others.

As we consider the free grace offered to us in the gospel, be careful to communicate to your men that how they live still matters. Remind them that we are delivered from the domain of darkness in order to serve the King who rules over the kingdom of light. The Ephesians passage holds these two truths together beautifully. God draws us to himself so that we'll fulfill the service to him for which we've been saved.

Titus 2:11–14 makes the same case. The grace of God brings salvation so that we become people who exist for Jesus, eager to serve him. Is this how your men view the Christian life? Or do they see Jesus and the hope of salvation as the icing on the cake of their life? Discuss what it means to zealously serve him. What makes these good works different from the negative examples we examined yesterday? Discuss how your men can know the difference. Titus teaches that genuine motivation flows from God's saving grace, Jesus' selfless sacrifice to deliver us, and the certain hope of Jesus' imminent return. The passage describes serving our King for his sake, not our own.

Discuss the contrast between indulging our flesh through sexual sin and the call to serve others. Our pursuit of pleasure keeps us fixated on self, while the very nature of serving is a focus on others. Obviously, the life of Jesus epitomized this. Isaiah prophesied that he would be the Suffering Servant. Philippians 2:1–11, in calling us to serve, exalts Jesus as the glorious example of self-emptying in order to bless others.

Discuss the contrast between Jesus' fast in the wilderness and the abundant feast created for the five thousand. What does this teach us about him? His fast demonstrates his radical trust in the Father and utter dependence on him for even his physical needs—something pretty foreign to most of us as American Christians. His feeding of the multitude is a profound snapshot of his love for them and his ability to care for their needs (though they were miniscule in comparison). His selfless service is even more poignant against the backdrop of John the Baptist's horrific death. Jesus sought solitude to grieve that loss, perhaps even anticipating his own impending death, and instead is inundated by throngs of people. From before the incarnation when Jesus determined to set aside his glory, through the agony of his death, Jesus' life is a picture of utter selflessness.

In Mark 10, Jesus makes our calling explicit: Selfless service is the hallmark of Christian discipleship.

For Reflection:

1. How does the call to serve Christ and others change your perspective on the Christian life? How does it subvert the all-too-typical American evangelical approach to church discussed in Day 1?

I suspect your men will have the right “Sunday school” answers to this question. Push them to be honest about how this really plays out in their lives. Their sexual sin is evidence of their commitment to serving self.

2. How would focusing your life on serving others impact your struggle with sexual sin? Be specific.

Are your men making the connection between their struggle with sexual sin and their overall self-focus? Help them consider that their sexual sin is just

one example of a deeper problem, but that intentionally serving others out of an overflow of love for Christ is the road out of sexual sin.

3. Beyond sexual behavior, how would your life change if your focus was on serving others rather than personal pleasure? Consider your closest relationships—family and extended family, close friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc.

This should help your men consider the fallout of self-focused living on their relationships. Again, broaden the discussion beyond sexual sin to help them see that there needs to be significant changes in how they live, especially as their sin impacts the lives of others.

DAY 4: PETS ARE A GOOD IDEA

Day 4 connects the call to serve with the experience of raising a pet. Discuss what it means to be made in the image of God, particularly as we're called to be stewards over the rest of creation. Have your men considered that our role is to be God's representatives to the rest of creation? As stewards of the rest of the created order, we are called to give an account. This should give us pause, as we consider our caretaking of creation.

The bigger focus here is how this aspect of our image-bearing should help us to know God more deeply. Discuss the Bible's description of God's people as sheep. How can your men identify with the folly of sheep, particularly in their struggle with sexual sin? Discuss the encouragement that God is our shepherd, and that he's committed to tenderly caring for us despite our folly.

Where have your men experienced God's heart for them through serving others? Parenting is one significant way that we learn the blessing of serving. A child's utter dependence on us softens our hearts and deepens our love for them. Some married men and those who are single will not have this experience, so broaden the discussion to include other ways we're invited to serve, and ask men to share their experiences. How has serving others opened their eyes wider to God's love for them? We need to pay attention to *why* we serve, but nonetheless, the call to serve others is universal for all Christians.

For Reflection:

1. Have you had the experience of raising a pet? What did it teach you about patience, perseverance, and compassion? How did you experience a growing affection for your pet through those actions?

Answers to this question should be pretty straightforward. If your men had negative experiences with pets, help them consider how this too can point them to God, similar to the example of wayward sheep.

2. Have you ever held a baby and pondered the reality that you were once that helpless and dependent? What would change if you realized that you're as needy and dependent on God, moment by moment, as an infant is on his parents?

One of the greatest ironies of the Christian life is that it's supposed to work in exactly the opposite way of every other human experience. Children are expected to grow more independent and eventually leave the home as adults. As we repeatedly practice various tasks, we become more proficient and less dependent on direction. But in the Christian life, the goal is to grow increasingly aware of your need for God. We don't become more independent by living as Christians—instead, we should be growing more aware of our total dependence on God.

3. How has your experience with pets, children—anyone dependent on you—impacted your understanding of God and his love?

The goal of this question is to help men see that the affection we develop through serving is a tiny taste of God's love for us. We each exist by his design, according to his plan, and "in love" he predestined us to live in a restored relationship with him (Ephesians 1:4–5). Encourage your men to see that their experience of love is the result of God's first loving us (1 John 4:19).

DAY 5: SERVING SLAYS SIN

In Day 5, we continue to examine our call to serve others. We often assume that if we were happier about the specific people we were called to serve, it would make service easier. This can be true on some level, but eventually whoever we serve will annoy, frustrate, or even hurt us. This is why so many couples end up in miserable marriages who were deeply in love on their wedding day. At some point, service includes an obedient act of the will, whether it's enjoyable or not.

Discuss the challenges of persevering in loving service. Many of your men are likely in difficult marriages—not least of all because of their sexual sin. Be careful not to let the conversation spiral into grumbling, but acknowledge the challenge of maintaining a servant's heart in marriage. (Be aware of single men in the group as well.) The goal of this discussion is to help your men make the connection between serving others and our experience of affection for those we serve. The more committed we are to serving for Christ's sake, the more we grow in our love for those we serve, and the less we focus on ourselves.

None of us are thrilled to lay down our lives for others. Remind them of the pain that resulted from their sexual sin, and discuss the wonder of the Ephesians 3 passage. What is God offering? What do we receive when we're willing to sacrifice all? Do your men believe there is abundant life apart from their sin? Discuss what the passage means when it promises we will be "filled with all the fullness of God." Have your men considered that the people they desire are only desirable because they dimly reflect the wonder of their Creator? What would it be like for them to acknowledge God in their craving for another, and turn their lust into worship of the one who is glorious beyond our ability to comprehend?

For Reflection:

1. When have you served someone you really couldn't stand? Did it soften your heart or make things worse? Did you find yourself praying more to God for the ability to serve graciously, or grumbling to others? Be specific.

This question is tricky. Hopefully some of your men have had redemptive experiences in loving difficult people. If their experiences have been only negative, help them consider ways their own sin might have impacted the situation.

2. How has serving others made you more dependent on God? How has it deepened your relationship with him?

When we seek to serve others selflessly for God's glory, we're quickly confronted with our own weakness and selfishness. Serving is hard! To do it effectively, we're forced to our knees to stave off self-righteousness, bitterness, entitlement, etc.

3. Are you encouraged to consider that God offers you himself, or does that seem too abstract? Have you ever experienced joy as you considered who God is, what he did for you in Jesus, and the promises of what awaits you in the life to come? Explain.

Much of the Christian life is by faith, finding spiritual sustenance in the midst of physical and emotional deserts. This is hard for all of us—especially if we've trained ourselves to think that life shouldn't be so painful or should bring more tangible experiences of pleasure and reward. Help your men to consider that God's promises to us offer life!

SECTION 4: A TRANSFORMED LIFE

WEEK 11: ARE YOU READY TO FIGHT?

DAY 1: TIME TO GET BLOODY

This week, we turn the corner, beginning a new section that challenges men directly to take responsibility for the change process. Growth in holiness is always hard—in fact, it’s a battle! One of the significant stumbling blocks we face is the assumption that obedience should be easier. Therefore, Day 1 begins by challenging your men that this battle is the most important fight of their lives. Help your men consider that as long as they’re stuck behaviorally, it will be difficult for them to address the deeper issues of their hearts.

Discuss the huge challenge of obedience. Do they believe that if God is all-powerful it should be easy? Many men have a misconception of the Christian life, as if God’s goal is to make their life easier and pain-free. Discuss that God’s ultimate goal is to conform them to the image of Jesus, so that he will be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:28–29). This means purging the sin from our lives.

Do your men believe that obedience is possible? After so many years of slavery, freedom can seem like an impossible dream. If necessary, review some of the material from Weeks 5–7 about Jesus being our deliverer from the power of sin.

In stark contrast to easy obedience, Scripture uses rich athletic metaphors to describe our growth in grace. Help your men make similar connections from their personal experiences with sports or exercise. Most of us don’t love exercise—our faithfulness in doing it is usually an act of obedience. (At least it is for me!) Yet we learn that, in the long run, the pain is worth it. Do your men approach the Christian life expecting the same level of spiritual rigor? Do they see the reality that becoming “spiritually fit” takes a lot of hard work? How would their approach to the Christian life change if they viewed it as preparation for a marathon or triathlon?

For Reflection:

1. Do you wish the Christian life were easier? In what ways? How might this expectation keep you stuck in sin?

Help your men to consider that their approach to the Christian faith may be more lax because they expect it to be easy. Do they approach the change process with the same rigor and dedication that they would an intense athletic competition? Can they see how not doing so might keep them stuck? How might their hearts be engaged in the process? Is there a part of them that doesn't want to give up their sin?

2. How does the challenge of obedience affect your relationship with God? Does it make you angry with him? Does it seem like he asks the impossible? Why?

Help your men to be open about how the challenge of obedience impacts their understanding of God. Help them consider that the challenge of obedience is intended to draw them into deeper relationship and dependence on God.

3. What messages do you get from your church about the Christian life? Do you get the idea that obedience is easy and that no one else is struggling with sin like you, or do you hear other Christians talk honestly about their struggles to obey? Explain.

Many men feel as if they're the only ones dealing with sexual sin. Remind them that many are suffering in silence and that everyone is dealing with sin in their life that should be humbling them and drawing them closer to God.

DAY 2: ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS

As the title suggests, Day 2 continues the discussion from yesterday and reframes our expectations for the Christian life. One of the big fallacies men entertain is the idea that they simply need to put Jesus in the place of their sexual sin. Discuss why this won't work. The more your men have been able to make connections between their sexual sin and their frustration with life in a fallen world, the better they'll understand this concept. Remind them that we turn to idols when it seems like God isn't going to come through for us.

If it would be helpful, take a few minutes to talk about specific pressures your men are facing at this particular time. What current life circumstances cause them to question God's goodness and ability to provide? Can your men identify with the idea that idols promise faster delivery from our problems? Ask them to share their own examples of when they've been tempted to go for the quick escape. How does our desire for a quick fix reveal a heart that refuses to suffer? Discuss the challenge of clinging to Christ by faith when things are not going our way.

What does it mean to your men to live by faith? Hebrews 11:6 is crucial—God does promise to reward us for seeking him, but that doesn't mean it will look the way we want. Living by faith means trusting that God knows best even when it doesn't look or feel that way. Discuss the call to wait on God. What does this mean to your men? So many of the psalms recount very real, imminent problems facing the psalmists—and their struggling, but ultimately resolute stance to trust God's provision even when it looks impossible.

Discuss the reality that obedience brings joy. Ask your men to recount times they've stood their ground in the face of temptation, and contrast those experiences to what it's felt like when they've given in to sin. Although standing firm might feel like death in the moment, when we push through the temptation and emerge victorious on the other side, we learn that Jesus is so much better than our sin. That is truly an experience of life and vitality that sin never delivers!

Discuss the idea that our battle with temptation is necessary. Can your men see other areas in their life where temptation had a sharpening effect on their

character? How has God used this for good? How do your men respond to the Rutherford quote? Many of us long for a life free from temptation, but this is never promised to us. Tomorrow's lesson looks at the life of Christ and the reality that we are following his footsteps as we battle temptation. How do your men react to the reality that their battle with sin—and sexual sin in particular—will be a lifelong struggle? Are they overwhelmed or eager to engage in the battle by God's grace?

For Reflection:

1. Have you ever thought, "I just need to replace my sin with Jesus"? Although theologically correct, how does this view miss the main problem with idolatry?

The main point you want your men to get is that Jesus is not going to perform on command and give them what they want in the way that sexual sin does. The whole point of idolatry is taking matters into our own hands, to get what we want when we want it. Following Jesus means surrendering our agenda and submitting to his.

2. How does the hope for a total deliverance, in which temptation is completely eradicated and obedience is no longer costly, reveal the heart of our idolatry?

The idea of being completely free from temptation reveals the same heart that embraces idolatry. It is a heart that avoids pain at all costs, assuming that the Christian life should be easier. This is the same attitude that keeps us stuck in sexual sin.

3. In what ways do your idols deliver faster? How does it feel to have to wait on God and not take matters into your own hands? Where can you see God's purpose in allowing you to suffer with temptation?

It is important to acknowledge that obedience is hard. At times it is extremely painful, so we need to keep in view not only God's purpose to conform us to the image of Jesus, but also the reality that there is blessing in obedience. Victory in Jesus is glorious!

DAY 3: FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE MESS

Day 3 examines Jesus' experience with suffering and temptation. How do your men describe God's goodness? How do they gauge it? Where are they guilty of evaluating God based on the tangible blessings they've received? Discuss how this completely disregards what God accomplished for us in Christ and reduces him to a genie in a bottle, existing to satisfy my desires. It reveals a heart that ultimately isn't satisfied with him alone.

Jesus' life was radically different. He embraced relationship with the Father for its own sake despite the steady "decline" of his life that ended at the cross. Discuss the Hebrews passages that describe the intention behind Jesus' suffering. In a similar way, James calls us to count it all joy when we face trials, because God is bringing about Christlikeness in us through them (James 1:2–4).

The glory and perfection of Jesus' character was revealed through his suffering. What is suffering currently revealing in your men? Leading by example, discuss ways that suffering has revealed your own heart. If you're disheartened because your suffering is revealing weakness, this is the very place the writer of Hebrews seeks to bring encouragement! He wants us to understand that Jesus perfectly identifies with our experience. First, Jesus was made like us in every respect. Secondly, he was tempted like us in every way. Because he identifies completely with us, he is a merciful and faithful high priest. Discuss these ideas with your men. What difference does it make that Jesus understands their experience exactly? Do they believe it?

It's crucial to realize that Jesus knows our experience. All of us long to be known, to have others understand our experience of life in a fallen world. Jesus gets it—perfectly. How do your men respond to the truth that Jesus even identifies with their experience of guilt and shame? How might that change their willingness to approach him when they fail? Discuss the hope that he both identifies with our suffering and offers us real power to overcome our struggle with temptation. What prevents your men from believing that Jesus has suffered the exact same temptations? What would change in their relationship with him if they could believe this clear, biblical truth? Most of

us are so laden with guilt because of our temptations that we resist running to the throne of grace in that moment—the very thing we’re invited to do, with the promise that we’ll be given what we need when we need it.

Have your men been guilty of the “But he was God ... ” argument? Discuss the importance of holding a balanced view of both natures of Christ. This has always been a hallmark of orthodox Christianity. If we neglect to fully emphasize Jesus’ humanity, we undermine the source of our freedom and perpetuate the distinction God abolished through the incarnation.

For Reflection:

1. What positive examples of suffering have you seen? How has God used suffering in your life (or with others you know) to ultimately bring about something good?

Discuss suffering broadly, not just in the context of temptation. Although God’s purposes in suffering are often masked in the short term, hopefully some of your men have had glimpses of his redemptive purposes through suffering.

2. How do the passages about Jesus being perfected and learning obedience through suffering fit with your expectation of the Christian life? Explain.

The idea of this question is to adjust expectations. Jesus taught that a student is not above his master. He equated the Christian life with carrying a cross. Just as Jesus suffered, we should expect that God will use suffering to conform us into the image of Jesus.

3. What difference does it make that Jesus suffered victoriously? How can you be encouraged that he both understands your struggle and offers the strength and grace you need—because he not only was tempted in the same way but suffered victoriously?

Hopefully this question will help your men more fully grasp that Jesus offers them real power in his Spirit. His perfectly mirrored experience, while always victorious in temptation, is the guarantee that he will give us exactly what we need to endure.

DAY 4: NOT ALONE IN THE BATTLE

Day 4 builds on Day 3, encouraging your men with the present, ongoing work of God to complete what he began in us. Too many men view their growth in the Christian life as entirely up to them. Just as God saved us by grace, he continues to grow us by grace. He is actively engaged in the change process.

Discuss the teaching that Jesus lives forever interceding for us. Keeping in mind what we looked at yesterday, how should this change our view of temptation? How does it impact your men to consider that the Spirit groans before the throne of God on their behalf? We often believe we're the only ones groaning in the midst of temptation, but these passages make clear that Jesus and the Spirit are intimately bound up with us in the battle. Do your men believe this? Why or why not? What causes them to doubt? Where do their experiences or feelings seem to contradict this truth? Is it possible that the reality of our ongoing battle feeds our doubt, even though Scripture tells us to expect this battle? Where do your men need to grow in embracing the battle?

Discuss the reality that through the Spirit we're invited into the intimacy of the Godhead. Jesus makes this even more explicit in describing the vine and the branches. Discuss the reality that the Father prunes us, taking us through painful trials so that we might bear more fruit. Ultimately, we only bear fruit if we stay vitally connected to Jesus. Do your men believe this? Many of them have likely been living in a state of perpetual failure for years, so don't be surprised by cynical, doubting responses. Like the paralytic who needed the faith of his friends to lower him through the roof to Jesus (Mark 2:1–12), your brothers may need you to hold out that hope before them. If it would be helpful, pause and ask God to build your faith like the father in Mark 9:24, who cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" This is a prayer God loves to answer!

Discuss what it means that Jesus' resurrection power is available to us. Help your men hold together these two realities: God will give them the grace to overcome their struggle with sexual sin because his power is at work in them, but it will be an excruciating experience requiring them to die to their desires.

For Reflection:

1. How does it make you feel to hear that you don't even know how to pray right? Does it encourage you because you know you're a mess, or discourage you because you'd like to believe you're more together than that? Explain.

Most of us tend to be frustrated by how challenging prayer can be. Be honest about your own struggles with prayer. Hopefully, the reality that Jesus intercedes continually and the Spirit groans for us will encourage your men that God will be faithful to finish his work in them.

2. When have you been encouraged to discover that someone was praying for you? What difference should it make, then, that Jesus and the Spirit are continually interceding for you—groaning for your soul?

Many of us have gone through challenging seasons, when the body of Christ surrounded us with prayer. I was blessed to have many people interceding for me through my wife's passing and my early adventures in single parenting. All these experiences, however, pale before the wonder that Jesus and the Spirit intercede continually for us.

3. How would your struggle with sexual sin be transformed if you understood how fully God's power was truly available to you? How can being united to Jesus impact your battle against sin?

Discuss how we often believe that "resistance is futile." Because Jesus' resurrection power is offered to us, we truly have an escape in the face of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). He invites us to come boldly to the throne in our time of need.

DAY 5: GETTING VIOLENT

We close this week by challenging your men to embrace this mystery of the Christian life: Our growth in grace is both the work of God and our responsibility at exactly the same time! Discuss the Bible's challenge to put the sin in our life to death. This is a place of profound spiritual warfare, and we need to be ruthless in stamping out the remnants of sin. Your men might indicate that their struggle with temptation has increased since attending the group. Encourage them that what appears to be signs of failure may actually be progress! There is often significant spiritual pushback when we start addressing deeply entrenched patterns of sin.

Growth in grace requires our effort. Christ's resurrection power means that our victory is secure. We are "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). But your men need to gear up for the fiercest fight of their lives. What steps are they willing to take to overcome their struggle with sin? What are their particular places of struggle? Are they willing to articulate the places they regularly stumble and take steps to cut off those escape routes? Ask bold questions about what they're willing to sacrifice. Pray that they'll see that this is a matter of life and death. Regardless of its manifestation, all of us need to take radical steps to fight sin in our life, and that will always mean being willing to let go of something we love, a source of "life" that is actually killing us.

For Reflection:

1. Where do you need to get violent with sexual sin in your life? What sacrifices do you need to make in order to honor God with your sexuality?

This question addresses broader categories where we can be more proactive—moving out of a tempting neighborhood, getting rid of the Internet or cable TV at home, etc.

2. Where do you need to get back in the fight? Do you have a hidden cache of porn in your closet or computer, or other objects hidden for sinful

purposes? What specifically do you need to get rid of?

This question targets current places of struggle and compromise. Leading by example, help your men get honest about the places where they're falling. Encourage them to help each other put appropriate safeguards in place.

3. Where are you leaving the back door cracked open for sin—an unprotected computer or cable TV in a secluded area of the house, keeping someone's number, not changing your number? Are you ruthless in addressing each area, and bringing others into the fight with you? Be specific.

This question is to help your men consider where they're standing and to be careful not to fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). It directly addresses a significant issue discussed previously—that it's crucial to include each other in the fight.

WEEK 12: RUTHLESS HONESTY

DAY 1: FEARING EXPOSURE

This week, your men are challenged with the importance of being ruthlessly honest about their struggles with sexual sin, in order to find freedom.

Day 1 addresses the harsh reality that exposure is guaranteed. Either in this life or the next, our hidden lives will be revealed. Discuss the reality that when we are mired in sexual sin we prefer to hide in the darkness. How have your men experienced this? What has hiding cost them relationally?

Although we often believe we can get away with our behaviors, the Bible clearly teaches that all hidden things will be revealed. How do your men respond to these passages? Do they believe God is trying to punish or humiliate them? Be aware that some of your men might have had very painful experiences with church leaders exposing their sin in unbiblical ways. Give them opportunity to share those experiences, but be ready to rein in the conversation if it begins to take on a life of its own.

Shift gears to discuss God's purpose in exposing us. Others may have harmed us through revealing our sin to others, but God invites us into the light to experience his blessing. He calls us to expose our sin so we can be set free. His promise to us is that if we'll trust him, we'll never be put to shame.

For Reflection:

1. Has God ever forced your sexual sin into the light? What was that experience like? Though initially painful, how have you seen God's goodness in this?

Too often, men come for help only after their secret lives have been exposed. Discuss that initial experience of shame, and then help them see that God is using the pain of their exposure to deal with the sin in their life. He is wooing them by dragging them into the light.

2. In what ways have you been blessed by allowing others to know the

worst about you? When have you been terrified to share about your behaviors, only to experience relief once it was over?

Responses to this question will likely be mixed. Some men will have experienced rich blessing through letting others into their struggle; others may have experienced rejection. Be aware that the latter is frequently experienced by men struggling with same-sex attraction. Hopefully you and other men can testify how God has used others in your lives.

3. Along with the fear of exposure is the weight of carrying the burden alone, maintaining the façade, etc. What would it be like to be free of those burdens?

Invite your men to consider the incredible blessing of being free from the burden of their façade. There is an incredible weight on our souls because of the masks we wear. Help your men to consider where their façade impacts their life, especially the fallout in their closest relationships.

DAY 2: WALKING IN THE LIGHT

The rest of this week will examine the truths raised from 1 John 1:5–10. Day 2 particularly addresses the reality of denial and self-deceit, and the fact that we deceive both others and ourselves. How have your men experienced this? Although they probably said they were “fine” for years, their presence in your group is evidence that they’re *not* fine.

Have they noticed a propensity to minimize their behaviors, or the effects of their sexual sin on their relationships or career? Are you willing to challenge them directly on their denial? Depending on the situation, this might be best done outside the group context. We tend to get defensive when confronted, and this is all the more true in a public setting. Discuss the importance of giving each other permission to ask intrusive questions. Make clear that your group needs to be a place where men are willing to be exposed. For some, it might still be terrifying to consider doing that broadly in their life. Help them see that the group is a safe place to start.

How do your men hear the call to walk in the light? Many probably think it means living a life of sinless perfection, but the context makes clear that it’s

about living a life of honest exposure. It means no longer pretending everything is fine and playing a Christian game. John is calling Christians to be honest about their flaws. He invites us to come out of the darkness of hidden sin and walk in the light of honest exposure.

For Reflection:

1. When have you realized you were self-deceived? How did you discover it? Who in your life today is willing to challenge your self-deceit?

Hopefully some of your men have had their eyes opened to the destruction of sin in their lives that they hadn't previously perceived. Often, this is the result of others who love us enough to confront our sin directly. Talk about the importance of developing this kind of deep relationship.

2. What does it mean to you to walk in the light? How have you understood that calling in the past?

Help your men to see that 1 John 1 is calling us to honesty, not perfection. Show them that John's main point is that people aren't being honest.

3. How much hiding still occurs in your life? Do you have secrets you plan to take to your grave? How do you think those secrets affect your closest relationships?

This question anticipates the issues discussed tomorrow. Throughout this study, there have been repeated opportunities for men to come clean with their struggles. Help them to see that it's impossible to experience genuine intimacy, especially within marriage, if they're committed to keeping secrets from others.

DAY 3: THE “FORMULA” FOR CHANGE

Day 3 focuses on the meat of the 1 John passage, demonstrating that the way out of sexual sin is to walk in the light of ruthless honesty. The passage contains a wonderful promise: Honestly confessing our struggle with sin will result in fellowship with others *and* deliverance from sin. Talk about our typical approach to confession. Most of us view it as a personal, private affair, and perhaps read 1 John 1:9 in that manner. How does Proverbs 28:13 challenge that view of confession? Help your men to see John’s purpose here is to call the church to authentic community (see 1 John 1:3). Discuss the reality that corporate confession has always been essential to God’s people. The growing trend away from public confession is really an anomaly in redemptive history!

The reality of our need for confession is evident from both the teaching of Scripture and from Christian experience. Most of your men probably spent years trying to fight this battle alone. Discuss the futility of that struggle. Many argue that God doesn’t need to use other people in our lives and that he’s powerful enough to deliver us all by himself. Obviously, that’s technically true, but it completely misses the point. God designed the Christian life to be lived in community, and in his wisdom determined that this is best for us in order to grow.

If your men have been in Christ for any length of time, they know the feeling of living like a hypocrite. Ask them to describe that experience. How does it feel to wear a plastic smile—to struggle to look people in the eye because you’re weighed down by shame? John makes clear that the road to freedom is paved with honesty with others. Challenge your men with the importance of building honest relationships within the larger body of Christ. This point is especially crucial for men not attending your church.

For Reflection:

1. What different formulas or self-help strategies have you used, trying to overcome your sexual sin? How have they helped? In what ways have they fallen short?

Most men have tried many methods on their own before joining the group. Although any attempts in isolation will ultimately fail, there are some practical things your men have learned along the way which can be very helpful as they pursue holiness in community.

2. What does it feel like to live as a hypocrite? When have you been challenged with the importance of ruthless honesty? Do you believe this is the only way you'll find freedom? Why or why not?

This issue is central. It's crucial that your men understand the importance of honesty, and commit to growing in this area in a group and in their personal lives.

3. Have you ever been a part of a church or group that was committed to corporate confession of personal sin? How have you benefited from sharing your struggle with others?

Hopefully there are men who have experienced the blessing of honest fellowship in the body of Christ. At the very least, discuss the benefit of the time you've spent together in group.

DAY 4: THE BLESSINGS OF HONESTY

Day 4 considers the promises of blessing mentioned in 1 John 1:7. Begin by discussing what it's like to go to church weighed down by guilt, but choosing to suffer in silence. In the same way, discuss what its like to give a veiled confession. Have they experienced the emptiness of a friend's encouragement after giving a veiled confession? Have any of your men had damaging experiences with confession?

Contrast these experiences with the blessing of truly being encouraged by a

brother. Discuss the implications of Hebrews 3:12–13. How can your men encourage one another daily? Do they see the need for regular, ongoing fellowship, or are they tempted to maintain a me-and-Jesus approach to the Christian life? Do your men understand that a brother's encouragement is only truly encouraging if they know where exactly we're discouraged?

Holding the promise of 1 John 1:7 together with the exhortation to daily encouragement in Hebrews gives us a snapshot of how God calls us to live the Christian life. There are times when our faith is faltering and we need others to point us to Jesus and remind us of his promises. Left alone at those times, it's easy to spiral into despair. Our best defense against the hardening of our hearts is to receive the encouragement of our brothers in Christ.

The passage also declares that through our confession the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Do your men believe this is possible? Discuss the challenge that our honesty puts feet on the gospel. Do your men agree that it's one thing to say you believe in Jesus for salvation and something radically different to actually let others know your sins specifically?

All of us who wrestle with sexual sin struggle with deceit. The two go hand-in-hand. Discuss the statement that our tongue demonstrates the allegiance of our hearts. Are your men using their tongues to demonstrate allegiance to Christ through speaking truth, or continuing to live in deceit? Encourage them again to speak truth within the group, even if it doesn't feel safe in the rest of their lives.

For Reflection:

1. Describe a time when you suffered in silence with your sin. What did that feel like? What was it like to be around other Christians?

This question examines the heartbreak we feel in being estranged from others in our sin. As discussed in previous weeks, some men respond by going deep into isolation, others build elaborate façades, but all of us are ultimately cut off from relationship because of sexual sin.

2. Describe an experience of genuine fellowship and encouragement. How does this contrast with what happens when you give a veiled confession?

Although some of your men may not have had rich experiences with genuine fellowship, they almost certainly will have given veiled confessions. Help them consider what it would be like to be truly known in their relationships.

3. Does it make sense that honesty unleashes the power of the gospel? Why or why not? Where do you need to take a clear stand against the enemy and demonstrate your love for Christ through the power of confession?

Do your men see the connection between honesty and faith? The genuineness of our faith is demonstrated by our willingness to confess our sin and weakness, turning to the body to help us face things that are impossible for us as individuals.

DAY 5: FREE TO BE RUTHLESSLY HONEST

In Day 5, we examine what enables us to become ruthlessly honest. Discuss the statement that ruthless honesty is a demonstration of saving faith. Do your men agree? We tangibly demonstrate our hope in Jesus when we're honest about the sin in our lives. Our unwillingness to be exposed reveals how controlled we still are by our reputation, fear of man, etc. The only way to face these fears is to rest in the finished work of Christ.

Believing that we are loved and accepted by God frees us to face the disapproval and rejection of men. Ask your men to consider how a deeper understanding of God's love for them would give them the courage to face others with the reality of their sin.

Discuss the promise that there is an eternal weight of glory awaiting us. Does it terrify your men to consider God's face turned upon them? This is a great opportunity to help them see their struggle to really rest in the gospel. If they're believers, their official theology acknowledges that God sees them in Jesus, but their fear of standing before him exposes that they're still concerned about their record.

Consider how your suffering, including suffering with temptation, is promised to result in blessing. Do your men believe that the afflictions of this life are fitting them for heaven?

Make the connection between our experience of earthly romantic love and God's delight in us. Ephesians 5 teaches that, at its glorious best, marriage is a picture of our relationship with Jesus. One of the reasons God created marriage in the first place was to give us a picture of this wondrous reality. Your men may be uncomfortable to consider their role as bride, but discuss the wonder that God's love and delight in us goes infinitely beyond anything we've experienced toward another person in this life. Resting in this glorious truth is the essence of the Christian life, and the spring from which all true obedience flows.

For Reflection:

1. When was the last time you experienced the joy of God's forgiveness—the wonder that he loves you enough to offer up Jesus for you? What was it like?

Many of us were overjoyed when we first understood God's mercy in Christ, but the ongoing battle against our flesh can lead us to doubt. How can God keep forgiving that same sin over and over again? Help your men to embrace the simple hope that God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

2. If you could gaze into Jesus' eyes at this moment, what do you think you would see? Think also about the right "Sunday school" answer—that Jesus is looking at you in love. What prevents you from living as if this were really true?

Another way to come at this idea is the reality that Jesus actually delights in us. Lots of men say they know Jesus loves them—almost out of obligation—but have a hard time believing he truly *likes* them. Pray together for the grace to embrace this hope more fully.

3. What does it mean to you that God has an eternal weight of glory in store for you? Do you believe that God looks forward to glorifying you? How would your life change if you could fully grasp this hope?

Obviously we can't conceive the wondrous eternal reality suggested by this text. Nonetheless, what does it mean to your men that God promises to bestow glory on them? Why is this so hard for them to get their heads around?

WEEK 13: REDEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY

DAY 1: ACCOUNTABILITY IS GOOD

This week focuses on the practical application of establishing accountability relationships. Accountability is often given a bad rap, but it is essential in our battle against sexual sin. In Day 1, we make the case for why accountability is so necessary. Discuss that our default mode is to believe we're autonomous beings. This is particularly true of unbelievers, but we continue to struggle with this mindset even after coming to Christ. We need accountability in our lives because it reminds us of the structure of the universe.

How did your men respond to the story of the Roman centurion? If any of them have a military background, this will certainly connect with their experience. Help your other men to consider other illustrations from work or their relationships. It's helpful for us to continue to remember that on the last day we too will be answerable. The New Testament is clear: Even Christians will face judgment based on how they lived (see 1 Corinthians 3:10–15).

Discuss the advice that your wife should never be your accountability partner. Some men may see this as a tacit blessing to keep her in the dark. Nothing could be further from the truth. A one-flesh union should mean that there are no secrets. However, it shouldn't be her responsibility to ask you the hard questions. Help your men understand that good accountability is crucial in restoring health to their marriages. It's as important to provide your wife with peace of mind as it is for you to grow in overcoming your sinful behaviors. Be willing to acknowledge that many of your men are in difficult places in their marriages, but be sure to avoid letting the conversation turn into a gripefest!

For Reflection:

1. Describe your experiences with accountability. Have you ever seen it as a reminder of the structure of the universe? How might this perspective change the dynamic and your perceptions about accountability?

There will likely be mixed reviews from men about their accountability experiences. Keep the focus on how this points us to our standing before God.

2. How else do you battle against an autonomous mindset? How does it impact your relationships?

Proverbs 3:6 calls us to acknowledge God in all our ways, and yet we make hundreds of decisions every day without consulting him and seeking his counsel. Encourage your men to think back over their day and to identify decisions they've made—maybe even significant ones—without talking to God.

3. If married, has your wife served as your accountability partner? How has that impacted your marriage? How might it benefit your wife if she knew other men were asking you the hard questions?

This is an important question for your married men to wrestle with, but be sure to stay aware of the single men in the group. I've never met a wife who didn't want her husband to have regular accountability. Help your men to see that by submitting to accountability, they're showing love to their wives in a significant way.

DAY 2: ACCOUNTABILITY: THE BASICS

In Day 2, we look at the nuts and bolts of establishing an accountability group. I assume your existing group is already doing accountability as a part of your time together. The intent here is to help your men get a vision for a longer-term plan. If appropriate, ask if there are men in their lives who could be accountability partners. If asking each other hard questions hasn't been a component of your group thus far, and they don't have accountability elsewhere, discuss the importance of beginning to establish accountability within your group.

Would your men feel comfortable opening up to others who don't struggle with these issues (or at least don't appear to)? Help them see the truth of 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 that God comforts us in our afflictions so we can comfort others in any affliction.

Discuss the idea of sin-management accountability. Have any of your men tried to stay within the bounds of “acceptable levels” of sin? How would accountability change if we had a NASCAR view of sanctification instead of cruise control? Ask your men if they know any mature older men who might be willing to walk with them. If they don't know anyone, spend some time praying that God would provide older men in your churches to heed the call to mentor younger or less mature believers.

It's crucial to stress the importance of obedience without making it appear that we earn our salvation. The Bible always holds these ideas together: Salvation is entirely the work of God, but the reality of our faith is evidenced through the fruit of a transformed life. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). How do your men respond to this truth? Encourage them that even the work of attending a group is the beginning of living differently. Remind them that all of us are in process and that God promises to complete the work he's begun.

It is a mercy to get in a brother's face if he's repeatedly making foolish decisions. Are your men willing to engage one another on this level? None of us want to let go of our idols. We need men who are willing to pry them out of our fingers, even if it means a fight!

For Reflection:

1. Have you ever been in a “sin management” accountability group? How did this experience impact your soul?

Did your men tend to stay within the acceptable sin limits or break them? Depending on their responses, the group either bolstered their pride or left them in deeper despair after every meeting. Discuss as a group how you want your time together to be different than these previous experiences.

2. In what ways do you operate on Christian cruise control? Do you want your Christian life to be like NASCAR? Explain.

It may be helpful to broaden the discussion beyond sexual sin. What are other places in your men’s lives where they’re tempted to cruise along, rather than screaming around the track to win the prize?

3. How do you gauge what’s okay regarding your use of entertainment, music, money? With whom do you tend to compare yourself?

The goal with this question is to help your men consider the voices they listen to when making various decisions. Do they stick with the pack, or prayerfully consider God’s leading on various issues? Remind them that God wants to be acknowledged in our decision-making process. He is the King we’re called to serve.

4. Who in your life is willing to give you a spiritual beating (in love) when you need it? Are you pursuing an accountability relationship with that person currently? Why or why not?

This is a critical question. Hopefully by now your men see their need for accountability with other men. If they’re not pursuing those relationships currently, dig in. Pinpoint what’s holding them back, and help them get over those hurdles.

DAY 3: PUTTING ON ...

Day 3 focuses on an often-neglected aspect of accountability—the importance of targeting positive growth, so that we can be conformed to the image of Jesus. Specifically, we need to be challenged to grow in our obedience to the two Great Commandments.

Most men have experience with the exhaustive-questionnaire approach to accountability. Discuss the limitations of this approach. We are easily self-deceived, convinced we are technically telling the truth, ignoring the reality that God delights in truth in our inward being (Psalm 51:6). Ask your men if they've previously wrestled with speaking truth in these contexts.

The other challenge is that yes-or-no answers don't deepen intimacy. Do your men understand the goal of open-ended, reflective questions? Asking questions requiring reflection is particularly important when addressing putting off sinful behaviors, but they're also helpful in considering the putting-on questions. The goal of reflective questions is to help men discern the motives of their hearts.

Discuss the importance of focusing accountability on positive growth. The Bible anticipates that we'll grow increasingly to reflect the glory of Jesus in this world. Discuss how Romans 13:8–14 demonstrates both putting off and putting on. The passage describes behaviors we need to turn away from and gives the picture of the men God wants us to become. What from this passage encourages your men? Does its calling seem impossible? Verse 14 in particular is clearly pointing the way forward in turning from sexual sin. Most of us have excelled at making provision for the flesh. We've struggled to understand what it means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and live in humble dependence on him.

There are two main aspects of putting-on accountability. First, we need to be challenged about how we're doing at cultivating our relationship with God. There seems to be tremendous resistance about time spent with God becoming "legalistic." Nonetheless, your men must be challenged that a relationship with God requires intentionality. Like any other relationship, it will only grow if we're committed to investing time and effort. If your men

are waiting to be in the mood to pray or read the Bible, it will happen very infrequently! Humbly share with each other ways you engage in spiritual disciplines. Be wary of the opportunity for men to posture. If they're in this group, there clearly are significant holes in their spiritual life, and it may be helpful to acknowledge that reality at the outset. Help each other consider the specific ways that each of you needs to grow in your relationship with God, remembering that it will likely look different for each of you.

In the same way, share ways you need to grow in loving others, especially those closest to you, and those you find the most difficult. Be sure to give concrete, specific ways that you need to grow. If the goals in either of these areas aren't clear, it will be difficult to identify growth.

For Reflection:

1. How do you need to be encouraged to grow in your relationship with God—Bible reading, prayer, journaling, etc.? What would growth look like specifically in your case?

Assuming there are holes in their spiritual lives, push your men beyond where they already are. Faithful Bible study that produces no fruit is an indicator that a man is probably lacking genuine intimacy with God through his Word. Similarly, an active prayer life that isn't informed at all by Scripture will likely produce a Christian with a stunted understanding of God, rather than one rooted in the truth of God's character.

2. Who's the most difficult person for you to love right now? Do you believe God put him or her in your life for your good? What would it look like for you to have an agenda of love toward that person?

Be careful not to let the conversation degrade into complaining. Help your men see God's purposes in these challenging relationships and to consider the glory of having a radical agenda of love that will change their hearts, and likely impact those difficult people as well.

3. How would those closest to you rate your attention to their concerns? Are you willing to ask them for feedback on how you need to grow in your relationships? Why or why not?

Although it's hard to love difficult people, sometimes it's often even more difficult to love those closest to us. Where do your men need to grow? Are they willing to humble themselves and ask their wives, children, or housemates where they need to grow in love?

DAY 4: PUTTING OFF ...

Today's reading is extremely important, as it introduces issues that will take a long time for your men to fully grasp. Overcoming sexual sin is not simple behavior modification. It requires us to learn to discern the intricacies of our hearts and the places we're prone to run after false gods.

Although these issues are much deeper than our behaviors, we need to start there. Hopefully by this point the group has grown in vulnerability, and men are sharing the specific nature of their struggles and how they manifest. Your men need to be asked specific questions about when and where they're most prone to act out sexually. Again, questions need to be open-ended, not simply yes or no. If an individual is wrestling with multiple sinful behaviors, he needs to be asked specific questions targeting each behavior. Again, challenge your men with the importance of being ruthlessly honest—it's the only way they'll grow beyond their current struggles.

As your men begin to pay closer attention to their behaviors, they'll begin to discern patterns. Bill-paying time, situations at work, or visits with extended family become obvious places of intense battle. As long as we're living in a perpetually "medicated" state with sexual sin, it's very difficult to see these patterns. When you constantly succumb to temptation, they're almost impossible to discern because the barrage feels relentless. But as your men begin to get serious about this fight, their eyes will start to open. As you actively battle temptation, you're aware when the intensity increases.

What we're talking about is identifying the sin behind the sin. Your men need to grow in their awareness of the outside influences that send them running for another deliverer besides Jesus. Discuss current circumstances your men are facing. What causes them anxiety, frustration, insecurity? Where are they angry? Ask them to share what they'd like to change about their lives. What do they think would make life easier, or fulfilling? What's

missing, or what do they want God to take away? Their answers to these questions will help expose their hearts and the sin behind the sin. We run to false saviors when our ultimate Savior isn't giving us what we think we need. As we discussed earlier, we'd rather provide for ourselves with a leaky cistern than be dependent on God to continue providing fresh spring water.

Help your men see how that better understanding our enemy changes the face of the battle. Instead of gritting our teeth to fight behaviors, we're pouring out our hearts to God, asking him for grace to trust, and waiting on him, surrendering our dreams and desires to his will.

For Reflection:

1. What specific behaviors do you need to put off? What's your greatest area of weakness? Which behaviors continue to be an issue?

Challenge your men to be open and to share specific sinful behaviors that require regular accountability. Most of us hate to let go of our sin. Remind your men that they will only find life if they're willing to sacrifice the sin they love.

2. Where are the vulnerable places in your life? Which circumstances tend to be times of regular temptation and/or failure?

This question is to help discern weak spots—places where your men are in more vulnerable circumstances and may be prone to act out because of a greater sense of autonomy, freedom, etc.

3. Do you understand the idea of sin behind the sin? What specific sources of stress, frustration, disappointment, loneliness, etc., provide an excuse to turn to sexual sin?

This is a huge issue and perhaps the most significant question for your men to continue wrestling with in the weeks and months to come. The greatest changes will come in their lives as they're intentional about identifying and battling the sin behind the sin.

DAY 5: THE BATTLE PLAN

Day 5 challenges your men to begin taking practical steps to battle their sin proactively. Using the information you shared from yesterday's lesson, help each other get a plan in place to combat current areas of weakness and failure.

There are some basic no-brainer courses of action. All of us should have safeguards on our computers. At the very least, married men should be concerned about protecting their families. Even if you don't struggle with Internet porn, we all could use accountability for the time we spend online. The Internet is a wonderful tool, but it can consume our lives if we're not careful. Premium cable channels featuring soft porn should also have no place in our homes.

For some, putting safeguards in place isn't enough. They need to be challenged that radical amputation means getting rid of the home Internet or cable TV. Remind your men that these issues are greater than life and death! There is no room to play games.

A word on "Christian freedom": There's a backlash against fundamentalism in some circles that suggests we're "free in Christ" to engage culture wantonly. Scripture actually teaches that our freedom exists not to indulge our flesh, but to serve others in love (see Galatians 5:13–14). There's no danger in these circles of returning to a legalistic approach to entertainment, but there's a huge danger of flirting with worldliness.

Get practical with each other! Help each other establish a battle plan. Where do your men need to build fences? The goal is to reduce the number of surprise attacks. And of course, we also need to be honest that with sexual sin we are our own worst enemy. We deceive ourselves that we're "innocently" channel surfing, when in our hearts we're really hoping to stumble across porn.

Do your men understand the difference between building fences and legalism? Too many Christians are fearful of anything that looks like "law," but we're talking about taking steps to safeguard our souls from destruction—because we know that we *are* lawbreakers.

The ultimate road to freedom is to put on Christ. Yet, it's hard to grow in our delight in him as long as we keep devouring the things of this world. Your men's effectiveness with putting on the Christian life will be directly connected to their putting-off. It's impossible to develop a deep, satisfying relationship with God while you continue to binge on porn. Spend time asking God to give you the grace to challenge one another to take this battle seriously and to spur one another on to love and good works.

For Reflection:

1. Where do you need to establish a battle plan? What are the specific situations where you regularly fail? What can you do to start addressing those issues?

Use what you've already learned about your men during your time together to help them think through their specific battle plans. They need to be clear, targeting their particular places of weakness and developing strategies to counteract their failures.

2. How does considering the sin behind the sin affect your battle plan? Pray over those areas, talking to God about your fears, doubts, unbelief, anger, etc. How are these issues deeper than your struggle with lust?

Tying into what we discussed yesterday, helping your men grow in understanding the sin behind the sin will help them be even more focused with their battle plans. Apart from seeing the inner workings of our hearts, it's easy to feel as if temptation just appears out of nowhere.

3. What specific steps can you take to put on Christ, when confronted with temptation? Where do you most need to grow in your relationship with him?

Challenge your men to connect this question directly with the idea of the sin behind the sin. The times when your men are most prone to run to a false savior are also the most crucial moments for them to practice putting on Christ. This requires thoughtful reflection. What lies do they believe in that moment? What benefits do they anticipate from acting out? Why do they doubt God's goodness *now*? The more your men begin to slow down in the moment of temptation and prayerfully discern the motives of their hearts, the

better equipped they'll be to address the lies they believe with the truths of Scripture.

WEEK 14: CULTIVATING HUMILITY

DAY 1: THE BIGGEST BATTLE

We move in a different direction for this final week, raising the importance of humility in order to overcome our struggle with sexual sin. One of the most significant ways we grow in Christlikeness is to cultivate this virtue of all virtues.

In Day 1, we considered that the biggest battle we face is against our pride. Pride is deeper than our sexual sin. It is the natural bent of our hearts and as invisible to us as the air we breathe. Discuss the John Stott quote. Why does Stott make such a sweeping claim? Why is pride our greatest enemy?

Do your men see how pride is at work in their sexual sin? Instead of seeing ourselves as existing to serve and bless others, we believe others exist to serve and bless us. Do your men believe that pride is at the root of all our struggles with sin? Pride led to Satan's downfall, and pride led Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit rather than remain dependent on God.

Can your men identify pride in others? Where do they see it at work in their own hearts? Discuss the verses from Proverbs. How do your men respond to the severity of God's wrath against pride? Does it seem extreme? Why does God take this so seriously?

For Reflection:

1. How is pride "contending for supremacy with God"? How does it feel to know that it's an abomination to God?

The first part of the question may be too abstract, but all of us should be sobered by the severe indictments against pride in the Bible.

2. How do you think pride is at work in your sexual sin? In what ways does it manifest itself?

Examine issues of coveting and exploiting. Remind your men of the subject of an earlier discussion: Our fantasy life is the attempt to create a universe

where we're at the center. This is a poignant expression of pride at work in our sexual sin and a clear example of how we "contend for supremacy."

3. Outside of sexual sin, where do you see pride in your life? Here are some tips: What do you base your image on? Who do you tend to look down on? By what criteria do you compare yourself to others?

Help your men to broaden their perspective on the effects of pride in their lives. Areas of pride tend to be most evident in the ways we compare ourselves to others.

DAY 2: THE FOLLY OF PRIDE

The goal of Day 2 is to help your men develop a sober assessment of their condition, by exposing the folly of pride and helping them to see God's wondrous promise to give us more grace, as we humble ourselves before him.

Do your men acknowledge that they owe God everything? Discuss the reality that everything we have is a gift. Even the self-made millionaire is indebted to God for the abilities he's given, not to mention the providential circumstances God created for his success.

Discuss the irony of our pride when our struggle with sexual sin so clearly demonstrates our weakness and folly. Ask your men if they see a growing sense of pride as they begin to overcome their sexual sin. Discuss the Lewis quote that the devil is glad to see victory over smaller sins if he can enslave us with pride. Is this a danger for your men?

Along these lines, it is important to note that both the Scripture passages quoted point to both the work of the enemy and the importance of cultivating humility. In earlier weeks we looked at the presence of spiritual warfare within sexual sin. Discuss the reality that as we tackle our pride, we're entering the most intense place of battle. Why is the devil so invested in keeping us proud? Why is this particular issue so difficult? Because pride is as natural to us as the air we breathe, and because it is a "purely spiritual" sin, the devil is heavily invested in keeping us blind and enslaved.

The warning of these passages should be deeply sobering. The last thing your men should want is God's opposition! Conversely, God gives us the

greatest promise possible—if we cultivate humility he will give us more grace. The warning and promise of this passage is the reason for Stott’s comment from yesterday. Pride is our greatest enemy, and humility our greatest friend.

For Reflection:

1. Have you compared yourself to others, specifically regarding sexual sin issues, in order to feel better about your own behavior? What has that looked like? Over whom do you tend to exalt yourself?

Some men struggling with porn may judge those who go to prostitutes. Men with heterosexual struggles may judge men wrestling with same-sex attraction. Help your men to see the folly of believing their chains are somehow better than another’s.

2. Are you sobered to consider the reality of spiritual warfare surrounding the issue of pride? How can that fact help you cultivate greater humility?

The might and malice of our enemy should send us fleeing to the throne of grace. This is exactly where God wants us—soberly aware of our need and clinging to him for life!

3. Consider your responses to failure. Since God opposes the proud, how might this issue have kept you stuck in sexual sin? Does it encourage you that more grace is freely offered to you? Why or why not?

I’m sure your men lament that God doesn’t seem to be answering their prayers for victory over sexual sin. Help them consider that tackling their pride is a crucial component. Our fight against sexual sin is utterly dependent on God’s grace, and his grace is contingent on our humility!

DAY 3: THE POWER OF WEAKNESS

Day 3 challenges your men with the importance of embracing their weakness. God wants us to understand our utter dependence on him and is committed to bringing us to that place. Discuss the 2 Corinthians 12 passage. Ask your men to describe a time when they've experienced this dynamic, perhaps during a time of illness or grief. Do they believe that God's grace will be sufficient to meet them in the weakness of their sexual struggle? Can they see how God might be using this very struggle to humble them and to give them a greater awareness of their desperate need for his grace?

How do your men respond to Andrew Murray's comment that we're to be empty vessels filled by God, to manifest his power and goodness? Is this desirable to them? What will it cost them to be emptied out, to let go of the ways they seek glory and bolster pride? What blessings would they gain?

Jesus lived a life of perfect humility. From their knowledge of the Gospels, ask your men to share examples of Christ's humility. He gave God credit for the miracles he performed. He acknowledged that his teaching was only passing on what he'd received from the Father. He relentlessly served others, even when he was physically exhausted. He patiently endured the misunderstanding of his family, the disciples, and the crowds. He suffered unbelievable physical torture, not to mention cruel mocking and was killed in the most shameful and excruciating way that the evil forces of the world could devise.

Do your men hear Jesus' invitation to experience his strength through humility? Do they believe that embracing humility is the way to become truly human? Emptying ourselves for God to fill enables him to become all in all!

For Reflection:

1. *Aside from your struggle with sexual sin, what else has God brought into your life to humble you? Are there other ways he's calling you to see your weakness and receive his strength? Explain.*

There could be any number of things—illness, job loss, grief, or a child’s rebellion. Hopefully in the midst of this, there will also be testimonies of how God has used suffering and weakness to bless your men.

2. How has God used sexual sin to humble you? How do you see his love for you in that?

Just entering a support group is deeply humbling for most men. Many are likely dealing with consequences because of their sin in their relationships, workplace, or finances. Remind them of God’s promise to discipline the sons he loves (see Proverbs 3:11–12; Hebrews 12:7–11).

3. From your knowledge of the Gospels, describe the humility of Jesus. What blessings would there be in taking up Jesus’ yoke and learning humility from him? What will it cost you?

Through humility, we’re invited into deeper communion with God. A humble man walks with God, because he is aware of his need. God invites us to experience his fullness when we surrender our attempts to fill ourselves for personal glory. But it means letting go of our current attempts to exalt self.

DAY 4: MORE LIKE JESUS

Day 4 focuses on one particular aspect of Jesus’ humility—his willingness to endure injustice. This is a significant issue for all of us, but it is particularly important in marriages impacted by sexual sin.

Discuss the 1 Peter 2 passage. Can your men imagine the things Jesus endured in silence? How would they have responded? How do they typically respond when others attempt to humiliate them or when they experience injustice? Murray challenges that seeking to humble ourselves before other people will aid us in becoming more humble before God. How do your men respond to that statement? It is radically counter to our natural bent to embrace opportunities to humble ourselves. What might that look like on a daily basis for your men? Encourage them to name specific ways they can humble themselves in their relationships.

Discuss the reality that from a young age we’re very aware of what seems fair to *us*, but have little perspective on whether others are being treated fairly.

How does the idea of justice differ from fairness? Justice calls us to be outward-faced, considering the good of others. Fairness is consumed with self.

Because pride attacks our relationships, it's no surprise that marriage—the most intimate human union—is a crucial place to grow in humility. Ask your married men where they need to grow in humility in their marriages. Their struggle with sexual sin has exacerbated the situation by creating deep hurt and distrust in their wives. Help them to see that their willingness to take it on the chin when their wife unjustly accuses them takes radical faith and humility, and is an important step to bringing healing in their union. Acknowledge that many wives, even after a husband's grown for years, can be stuck in a bitter, unforgiving place. This points to the desperate need to have men intentionally engaged with their wives, so their marriages can heal.

For Reflection:

1. Who in your life is most vexing on a regular basis? What would it look like for you to go out of your way to show kindness and love to this person?

This ties in to the importance of putting on, discussed last week. Help your men to consider this from the standpoint of the importance of cultivating humility.

2. Where are you suffering injustice? How might God be using this to humble you? At what point is it okay to fight back? Explain your answer.

There are certain situations of injustice that are completely out of our control. Nothing can be done to remedy the situation. Here we need eyes of faith to see God working for our good, to humble us and bring us to greater trust. It's right to battle injustice, but we need to guard our hearts against sin.

3. How are you responding to your wife's lack of trust? Are you tired of hearing about your sin and just want her to get over it already? Where do you need to be more humble in your marriage?

This discussion could spiral quickly. Help your men to stay focused on how God is calling *them* to grow, not the ways their wives are currently failing. Be wary of any man who seems callous to his wife's pain over his sin.

DAY 5: WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

This study ends with a warning against the way religion often fans our pride. As mentioned earlier this week, even our gains in overcoming sexual sin can become sources of pride.

Discuss the Lewis quote. Ask your men to share their personal experiences with religious pride. The irony of pride at work in our hearts is that we can be living a radical double-life of secret sexual sin, and yet be self-righteous. Be careful to keep the focus on the members of the group and not on all the Pharisees in their churches! Take time to thank God for his incredible mercy and patience toward us, despite our ongoing blindness and rebellion.

Just as God has glory in store for us, so also he doesn't deny our desire for greatness. Instead, he redefines the meaning of greatness. How do your men respond to Jesus' radical redefinition of greatness? Do they see the blessing Jesus is offering if they're willing to lay down their lives for his sake? Discuss how we've zealously pursued our own desires, only to experience profound discontent and reap destruction in all kinds of ways. Jesus is asking us to relinquish our agenda that brings death, so he can bless us with resurrection life.

Discuss the Proverbs 3 passage. How does this radically change our approach to life? Ask your men to consider what their lives would be like if they walked in close contact with God, acknowledging him in everything rather than living by their own faulty decisions. As you go forward, how can you spur one another on to continue walking this road of humility before God?