

Five-Star Athletes – God’s Process for Building Men (Learning to “Trust the Process”)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Athletes – God’s Process for Building Men

Learning to “Trust the Process”

“...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12: 1)

Out of the gate, I may lose part of my audience due to comments on what has become, in the last decade or so, a time-consuming area for men in the months leading up to the next major sport season, especially football, the draft. The amount of hyperbole surrounding star ratings of young men for their athletic prowess is (in my humble opinion) over the top. In some circles (not all), there is more concern for ***developing performance over the person—competitiveness over character.***

That said, do not think for one second God is not interested in ***building high-performance men.*** He absolutely is! He just defines them differently. On the surface, His process (compared to those above) seems doomed to fail. God does not care how fast we run the 40, how many reps we bench press 225 lbs, or how high we jump. We will not run through cones, but we may run through fire!

Biblical and modern history have demonstrated God’s process can be widely successful. But many find it troubling. The reason is simple. His methods are not natural—they are ***supernatural.*** They do not build on the physical man, but the ***spiritual*** one. God builds His men ***inside-out.***

God does not care what we look like or the physical attributes we bring to the field when we join His team. I hope this has piqued your curiosity. Throughout this study, you will be given the opportunity to peak into His playbook. But first, **The Process.**

Following are five facets of God's process for building biblical Christian men. This overview is neither exhaustive nor original—just a humble attempt to call attention to another aspect of our Father's love for you and me. He invests heavily in His boys with hope that we become godly, young men, and, ultimately, maturing men after His own heart—soldiers of the Cross fit for our King. I chose present participles because God never stops the process this side of Heaven.

★ **Providing**

The first, and best, provision is obvious—Jesus our Savior, Who redeemed us from our sins because He alone could, and did, satisfy the mandatory death penalty that accompanied them. Neither our fathers nor we, ourselves, had any chance of doing that. Neither can we do it for our children. The best Old Testament foreshadowing of this provision is the very familiar story of Abraham and Isaac.

*“Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham said, “**God will provide for Himself the lamb** for the burnt offering, my son.” (Genesis 22: 7-8 NASB)*

Jesus often spoke in parables to His disciples. As His crucifixion drew nearer, He spoke directly that He was God's provision (the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world as John the Baptist called Him).

"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised up on the third day." (Matthew 16: 21)

That satisfies the most important provision, but God did not stop there. He knows all our needs and delights to make provision for them throughout His process. These two verses give me great assurance of that—one from David; the other the Apostle Paul.

"I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread." (Psalm 37: 25)

"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4: 19 NASB)

★ **Protecting**

God is not about to let our enemies, especially Satan, score early victories over His men in process. We are safe under His wings, the sanctuary of His Word, and fellowship with other brothers also in the process and older men of God, mostly on the other side of it. Consider two verses citing God's protection. Many believe Moses wrote Psalm 91, as he did Psalm 90, though it is not confirmed. King Solomon wrote the second. God does not want us to think He bails on us when the going gets tough (which we know it does). He reminds and reassures He is our Protector Who goes before and after us.

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you...He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark." (Psalm 91: 1-4)

"The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man

runs into it and is safe.” (Proverbs 18: 10)

★ **Purifying**

Now the process gets harder and hotter!

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.” (Isaiah 48: 10 ESV)

I chose the following powerful verse from the Apostle Peter because he went through as visible a purification process as any man in the Bible. Boastfully zealous and outspoken at times. Swore to his willingness to die for or with Jesus. Slept on His command in the garden. Ran away when the soldiers came. Denied Him three times. Somewhere weeping and hiding as Jesus was crucified. Wow!

But Jesus, loving, forgiving Lord that He is, restored Peter. On the other side of his intense purification process fell out a man useful for Christ’s service—one of the key leaders of the early church.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4: 12 ESV)

So take heart, brothers. For we have in our own ways slept on Jesus’ commands to us in Scripture, run away during tough times, denied Him with our words, and, more so, our lives for which we have wept bitterly in the shadows hoping no one would see us.

But there is great news and encouragement! The same loving, forgiving Jesus meets us where we are and restores us to Himself to put us back in His service—a more purified and useful vessel.

★ **Pruning**

Late Winter or early Spring (depending on where you live) is a time many prune trees and shrubs to prepare them for the new growth of Spring and Summer and fruit in late Summer or Fall . Cutting back select branches on a fruit tree to make them more fruitful is not painful to the tree, but it sure is for men. Horticulturists tell us pruning directs more of the trees energy into producing fruit. So does God's pruning!

God prunes the tree (man) to see who is a genuine disciple of Christ, grafted into the vine, versus those simply holding onto it (like kudzu) for the sake of convenience and appearance. Jesus' words:

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." (John 15: 2 ESV)

He also prunes the forest (the church) as well—again to separate out the real from the pretender.

"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire..." (Matthew 3: 10-11 ESV)

(I feel it is important to interject a quick note on these verses. These verses can be misinterpreted to mean one can lose his salvation if you are not bearing fruit. The reality is Jesus is calling men out to examine our hearts to see if we are born-again in the first place.

The issue is not losing your salvation. The compelling issue is whether you ever had it! Jesus made perfectly clear the consequences. So be sure to examine your hearts, brothers!



Perfecting

Most are familiar with the adage, *"Practice makes perfect."* That was *one-upped* by someone else who said, *"Perfect practice makes perfect."* Perhaps the most glaring difference between

this athletic analogy and real life is this. There is no practice field in the Kingdom walk.

If you have been born-again into the army of the Lord, you are in the fray. You do not get to sit on the sidelines and wait your turn or sit behind a veteran to learn the ropes. It could be argued our churches and discipleship ministries serve that end for “rookie” Christians. They can/should serve that purpose,

but at no time is the Christian man not in the battle—it is not a game.

“Trust the Process.” I attempted to trace the origin of this oft used expression in sports. It has been used by winning schools and organizations that took a very process-oriented approach to all aspects of building their respective programs. One recent use that is now deemed “successful” is a pro team that lost for years so they could get the best draft picks—the most five-star athletes. Interesting, but painful and expensive for the season tickets holders to watch during those years. I thought the object was to compete as hard as one can to win; not lose to get better the next year. Silly me!

I do have the answer to the question, *“Who first said that?”* The most important thing to note is this. It was the *second* phrase spoken because it paled in comparison to the first.

The Lord God said to man in the beginning and throughout His-story. “Trust Me.”

From Adam to Noah to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, Moses, all the subsequent judges, prophets, kings, and the rest of the boys in the band, God kept saying, “TRUST ME! Good things happen when you do. Bad things happen when you do not.”

God’s process is about perfecting you and me. I know that

sounds crazy to some, but if you will not believe me, believe Jesus. **He commanded us to be perfect.** The following was not a suggestion.

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5: 48)

That is as impossible an assignment for us as obeying all those laws was for the Israelites in the OT. God is always giving His men impossible assignments. Is He setting us up to fail? Of course not. He does that so that we come to the end of ourselves (my definition of a *desperate man*) and have no choice but to turn to Him in complete dependence. Then, and only then, can Holy Spirit power, wisdom, and guidance take control of our lives and this seemingly ridiculous assignment.

One key to success was given to us by James, the half-brother of Jesus, and leader of the new and very fragile Christian church.

*“And let **endurance** have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (James 1: 4)

If we trust God first and best, then we can learn to “trust His process” and stay the course. On the other side, you will look in the mirror and see a man who looks more like Christ than we ever thought possible—more fit for war than we ever imagined or hoped.

Performing

My dear brothers, if we endure God’s “five-star” process, we are ready to perform for Christ’s sake and His glory. The Apostle Paul must have had some athletic skill and experience as he used numerous analogies to things like I discussed above and the Christian life. Consider these two passages.

“...Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable

(one). So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 ESV)

*“But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. **Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus...that you **keep the commandment without stain or reproach** until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Timothy 6: 11-14 NASB)*

The only stars you and I should be concerned with are those that will bejewel our crowns when we have kept the faith, fought the good fight, and finished the race He assigned to us. Our race does not end at a finish line. It ends at the Beginning Line we call the entrance to Heaven—finally Home. Hallelujah!

Walter

From a Donkey Ride to an Empty Tomb – Four Lessons from the Most Important Week in His-Story



The King of Kings on a Donkey's Colt – The “*Un-triumphal*” Entry

First, I should write that I looked long and hard for the origin of the phrase “triumphal entry” used to refer to Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem on a donkey of all things. I could not find any specific references other than the words were assigned based on the response of many Jews to Jesus riding into Jerusalem accompanied by a crowd.

His arrival seemed “triumphal” to observers. These people (not their leaders or the Romans) were shouting and singing—praising God and calling on Jesus to “save them now” (Hosanna in the highest”). They threw palm branches in His path.

But Jesus and the crowd had very different agendas. The Jews wanted a political Messiah who would throw off Roman rule and return Israel to them—not at all what Jesus had in mind. He came to save them (us) from their sins—not the Romans! (Luke 5: 32)

The importance of this event and amazing scene is underscored in that it appears in all four gospels. What lessons can we learn from our own observations on what we now refer to as Palm Sunday? Two things stand out regarding Jesus’ *ride*—a small donkey.

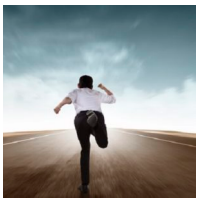
- **Jesus’ abject humility.** It is both interesting and exciting that this humble (and probably uncomfortable) means of travel also fulfilled OT prophecy.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous

and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Zechariah 9: 9 ESV

- **Beast of Burden.** Donkeys carried loads for their owners that would be too burdensome, if not impossible, for them to bear. Jesus carried our sins to the Cross, and there bore our burden “once for all” who repent of sins and receive Him as Savior.

What a great start to the most difficult week in His-story!



The First Streaker Recorded in the Bible

“Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. Matthew 26: 56 KJV/ Mark 14: 50

“Every man for himself” may have been what the disciples and others who followed Jesus were thinking or screaming as they literally ran for their lives. All deserted Him—every man who swore they would stand by Him to the end, walked with Him three years—the men Whom He referred to as ***friends!***

Mark shares in his gospel that one young man (himself) was grabbed by the cloak and ran out from under it—naked and very afraid, escaping with his life (v. 52). Only John, is accounted for at the Cross. We know Peter was hiding – crying bitterly at having denied Jesus three times. And a distraught Judas hung himself.

Honest Christian men will admit to times we also ran away when standing up for Christ got tough, or we were afraid it could cost us our standing with others; perhaps even our jobs.

Like His disciples, whose feet Jesus' knelt and washed during the Last Supper, we have experienced His humility, drank from His cup of grace, yet withheld it from others whose needs were no more than our own.

Peter's denial offends no more than ours as we stand nervously in silence or curse Him, not with words, with deeds that reflect our true nature, not His.

The first half of Holy Week was all good for these devoted followers of Christ. It brought popularity and fanfare. The second half brought fear and failure.

Yet out of despair and defeat looms forgiveness and victory. Jesus is heading to the Cross for your sin and mine. We just have to make it 'til Sunday. Happy days lay ahead.

As we approach Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, let's do some introspection that will lead surely to confession as the desperate men we are apart from Christ.

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The "King of the Jews" is Dead – Long Live the King!

"When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour (12-3 pm) ...And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last." (from Mark 15: 33, 34 37).

Only John recorded His words, *"It is finished."* (John 19: 30)

Luke recorded these as His last spoken words before dying.

"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." And having said

this, He breathed His last.”” (Luke 23: 46)

Imagine the defeated and hopeless feelings of Jesus' followers, who despite being with Him three years – listening to and living with Him – still did not get it. All they knew was the man who was supposed to save them was dead. How many times did He tell them He had to die to accomplish His purpose. Now He had.

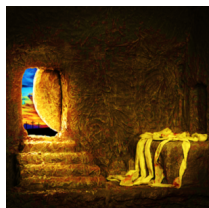
Even nature could not bear to watch, so the sun turned away and darkness covered the earth for three hours. God turned His back on our sin as Jesus became sin. Only now could God's holy demand for justice be satisfied.

When Jesus breathed His last and yielded His spirit back to God, strange physical manifestations occurred in response. (Matthew 27: 50-53)

- First, the veil of the temple was torn in half from top to bottom – an unimaginable feat. The veil was ~ 60 ft high x 30 feet wide x 4” thick. Only God could rip it in half. He did!
- The earth shook, and rocks split.
- Graves opened, and the bodies of saints came alive again. After Jesus resurrection, they came out and walked around the city.

That's the Good News, brothers, but what a price! Deserving death, Jesus bought us life. So, as you spend this Good Friday and the Saturday Jesus spent in the grave, I challenge you to consider your life in lieu of His death. Ask yourself this question,

“Has His death made an eternal and obvious change in my life?”



He is Risen Indeed!

He is risen indeed! – the greatest expression in history. Jesus had risen from the grave as promised. Those words of confirmation were first used by eye witnesses and spoken to disbelieving disciples to whom Jesus had not yet appeared. All four Gospels give resurrection accounts, but the Apostle Paul cut to the heart of the matter in terms of its significance in 1 Corinthians 15.

*“if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...and you are still in your sins...If in Christ we have **hope in this life only**, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* (from verses 16-19)

But Hallelujah, He is risen. Only fools will pity us as we celebrate and share this Good News. If you are in Christ, He lives in you. This is Resurrection Sunday – a day set aside by the Christian church long ago to celebrate His resurrection and the future hope with certainty of ours as well.

My prayer for true believers is that our lives are filled with such undying gratitude and joy that all whom the Lord puts in our paths will want to know the reason for the Hope we have. Our response? **HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

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Celebrating our risen Messiah with everyone who has received Him as Savior,

Billy Graham – Another Mighty Soldier of the Cross Goes Home! Hallelujah!



Chose this pic because Billy Graham always pointed people to the Cross of Christ and told them the empty tomb secured our salvation.

So many great and wonderful things have been written, posted, and said concerning Billy Graham, such an amazing, faithful man of God who finally arrived safely Home today.

I can only add to such beautiful testimonials what the Holy Spirit impressed upon me this morning as I sat praying and praising the Lord for his life during my QT. I found myself in Isaiah 50—a passage that is both poetic and prophetic. The

Servant (Jesus) spoke clearly—calling out the unfaithful nation of Israel, reminding them (us) of His power and willingness to help. He was faithful and obedient to the Father's work. Verses 4-5 stood out to me.

*"The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to **sustain the weary one with a word**. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. **The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back.**"* (Isaiah 50: 4-5 NASB)

I could not help but think of Billy Graham and his amazing ministry of more than seventy years. I feel certain God would have no problem with me saying the words of verse 5 about this dear preacher and evangelist. For clearly the LORD God opened his ears, and Billy Graham was not disobedient – neither did he turn back away from this powerful and profound call on his life.

Praise God, not only for not turning away from our sinful nation, but loving us enough to send Jesus as our Savior to redeem us from death into life eternal. Those of us who are in Christ long to join you, our dear brother. And until He also calls us Home, may He find us faithful as you were.

For Christ's sake

Walter

Has the Birth of Christ Made

a Real Difference in Your Life – A Christmas Challenge

Twas the night before Christmas and what was God thinking?

Gigi and I attended the Christmas Eve service this morning, had lunch, and checked our list (one more time) to make sure I did not need to join the hoards of last-minute shoppers. Thankful I did not, my mind turned to hear what the Holy Spirit would breathe into mine regarding “just another Christmas Eve”. All I knew was I really wanted to share a brief word of encouragement on this joyous eve of expectancy – for little children who cannot wait to see what Santa brings and Christians who manage to clear our heads of all the “Christmas clutter” and remember why we do this in the first place.

Expectancy. When I saw this picture of Mary kneeling beside the manger and holding her soon-to-be-born baby in her arms, as only an expectant mom can do, I knew this was the image that would best accompany these words of reminder to all who will celebrate the birth of Christ our Savior tomorrow.

Twas the night before Christmas, and there sat Mary (with Joseph not far away). We know, nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and shared the most amazing words ever. She was about to become pregnant and carry in her womb

the Son of God Who would become the Savior of the World. You may also recall Joseph was told that “his son” would “save His people from their sins”. Both wondered what God was thinking?

Mary’s life was further disrupted and pregnancy made even more uncomfortable – if not dangerous – when Joseph told her they had to journey to Bethlehem for a census since he was of the line of David that originated in this small town outside Jerusalem.

As an expectant dad, I know from watching Gigi endure four full-term pregnancies what those last few weeks can be like for a woman. While she could not wait for the baby to be born, there was a lot of discomfort that leads up to the most uncomfortable part of all – labor and delivery.

We have no idea what Mary and Joseph thought after those “God invasions” into their lives, as no thoughts or words are shared. What we see are incredible demonstrations of faith and obedience that cause me to shrink back in amazement. Did Mary really think, as this picture presents, she would be giving birth to the Son of God in a nasty stable surrounded by animals and the fragrant aroma of ox poop?

Yet we see her kneeling faithfully beside a feed trough (where animals slobbered all over it as they ate) rubbing and comforting her son in her womb, awaiting His arrival. Surely she must have wondered if this was really what God intended or was it just because the inn was full when they arrived.

No sterile surroundings of a birthing room. No nurses or midwives standing by waiting to help. Just poor old Joseph, perhaps just as clueless as the rest of us men who stood around awaiting the birth of our first child. I am sure he did what he could, perhaps laid out “fresh” hay and kept animals at bay while they waited for the arrival of the King Who would be their’s to raise.

One final “image of expectancy”. It could not be shown here

because it exists only in the hearts and minds of Christ-lovers who pause long enough to consider the expectancy in Heaven as all angels, cherubim, seraphim, and every living creatures await the incarnation of the One they know already as King of Kings and Lord of all. Surely they were amazed that God would condescend to sinful, created beings such as humans to save and redeem us from our deliberate decisions of defiance and disobedience.

As I wrap this up, there are about six hours left before the day calendar gets flipped and "just another Christmas day" arrives. I hope you receive this message in time to enjoy, with child-like excitement and expectancy, the imminent arrival of our Savior.

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." "She will bear a Son; and **you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**" Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (Matthew 1: 18-23 NASB)*

Expectantly waiting with you,

Walter

Hope Lives Here – A Message for Homeless Men That Applies to All of Us

Accountability – A Powerful Weapon for Demolishing Strongholds

ACCOUNTABILITY

A Powerful Weapon for Demolishing Strongholds

“Secret Sins” Series (Part Three)

A Sad Story. Hard to believe it has been twenty-plus years since that awkwardly, sad time. Our accountability group was composed of a few men from church-friends and golfing buddies. One was an associate pastor—a terrific man with a great family. At that point in the life of our group, I seem to recall we were not drilling down very deeply into our personal lives.

The first troubling key was our pastor friend began to join us less frequently. When we did see him, his countenance was not the same. He looked troubled in his spirit. Sadly, as

happens all too often among church men, including pastors, his affair was uncovered and the “hell” began—perhaps more so for his sweet family. Even more tragic is that was the second moral failure of a staff pastor at our church within a few years. Where was the *accountability* of and from the church leadership?

Accountability is perhaps the most overused/under-applied word in “Christian-speak”.

Most men avoid biblical accountability as much as eating liver! Interesting that we yield to being held accountable at work for attitudes and actions, but not spiritually for being the men God expects based on His Word and the many examples of Christ.

The Accountability Caveat. I have learned over many years of doing (or attempting) life with men in AGs, it is impossible to hold men accountable who really do not want to go there. Most of us are pretty good at keeping things buried—to a point. Lesson learned:

Men must want accountability and surrender to the process—both of which create stumbling blocks for many church men, even for some who are solid Christians.

The Accountability Mandate. I do not recall a specific point in my walk with the Lord when the Holy Spirit burned this desperate need in my spirit, but I am so thankful He did. Perhaps it was early on when I was being discipled by an older Christian man. While that really does not matter, what does is being true to this passionate concern for the spiritual health and well-being of men who say they belong to Christ.

On several occasions when writing or teaching on this subject, I searched the Scripture for specific use of the word(s) *accountability* or *accountable* in the present context—man to man. I found none. Does that mean we consider this an extra-biblical concept and excuse for not engaging? Hardly.

Following are three of many verses that point to the need for men to engage—holding one another accountable to biblical living and representing well our Savior.

1. Most men know this verse:

“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”
(Proverbs 27: 17 NASB)

Having had a strong background in metallurgy and metal working early in my career, I like to add when “iron sharpens iron” friction generates heat, sharp edges are honed, and sparks often fly. It was never intended as an easy process. As with metal, sometimes you have to hammer things out.

2. These verses provide some of Solomon’s wisest words of advice for men. I am particularly fond of the last line because accountability groups of three men make great sense and can work well.

*“Two are better than one...For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up...if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. **A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.**”* (Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12 NASB)

3. On numerous occasions in Scripture, Jesus and the Apostle Paul tell us we will give an account for our actions on the day of judgement. Here is one example from Jesus (Matthew 12: 46 ESV):

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.”

This side of Heaven, why not get in the habit of being accountable to one another so we help each other become “sharper” images of Jesus—encouraging, exhorting, and speaking

hard truth when necessary?

Let's close this lesson and 'Secret Sins' series offering three reasons men avoid accountability and ask three questions that just might save your life, marriage, relationship with kids, and job.

Three reasons men avoid accountability:

- Too many men do not want to admit we have issues—especially “those” issues. Prideful men always think they can work themselves out of any situation or problem. Just ask the men in my Desperate Men small groups at the mission and prison! “Pride goes before a fall.”
- While fear of failure may top the list of men's fears, this one comes in second: *fear of getting caught* AND suffering the consequences. We prefer to hide our secret sins from men, hoping God is not paying attention or we slipped something past Him. Little boys and immature young men do that—not men of God.
- Perhaps the opposite of pride or a subset, shame keeps men from owning and confessing sin. We are embarrassed to admit we struggle with things “real” Christian men should not. The truth is all men of God in the Bible also did. The Holy Spirit wrote their stories so we could learn from them.

Three questions that could save your life, marriage, relationship with your kids, and your job.

1. **Who is holding you accountable?** If the answer is “no one”, keep reading, but you might want to insert a cup in your boxer briefs before you do. This is serious business. Jesus did not mince words so neither will I in such an area of great need for men of His church. What is your excuse (and do not suggest *time*)? Pick one or more of the reasons above, and

tell God you are doing fine on your own and working through your issues. You do not need other men in the process who may have more issues than you. Bad answer. Trust me, you should not walk alone.

2. What areas of your life are you allowing yourself to be held accountable? It is easy to allow ourselves to be held accountable for things we do not do or areas in which we do not struggle. Man up and allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those things that you do struggle with and open those doors. Here are three blank spaces for you to write down just a few to start the process.

3. Are you willing to commit to the process? Be mindful that accountability groups can default to bull sessions and your own sports talk shows. Early in the process, there is nothing wrong with that. It takes time to build trust and convince other men you love them in the Lord—no matter what. But do not stop there.

As I said before, I have been in an AG with a pastor steeped in adultery and known several others who had similar issues. Drill down even if you occasionally hit rock. Remember it is a process, and we are not professional counselors, so these are not counseling sessions. The sooner you start, the sooner you will begin to find peace in the process, more joy in your journey, and help another brother as well!

Committed to the Holy Spirit's sharpening process—even when friction increases the heat or sparks fly,

Here are the links to the first two parts of this series. I hope you read and print all of them and pass along to men in your accountability group. And if you do not have one, start one!

Secret Sins – Things We (Think We) Hide From God

Finding Forgiveness

Your desperate brother in Christ,

Walter

“Secret Sins” – Finding Forgiveness

“Secret Sins” – Finding Forgiveness

“...be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32: 23 ESV)

Pastor Thomas got caught. The fourth *desperate man* character in the book, *All Men Are Desperate Whether They Admit It or Not*, Thomas made a rather stupid mistake that uncovered his “secret sin” of pornography—forgetting to close out one of the porn sites he frequented on his computer. One day when her iPad battery was dead, his wife decided to check Facebook on the computer in his study. Uh-Oh!

What she saw stunned her. As she checked the URL history in the drop-down menu, she began to weep bitterly because this was no discovery of a random act. Many of the sites led straight into the abyss known as the *dark Internet*. How could her husband, a Christian father and pastor, get involved with something evil like this? Composing herself, to the extent this shock allowed, she went in to confront Thomas—his “secret sin” was secret no more.

No one wants to get caught doing something he knows is wrong or violates a trust—especially when it brings consequences

that devastate our families, as well as our own lives. But that kind of forward-thinking does not precede sins such as pornography and others from the realm of “lusts of the flesh” Satan uses to tempt us. He has one purpose in mind—enslave ours.

Jesus’ warning in the Sermon on the Mount seemed over the top when we first read it. From Matthew 5: 29, Jesus said, “*if you right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away...*” Surely not. But then He gave it again in Matthew 18. We know Jesus wasted no words when He taught. And when He said something twice, it was not to get out attention—that should have happened the first time. It was to save us from ourselves. Both passages speak to the consequences of not taking sin seriously enough-Hell.

[I want to interject here I am not a licensed, professional Christian counselor. Dealing with any addiction and/or secret sin revealed (and the consequences) usually requires that level of help. If this is where you are, I strongly urge you to seek that level of help. Do not think you are strong enough to climb out of the abyss by yourself. Going downhill alone into such is not that difficult. Climbing out alone is impossible. There are many qualified Christian counselors whose methods are biblically based. Find one!]

Finding Forgiveness is a two-way proposition. Unfortunately, we only control one side of the deal. This is one of the rare times that demands we focus initial attention on ourselves. Three biblical prerequisites come to mind to facilitate the process and give it a chance to be successful. These are based on many years of working with hundreds of men from all walks of life dealing with these and related issues.

1. We must **confess our sin**. The sin most frequently discussed among Christians is *someone else’s!* Admitting we may have a problem is lame. Admitting we have a problem and are willing to consider addressing it is still weak. Admitting we have a

problem with sin is the correct biblical response—also the hardest. Why? Easy answer—PRIDE.

David provided the best examples of *true confession*. Despite his issues (and there were many), he was the only one God called “a man after My own Heart.” I believe that is, in large part, because David spent time confessing his sins to the Lord. He taught us to understand that our sin is first against God.

“Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.” (Psalm 51: 4 NASB)

He also taught us the consequences of holding onto or harboring sin—physical and emotional pain.

“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.” (Psalm 32: 3 NASB)

Confessing our sin means we own it and accept responsibility for the consequences.

2. We must **ask for forgiveness**. When our youngest son was a little boy, he came up with what he thought was a sure-fire means of avoiding time-out or a spanking. Sometimes even before being confronted with his misdeeds, he would begin running around repeatedly saying he was *sorry*. As you might have guessed, those attempts, though well-conceived for a little boy, were unsuccessful.

He was not sorry. He was just sorry he got caught!

So it is with many of us. Caught in the act or confronted with our transgressions, we respond in much the same way hoping it gets us off the hook or mitigates liability and consequences. We are not sorry—just sorry we got caught. The Apostle Paul helps us understand *true sorrow*:

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and

leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Corinthians 7: 10 NIV)

The difference is evident to all involved. A repentant heart turns from sin, seeks forgiveness, and desires to reconciliation. That leads to the final prereq.

3. We must **commit to the process** of healing and restoration. Let's begin by stating two truths.

- *The unconditional love of God, in concert with His grace and mercy, makes His forgiveness immediate. He even promises to go beyond forgiveness and forget our sins. (Isaiah 43: 25)*
- *Unfortunately, because we are still human, that is not often the case with those whose lives are wounded or crushed by our reckless sins.*

There are many verses about our need to forgive others—even warnings about not doing so. Here are three that focus on the keys to success.

*“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who **confesses** and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” (Proverbs 28: 13 ESV)*

*“And whenever you stand praying, **forgive**, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark 11: 25 ESV)*

*“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First **be reconciled** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5: 23-24 ESV)*

God knows the human heart better than any of us because He created it—after His. He also knows most of us require time to work through the process of confession, forgiveness, and,

ultimately reconciliation. I hope those verses and words of encouragement do three things for Christians:

- Draw us closer to the loving, forgiving heart of God Who reconciled us to Himself in Christ.
- Encourage those who need to engage in this painful process to do so.
- Strengthen those who are engaged to see it through to the end God intends.

This is the hardest work assignment God gave us this side of Heaven.

Your desperate brother in Christ,

Walter

Review of previous lessons:

Thus far we drilled deeper into the lives of three of the five *desperate* men whose stories begin my most recent book, *All Men Are Desperate Whether They Admit It or Not*. One key takeaway from each is this:

We have more in common with these “desperate men” and their issues than we would like to admit.

- The Addict – The Addict and Is the Christian Man
- The Prisoner – “Not all prisons have bars.”
- The Rich Man – Taking Our Turn in the Crucible of Wealth
- The Pastor – Secret Sins

Secret Sins – Things We (Think We) Hide from God

“Secret Sins” – Things We (Think We) Hide from God

“For nothing is hidden...nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light.” (Luke 8: 17 NASB)

When our youngest son was a toddler if he could reach the cookies, left too low on a shelf, he would grab the bag and take off. He had two hiding places—in the curtains or under the comforter on our bed. It was comical to watch the covers shake and hear giggles coming out while he celebrated getting away with something because he “hid” himself from us.

As funny and silly as our son’s thought process sounds to us as adults (thinking he was getting away with something unseen), we do the same kinds of things when we attempt to hide our “secret sins” from others—especially the Lord. But, in our case, the Lord is not standing at the door smiling or trying to keep from laughing. He is not amused. His expectation of men who claim to be biblical Christians-devoted followers- is a continuous striving for perfection. (Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: 48)

Many sins readily fall into the category “secret sin.” As you may expect, and I am about to confirm in ways many may find startling, pornography has *wormed* its way to the top of the heap.

Pornography is the most well-known and popular “secret sin”—Satan’s most effective weapon against Christian men and pastors.

Consider these published sobering statistics that include only Christian men and pastors. If they do not get your undivided attention, check your pulse.

- 54% of pastors said they viewed pornography in the last year; 37% admit it is a current struggle.
- 95% of Christian men admit having looked at porn; 54% do so with some regularity.
- 18% of born-again Christian men admit to being addicted to pornography. (That is > 1 out of 6.)

Consider these stats on millennial men—the first generation raised in a large percentage of single-parent, absentee dad homes. They provide a scary glimpse into the future if we fail to act.

- 77% view pornography at least monthly; 36% do so daily; 32% admit having an addiction.

(FYI, the number of women, especially young ones, viewing and becoming addicted to pornography is increasing rapidly.)

This sexual sin, that leads readily to addiction, glides in low, like a stealth bomber, undetected until the problem is upon us. Such was the case with Pastor Thomas in the book where it snuck in through a misspelled URL during a web search. Most men are very visual—especially when it comes to sexuality. The first glance can be innocent (as it was for this pastor). But not so those second and third looks! They draw us in like a fly into a spider's web. If you recall that poem, the fly went away initially but eventually returned for another look and got a little too close to the web. Once ensnared, getting free becomes a war.

The impact of issues with and addiction to pornography cannot be overstated. The fallout is widespread, affecting many areas of our lives. Closer to home, collateral damage creates casualties by inflicting deep wounds—beginning with our wives and children.

The apostle John listed *“the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes”* (1 John 2: 16) as two of three primary categories of sins in the world today. Both contribute to incredible numbers cited above. The third category, *“pride of life,”* keeps men enslaved—we are too proud and ashamed to confess it.

Secret sins are areas of our lives we deliberately hide from others and think we hide from God.

Only God knows the extent of the truth of this statement, but I believe it safe to say all men harbor *secret sins*. Pornography is only one of them. They include *thoughts* and *behaviors* that, if exposed, would create issues, some serious, for the man believing they are hidden.

Before searching the Scripture, I imagined having trouble finding a key verse that would speak directly to *secret sins*. I was shocked. I found specific verses spoken by Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jesus. The fact that these mighty men of God and our Lord Himself addressed it requires no further explanation.

(Moses) *“You have placed our iniquities before You, Our **secret sins** in the light of Your presence.”* (Psalm 90: 8 NASB)

(David) *“When I **kept silent about my sin**, my body wasted away...groaning all day long.”* (Psalm 32: 3 NASB)

(Isaiah) *“Woe to those who **deeply hide their plans from the LORD**, And whose **deeds are done in a dark place**, And they say, “Who sees us?” or “Who knows us?””* (Isaiah 29: 15)

(Jesus) *“For **nothing is hidden** that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not...come to light.”* (Luke 8: 17 NASB)

I chose to end the first part of this lesson here so you can reflect on the Word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to invade

the most private areas of your heart regarding your secret sins, especially pornography– perhaps the most challenging sin affecting Christian men and pastors today.

I will follow up soon with the last two parts:

- Part Two: Secret Sins – Finding Forgiveness
- Part Three: The Key to Successfully Staying Out of the Web

From one desperate brother in Christ to another,

Walter

Review of previous lessons:

Thus far we drilled deeper into the lives of three of the five *desperate* men whose stories begin my most recent book, *All Men Are Desperate Whether They Admit It or Not*. One key takeaway from each is this:

All of us have more in common with each man and his issues than we would like to admit.

- The Addict – The Addict and Is the Christian Man
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The Addict and the Christian Man

The Addict ^{is} and The Christian Man

All Men Are Desperate Whether They Admit It or Not opens with a number of sobering statistics about ‘man issues’ in the U.S. That is followed by the introduction of five *desperate* men with whom you will connect or identify in some way as their stories unfold. As I always say when introducing such ‘numbing’ numbers, you must read them as **names**, not numbers. Insert your name, names of your sons, father, brothers, fraternity brothers, golf or hunting buddies. Only then will such statistics hold your attention.

The focus of this lesson is **addiction**, so I decided to share just one of these staggering numbers.

- More than **11,000,000** men in the U.S. battle alcohol, drug, pornography, and other addictions.

To put this in perspective, that is **more than the combined populations of New York City and Chicago!**

Many men struggle with these demons in secret. All of us know men among these numbers. Some of us have been there or fight that battle now. Other men live in denial.

The Lesson Title. What do I mean when I assert, “the addict is the Christian man”? It does not take much of a web search to find highly discouraging statistics to support this. That is how I came across the following grim *pornography* statistics on Christian men.

- 50% of men viewed pornography within one week of attending a Promise Keepers event.
- 54% of pastors said they viewed porn within the past year in a Pastors.com survey
- Focus on the Family poll (2003) revealed 47% of respondents said porn is a problem in their home.

These are old stats that have only worsened since these surveys were taken. Because men are prone to hide or cover up these sins, the numbers are typically lower than reality. These facts also cover only one of many issues that hook, ensnare, and trap men—leading us into desperate places.

Divine appointments. A couple of weeks ago, I met with two strong men of God who, like me, are passionate about ministry to men. One is senior pastor of a mega church; the other the men's pastor at a large, highly diverse church. Both men, and their ministries, have big hearts for ***broken men who have taken hard falls from the favor of men, but not the grace of God.***

The common thread of both pastors is each has his own *desperate man* story—the results of which often lead men into addiction. In my own *menistry*, I have seen God use two types of desperate men to reach other **men searching for help, healing, and hope that can only be found in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.**

(1) Men who recognized the deadly path they were on in time to turn around or get help. Or

(2) Men who have themselves been restored from the stronghold of addiction.

Uncommon Denominators – Identifying with the Addict. James is the first young man introduced in the book. He is one of too many kids from the 'hood', born to a crack-mom with no dad in sight. This horrible home life (if you can call it that), and desire to please people at all costs, led him into gang life, the recreational use of drugs, selling them to support his ever-increasing need, and, ultimately, addiction. So many bad decisions, born of a young mind that had no role model or mentor to guide or influence his life.

I developed the character, James, in part, because his life is in such stark contrast to ours. I wanted readers to say, "I

feel bad for those kids, but we have nothing in common, and I cannot identify with them at all." Certainly, most men reading this did not come from crack houses or 'hoods' like James. We cannot identify with his journey. But that does not mean we are not more like him than we will admit.

Addiction comes in many forms. The most typical forms that come to mind are drugs and alcohol. Historically, they dominated the addiction landscape. Perhaps a better image is that of carnage strewn across a battlefield. Broken, wounded men like the walking dead, lost or going aimlessly through life, without direction or hope. Some carefully try to hide their issues; others have reached a point where they do not care anymore. I hear their stories at the rescue mission or from men in prison or aftercare.

But wait. I also hear stories that begin differently but end up in the same place (addiction) from broken, wounded pastors and other Christian men. Most were once highly regarded in their churches, workplaces, and communities. Such men are much more likely to try to hide, mask, or deny their issues—too embarrassed to come out of the closet of shame and admit their issues. This ***denial*** group led to the title of the book. The men I meet and work with at the mission or prison are desperate and admit it.

Too many Christian pastors and businessmen are afraid to admit their issues, nor do they want to talk about them...until it is too late.

By then, they have bottomed out. Sadly, only men who admit they have issues seek the help they need to climb out of the hole Satan so agreeably helped them dig.

There is also a set of what some consider "lesser addictions". Men battle addictions to work, money, power, food, gambling, the Internet, anger, and even coffee (among the top ten). They may be lesser compared to the effects

caused by drugs and alcohol, but many of these addictions have devastating effects on families and work lives. Marriages are severed, families crushed, jobs lost. And there are known 'generational' effects on children.

Addiction results from continuous attempts to fill a hole in your soul or heart with something that cannot satisfy the true need. Jesus alone can do that.

The harder we try, the more likely we are to replace Him with something chemical, physical, or visual that only leads down darker paths into even more desperate places. It is a vicious cycle—one that Satan delights in as God's army of Christian men are rendered impotent and removed from battle, often falling on our own swords.

Drilling Deep into the Well of Encouragement.

God has answers. Because too many Christians today can be guilty of ***hyper-spiritualizing*** answers to the problems of ***other people***, I gave considerable thought to writing something as simple, yet profound as "God has answers." He does. But telling someone that or suggesting they just pray about it, and it will go away is, at best, half-hearted and, at worst, blowing them off. Funny how we do not want to hear that when the issues belong to us.

I do not know about you, but when I have a problem that needs fixing or a solution, I do not want you to sympathize with me, nor do I want you to tell me about how you once had that or something worse. I want you to tell me how or where to find relief now! You do not put a band-aid on a bleeding cut. You first help stop the bleeding. Neither do you tell someone with poison ivy to keep scratching. You help them find a salvo or med that gets to the root of the problem.

When God healed people in the Old Testament, directly or through a prophet, we always find the one with the issue in a desperate place with nowhere else to go AND humbly turning to

God for the answer no one else could provide.

In each situation, God gave the person (or people) instructions on what they had to do to receive the healing. It involved faith and their acting on that faith.

Jesus heals people with addictions. Likewise, Jesus healed in the same way His Father did.

“Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.”

(Matthew 4: 23 NASB)

Jesus heard the pleas for healing and (almost) always gave the person instructions to receive it. “Stretch out your hand”, “Rise up and walk”, “Go wash...”, “Come out of that tomb”. He closed most of those encounters with powerful words we need to lock onto. “Your faith has made you well.” Faith is the key to our healing whether swift or a long arduous process that encounters set-backs along the way.

The Bible is full of the stories of desperate men. The truth is all men all have a story because we are all desperate. The question is will we realize our desperate place and look to the only One who can heal us?

I take some comfort and solace when I read the stories of biblical men of God who had issues just like me. As we begin to put a wrap on this lesson, consider a truly great man of God, the Apostle Paul, and his well-known, introspective dialog recorded in Romans 7. Consider these excerpts.

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing... (Romans 7: 15, 18b,19 ESV)

Desperate man indeed! The great Apostle was talking about sin in his life that he could not or over which he had no control. That by definition is *addiction*. I love it when he cries out,

"Wretched man that I am!. Who can set me free...?" (Romans 7: 24 ESV)

Most of us have done that at some desperate point in our lives. Paul answers his own question by giving thanks to God because he knew his only hope for deliverance was Jesus his Savior.

You may be amazed to find that the culture of Jesus' time under Roman rule was as sinful and full of evil as ours. That's easy to explain—same enemy (Satan). The Apostle Peter hit head-on the issue of cultural sin that makes "feel good" promises that lead only to addiction.

*"They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption. **For whatever overcomes a (man), to that he is enslaved.**"* (2 Peter 2: 19 ESV)

Words of Warning

My dear brother, if you are flirting with addiction, living on the edge, thinking you have it all under control, God has a word for you.

*"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands **take heed** lest he fall."* (1 Corinthians 10: 12 ESV)

You know verses that warn of the sin of pride and the resultant falls—often hard and deep. Look yourself in the mirror and admit you need to make changes in your life. Find someone to hold you accountable.

Words of Encouragement

My dear brother, if you are in bondage to some form of

addiction, my telling you the truth and pointing you to the Truth will not get you where you need to be unless you do like so many who ran to Jesus for help and healing. You need to take action. Step out in faith, not in yourself, but in Christ alone and get help. God has provided many Christian resources to help you overcome addiction and reclaim your life. He has a place of service with your name on it!

Addiction is a war without end. But I have great news for you. We never go into battle alone.

If you are in Christ, God is our Unrelenting Father, Who...

- *meets us right where we are*
- *loves us unconditionally*
- *covers my sin with unfathomable grace*
- *extends to us unfailing mercy*
- *forever remains our source of unquenchable hope.*

Come now, brothers. Stretch out your hand, rise up and walk, or come out of that tomb—whatever you need to do to receive your healing from Christ Jesus our Lord. Do it today.

Walter