

Week One

Jumping In and Getting to Know Each Other

Objective

To begin building a bond with each other by establishing ground rules, sharing basic information about who we are, and sharing goals

Ground Rules

Here are a few I use with my clients. Add others if you feel it will help (for instance, you might want to have an attendance policy.)

1. Be curious. When we are curious, we are in a posture of openness. We are listening rather than judging.¹
2. Whatever is shared in the room, stays in the room.² This is extremely important. Otherwise, the group won't open up and be vulnerable.
3. Don't talk over others. Respect each man's right to share.

Introductions

Each man should introduce himself and share these things: a brief bio (family, work, hobbies, etc.); why he's in the group (or what he hopes to get out of it); and what he pictures happening to indicate real change is occurring. (The last question may seem a bit general but I find men who picture what they want to see happen—or what change looks like—are more likely to stay motivated as they see it taking place.)

Closing

Discuss helpful information such as the schedule of meetings and how to prepare for next week.

Prayer

Week Two (Chapter One)

Archetypes: The Making of Men

Objective

To increase our awareness of male archetypes that shape and influence us

Reflection Questions

1. What do you think of the four male archetypes the chapter covers (king, warrior, sage, and lover)?
2. Which one do you spend the most time trying to emulate? How successful are you at not giving in to its shadowy side? Are there any lessons you've learned about resisting it you can share?
3. In the community where you spend most of your time, which archetype gets the most attention? How does its shadowy side show itself?
4. Aside from David, is there another Bible character whose version of masculinity you identify with? Why?

Exercise

Draw four columns on a piece of paper. Label them “king,” “warrior,” “sage,” and “lover.” In each column, write several characteristics of each that you embody. Also, write down several shadowy sides you struggle with.

This will help you see how you express your masculinity. As you go through the study, refer to the columns so you can see how your masculinity is changing. Make a habit of asking, “What characteristics do I want to keep? Which ones do I need to change?”

Prayer

Week Three (Chapter Two)

Extremes: A Tale of Two Men

Objective

To assess how balanced you are between passivity and aggressiveness

Reflection Questions

1. Do you struggle with being too passive or too aggressive?
How does that express itself?
2. Think about the men who have played a major role in your life.
Are they too passive or too aggressive? How has their influence affected you?
3. How can you take the positive in what they taught you and separate it from the negative?
4. What lessons can we learn from Jesus about the balance between passivity and aggressiveness? See John 2:13–17 (aggressive) and John 8:1–11 (passive).

Exercise

Sometime this week ask someone you trust which characteristic you live out most frequently, including examples. Ask their advice on how to be more balanced.

It's a risky question for two reasons. One, you're putting the other person on the spot and they may not feel comfortable answering it. (You can hedge that by telling them they can have time to think about it.) Two, you could become defensive or angry—and even withdraw if you don't like the answer. But the risk is worth the reward. It will give you a great opportunity to discover who you are and the changes you need to make. And more than likely, it will *strengthen* your relationship with that person because they loved you enough to speak the truth—and you had the courage to hear it and do something about it (Proverbs 9:8).

Prayer

Week Four (Chapter Three)

Fathering: Breathing Life into the Son

Objective

To understand the role your father or other men in your life had in giving you life or creating hunger for a relationship that didn't exist

Reflection Questions

1. Now that you've read the chapter, describe what it means for your father or other male figure to be a life-giver.
2. Have you experienced that? If so, tell the group what it was like (including things you appreciated and learned).
3. If you didn't, what wounds or hunger have you been left with? What insights can the other guys offer about how to handle it?

Exercise

Identify a man in your community who needs a good male mentor (he can be of any age). Ask Jesus if you are the person who can provide that. If you are, what steps can you take to start the relationship?

On the other hand, if you need a mentor, identify someone who could fulfill that role. Pray for guidance about whether to contact him. The Lord will be faithful in showing you what to do ("Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." Proverbs 16:3; and "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." Proverbs 16:9)

Prayer

Week Five (Chapter Four)

Depression: Trapped in Our Anger

Objective

To figure out if you struggle with depression but hide it with things like anger, work, drinking, drugs, pornography, and/or sexual relationships

Reflection Questions

1. What were some of the messages you heard growing up about what it means to be a man? Who did those messages come from? Were they accurate?
2. What were you taught about expressing your feelings and emotions? Did you ever see your father or other significant male express emotions and feelings in a healthy way?
3. Did he struggle with depression? Did he mask it with anger, workaholicism, pornography, drinking, or other things? Have you picked up on any of those habits? What do you need to do to get rid of them?
4. If you are struggling with depression, how might God use it to draw you closer to Him?

Exercise

Pay attention this week to how you handle feelings. Do you express them in a healthy way or stuff them and cope with an unhealthy habit? For example, if you feel unloved but can't express it, do you withdraw from others and use alcohol or pornography? Also, if you think you're depressed, ask for help. If you think someone else in the group is depressed, reach out and walk through it with him.

Prayer

Week Six (Chapter Five)

Silence: The Relational Abyss

Objective

To honestly assess how you communicate with the important people in your life

Reflection Questions

1. Would you describe yourself as expressive or non-expressive? What experiences and influences have made you that way?
2. What fears do you have in communicating with others? What drives those fears?
3. Are you aware that when you fail to communicate with your wife you force her to “fill the void”? How does that usually work out?
4. What’s an example of positive, open communication you’ve had with someone? What made it that way? How did you feel during and after the conversation?

Exercise

Think of one person in your life who needs you to communicate with them and what they need to hear. Why are you holding back? Take the risk this week to talk with them.

Prayer

Week Seven (Chapter Six)

Stuck: Moving Out of Your Box

Objective

To understand if you're stuck inside your boundaries of competence

Reflection Questions

1. Larry Crabb describes men as living within the “boundaries of their competence.” Which boundaries do you live within?
2. What happens within those boundaries that affirms you and gives you meaning?
3. Are you a “fix it” guy? What happens when you can't fix it? How does that make you feel? What do you do when you feel that way?
4. What's it like when you move beyond your boundaries of competence and communicate or handle issues with others? Do you feel adequate or inadequate? Do you have the tools you need to do that well? If not, what steps can you take to get them?

Exercise

Choose a relationship outside your boundary and intentionally engage with that person. For example, if you struggle to communicate with your wife or girlfriend, talk with her. Ask open ended questions that allow her to share her feelings. An example is, “How does that make you feel?” or “What went through your mind when she said that?”

If you struggle spending time with your teenage son, spend time with him. If you're not sure which setting is best, ask which works for him. Let go of trying to have all the answers and fix everything. Be patient, present, listen, and engage—even if things get messy.

Prayer

Week Eight (Chapter Seven)

Encounter: Shaped by the Other

Objective

To understand, accept, and enjoy our status as sons loved by our heavenly Father; and gain insight on how our earthly fathers did or didn't support that

Reflection Questions

1. How does this chapter define “identity”?
2. Where do you find your identity—in your relationship with God our Father or having to achieve and do things for Him? Why?
3. What implications does Jesus' baptism and affirmation as His Father's beloved Son have on your relationship with the Father? Are you confident He unconditionally loves and accepts you? Why or why not? How has that affected your relationship with Him?
4. Do you feel unconditionally loved and accepted by your *earthly* father? Why or why not? How has that affected your relationship with him?

Exercise

Make a list of the things you build your identity on. Are they rooted in the unconditional love and acceptance of the Father or other things?

If you've built it on something other than His love, take this step to let go of it. For one month, set aside five minutes every morning and evening for prayer and quiet so you can sense God's affirmation that He unconditionally loves and accepts you. Use Psalm 103, Isaiah 30:18, 49:14–16, and Romans 8:31–39 to guide your reflection on that great truth. Also, ask Him to instruct you about how to center your identity on Him.

Prayer

Week Nine (Chapter Eight)

Vulnerability: Opening Ourselves Up

Objective

To begin experiencing the health, excitement, and vitality of vulnerable relationships

Reflection Questions

1. When you think of being vulnerable what comes to mind?
What scares you about that?
2. In what ways was Jesus Christ vulnerable in His life and relationships?
3. How is vulnerability a double-edged sword?
4. How would you lose power if you became more vulnerable?
Do you think it's worth the risk?

Exercise

Identify one person in your life who would benefit from your increased vulnerability. Do you get excited or fearful thinking about what may happen? What are specific, tangible things you can do to be more vulnerable with that person? Put at least one of them into practice this week.

Prayer

Week Ten (Chapter Nine)

Intimacy: Being Known

Objective

To start the process of experiencing deeper intimacy in your relationships

Reflection Questions

1. How would you define nonsexual intimacy?
2. What are some of the challenges you face in your attempts at intimacy?
3. Is your intimacy level with others what you want it to be? Why or why not?
4. Describe your intimacy with God. How can you experience it on a deeper level?
5. Do you project an image that keeps you from intimacy with other people? If so, what is it? What keeps you from being more authentic? What can you do to overcome that?

Exercise

Spend extra time this week praying God will show you what an intimate relationship with Him looks like. One of the first steps is to be honest—which requires being vulnerable with Him. Then you can prayerfully seek ways in which your intimacy with Him leads to intimacy with other people.

Prayer

Week Eleven (Chapter Ten)

Receiving: Taking Care of Ourselves

Objective

To accept the truth that self-care isn't an act of selfishness; it's an investment in those you care about

Reflection Questions

1. Describe how self-care benefits you *and* the people you know.
2. Who are the people who would benefit most from your self-care? Why?
3. Of the four areas of self-care (mental, physical, spiritual, and relational) which are you most successful at and which do you struggle with the most? Why?
4. Do you take a Sabbath each week? Why or why not? How could it benefit you?

Exercise

Draw four columns on a piece of paper. In each one, write an area of self-care. Write down one thing you can do in each area to make it a more regular part of your life. Don't overanalyze; just put down what naturally comes to mind.

Over the next few months, put those ideas into practice. You don't have to do each one every day; the key is to find a healthy rhythm that works for you. As each becomes a habit, add a new one in that area—and watch your skill at self-care grow!

Prayer

Week Twelve (*Chapter Eleven*)

Giving: Returning Home to Community

Objective

To learn how to be a life-giving man in your community and relationships

Reflection Questions

1. Have you been away from home physically or emotionally? For how long? Why?
2. What were you hoping to find? Did you? What did you learn while you were away?
3. Do you feel at home with God or are you on the run from Him?
4. God loves you, PERIOD. Do you believe that? Why or why not? Can you let Him love you or are you punishing yourself for something you've done?

Exercise

Write down some of the gifts God has uniquely given you. If you have a hard time coming up with something, ask a friend or one of the men in the group to help. Identify one person you can share your gifts with this week.

Prayer

Week Thirteen (Chapter Twelve)

Action: Out of Reflection

Objective

To practice the balance between reflection and action

Reflection Questions

1. When facing a decision or issue, do you spend most of your time reflecting or acting? Which of the two should you do more?
2. What hinders you from thoughtfully reflecting? What hinders you from taking action?
3. What role does passivity play in your movement from reflection to action? What role does aggressiveness play?
4. Can you identify an experience where you struck a balance between reflection and action? What enabled you to do that? What was that experience like?

Exercise

Identify an issue in your life that needs to be resolved. Set aside time for reflection (prayer, silence, and Sabbath) and then move into action (problem solving and participating). If it needs to be resolved in a few days, reflect for a few hours before taking action. If you have a month, try a few weeks of reflection. In either case, let your action be guided by your reflection.

Prayer

Week Fourteen (Chapter Thirteen)

Vocation: Hearing God's Call

Objective

To discover the freedom of connecting our work to our identity in God

Reflection Questions

1. What was the meaning of work communicated to you as you grew up? How does that influence the way you view work today?
2. Does your work flow out of your identity in God or does your identity come from your work? How does each affect you?
3. What kind of work has God called you to? Have you listened or ignored Him? Is there anything that scares you about listening?

Exercise

Think about your childhood for a moment. Write down the things you dreamed about doing for work. Where did those ideas come from? God? Your parents? Friends? Teachers? Coaches? How closely connected are those dreams to your work today? Are you disappointed or discouraged by that?

What needs to happen for you to do the work you really want to do? Could God be calling you to that? What steps can you take to find out if that's His will?

Prayer

Week Fifteen

Closing Reflection

Objective

To give the group time to think about the last fourteen weeks together

Reflection Questions

1. What was the first thing that changed in your life and relationships when you read the book and started this study?
2. In what areas have you grown the most in the last fourteen weeks?
3. What concepts have you most struggled with? What will help you move past those struggles and achieve success?

Exercise

Take time to encourage and breathe life into each other. For instance, acknowledge another guy's strengths, thank someone for their support, tell another man he's a good role model and that you want to be like him, or affirm someone as a good dad and husband.

Prayer

Week Sixteen

Closing Action

Objective

To give the group a chance to act on its last fifteen weeks of reflection

Reflection Questions

1. What do you most appreciate about your experience with the group? What are the most important lessons you've learned?
2. What things can the group keep on its prayer list for you?

Exercise

Over the last fifteen weeks, we've individually reflected on our life and relationships. We've also tried new ways of giving life to others. Now it's time to think about a life-giving action we can do as a group. Here are some ideas—but feel free to brainstorm others, too.

Ideas

A mission trip

A service project

A retreat or camping trip

A father/son trip or event (you can bring your sons, dads, granddads, uncles, cousins, or other significant men in your life)

Prayer