

HONEST TALK FOR MEN

**MARRIAGE. FAMILY.
CAREER. FAITH.
AUTHENTIC
AND REAL
CONVERSATION.
IMPACTPLAYERS.ORG**





HONEST TALK FOR MEN

8 Week Overview and Weekly Game Plan:

Real men need to get real with real men. Honest talk is an 8 session cohort which deals with honest questions that real men are asking. Together, we will ask real questions and find real answers and hope.

HONEST TALK FOR MEN Sessions:

1. **A Family That Lasts:** *"We can't keep doing this."*
2. **Finding Answers For Your Marriage & Family:** *"We have no idea what we are doing."*
3. **Money, Materialism & What Matters:** *"We can't keep up financially."*
4. **Moral Failure and Spiritual Victory:** *"I messed up... really bad."*
5. **Communication & Respect:** *"I just can't talk to you."*
6. **Personal & Spiritual Growth:** *"I am not seeing any improvement."*
7. **From Good To Great:** *"I want to have a good Christian family."*
8. **Invitation to the Lonely:** *"I have never felt like I even have a family."*

Pre-Season Training:

The Playbook: Read this intro to our study and get prepared for this season.

Week 1. A Family That Lasts: *"We can't keep doing this."*

ABC Bible Study Method: 1 Peter 4

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*** James 1:2-4

Week 2: Finding Answers For Your Marriage & Family: *"We have no idea what we are doing."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Proverbs 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** James 1:5

Week 3: Money, Materialism & What Matters: *"We can't keep up financially."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Luke 18

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*** James 1:17

Week 4: Moral Failure and Spiritual Victory: *"I messed up... really bad."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Psalm 51

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."*** James 1:13-14

Week 5: Communication & Respect: *"I just can't talk to you."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Genesis 16 & 17

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*** James 1:19-20

Week 6: Personal & Spiritual Growth: *"I am not seeing any improvement."*



ABC Bible Study Method: James 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”*** James 1:22 & 25

Week 7: From Good To Great: *“I want to have a good Christian family.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: 1 Samuel 1 & 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.”*** James 1:26

Week 8: Invitation to the Lonely: *“I have never felt like I even have a family.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: Ruth

Scripture Memory Verse: ***“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”*** James 1:27



Pre-Season Training

You are about to enter into an 8 week IMPACT Players Coaching Cohorts where you will be invited to join a group of men who are honestly trying to lead themselves, their marriages and their families through many of the same challenging circumstances as you. Before our first meeting, take the time to go through this “Pre-Season training,” so you will be ready to hit the ground running.

The Playbook: James, the author of the book of James in the New Testament, was not born in a “normal” house hold. He was the half-brother of Jesus, in other words, while Jesus was born of Mary through the supernatural virgin birth of the Holy Spirit, James was born the natural son of Mary and Joseph. It would be an understatement to say James grew up in a “non-traditional family.” His family moved around a lot and he may have been born as a refugee in Egypt and most certainly lived in a dumpy town called Nazareth. While we do not know exactly when, sometime between the time when his older brother Jesus was 12 years old and the time he began His public ministry at the age of 30, Joseph, James’ father died. Though we do not know much about the relationship between James and Jesus, we know James had a conflicted relationship with Jesus initially. John 7:1-6 records that at that time, James and his brothers did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Certainly, James had inside knowledge from his mother Mary about Jesus’ miraculous birth and yet, he still struggled to have faith in Jesus. Although he grew up in a home with Jesus, he had not made his faith his own.

After Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead three days later, Jesus appeared to many people, including His half-brother James (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). It seems that even when James did not believe in Jesus, Jesus still believed in James. Jesus cared enough about His little brother to personally appear to him in His resurrected form. Why would Jesus make a special effort to reconnect with His cynical brother? Here are two compelling reasons-

1) Jesus values family and the importance of reconciliation.

2) Jesus had a great plan for James’ life, but before James could be fully used by God, he had to work out his unresolved family issues.

Would you consider these truths in your own life?

1) Jesus values your marriage and family and the importance of reconciliation.

2) God has a great plan for your life, but before He can fully use you, you must allow Him to work out your unresolved family issues.

In the months and years that followed after Jesus ascended into heaven, James became a wise and devoted leader of the early church. In fact, James became the lead Elder (Pastor) of the church of Jerusalem. As a spiritual father to many young believers, James wrote this letter during the persecution which erupted during the reign of King Herod around 44-49 AD, which would make James’ letter, the first book of the New Testament written. What a great testimony that God would take the unbelieving half-brother of Jesus and turn him into one of the key leaders of the early church and the author of the first book in the New Testament? God can do great things in the lives of our family members... even those that do not believe in Him yet!

As we dive into this series entitled Honest Talk about Marriage and Family, we will tackle some difficult subjects head on. The key to lasting transformation and growth will be a commitment to honesty and honor. We must be honest with ourselves and one another, while maintaining a posture of honor towards God, ourselves, and others. If we can, we will experience powerful breakthroughs in our lives, marriages, families, relationships and churches.

In preparation for our first study, please carve out a window of time to engage in your first ABC Bible reading. On the next page, you will find a blank ABC Bible Study guide which will walk you through the steps.



In this season, we will look at sections of scripture which deal with an aspect of our Honest Talk series. Not every story in the Bible has a neatly tied up happy ending, the Bible is nothing if not honest about our brokenness. Take time to read the assigned Scripture passage in before each session of our Coaching Cohort.

After reading the chapter, please take a few minutes to write down any questions you might want to Ask about the chapter. Then, write down your **Best** verse, the verse that stood out to you the most. Finally, write down, the **Challenge** that this verse leaves you with for the week.

Secondly, take time to memorize the brief scripture verse each week. The great King David says in the Psalms, ***“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”*** (Psalm 119:11) Every scripture memorized is a deposit in the bank, a log in the fire, a bullet in the gun. It’s important and helpful for ever man to know truth and have it readily available to him.

Third, remember that what you put into this coaching cohort will determine what you will get out of it. Apathy and procrastination are not the marks of a dynamic leader, and they should not define your involvement in this cohort. As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. For the next 8 weeks, let’s raise the bar, increase the intensity and watch the results flow in. You can’t cheat the grind, so let’s set our face like flint and get after it together! Fight the good fight, but don’t fight alone!

Before our first study, please complete the following:

ABC Bible Study Method: 1 Peter 4

Scripture Memory Verse: ***“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*** James 1:2-4



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ABC Bible Study:

A) ASK: What questions do you have about this chapter? What sparked your curiosity or left you confused?

B) BEST Verse: Which verse in this passage really caught your attention or made you think in a deeper way?

C) CHALLENGE or CONVERSATION: (What is GOD saying to you in this passage?)

How is God challenging me to grow in response to this Bible Verse?

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Week 1: A Family That Lasts: *“We can’t keep doing this.”*

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Introduction: We all desire a utopian marriage, family and life. The word “utopia” was first used in the book **Utopia by Sir Thomas Moore**. The book describes a fictional island in which everything exists and functions in a society that is devoid of any problems or difficulties. Ironically, this 16th century depiction of “utopia” is a far cry from what we might imagine as a “utopia” today. For example, in this story, every household has two slaves, euthanasia is encouraged, and those who engage in pre-marital sex are punished by a lifetime of enforced celibacy. Today, the word “utopia” means, *“an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.”*

- Q. What would a “Utopian” life, marriage or family look like to you?
- Q. In what ways did you bring some utopian expectations into your life, marriage or family?
- Q. How have unmet or failed expectations impacted you or your loved ones personally?
- Q. How does the presentation of our lives on social media, or in public create a disconnect between your public persona and your private struggles?

Insight: The book of Acts is the story of how Jesus grew the early church through His disciples. In Acts 2, we see the closest thing to a “utopia” in the early church. God’s Spirit had moved powerfully and the church was experiencing explosive growth. The people were so close with one another that they were one giant family, sharing everything they had with one another and loving and caring for one another with beautiful unity. However, it was not long before “the honeymoon” was over. Sin entered into the church family, persecution came against the church family, and their initial prosperity was overcome with poverty. In this context that James writes these words in James 1:2-4

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4

TRIALS OF VARIOUS KINDS SURVEY: Reflect on these various kinds of trials. If you have experienced this trial before, write in the space a number on a scale from 1-10 marking the severity of the trial.			
Spilled Coffee on Shirt ____	Lost keys or wallet ____	No WiFi ____	Kids spill in the car ____
Girlfriend break up ____	Sports Injury ____	Academic Struggles ____	Persecuted for Faith ____
Divorce ____	Cancer ____	Church Split ____	Unemployment ____
Cancer ____	Crippling Debt ____	Unemployment	Abuse ____

- Q. As you review this list, what stands out to you about the variety of trials you have faced and their impact on your life?
- Q. How is it even possible that James could tell us to “Count it all joy” when you consider the trials you and others have faced in life?

Insight: There is a unique insight behind this word- “trial.” The Greek word is “peirasmos” and it literally has 3 meanings- 1. Temptation 2. Trial & 3. Test. Interestingly, the word meaning changes based upon who it is coming from. If the “peirasmos” is coming from Satan, then it is translated- “temptation.” However, when the “peirasmos” is coming from God, it is translated- “trial” or “test.” Satan’s goal in every “peirasmos” is to



trap us into the painful bondage of shame, guilt and sin. However, God's goal in every "peirasmos" is to test our faith **"to produce steadfastness"** so that we **"may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing."**

Q. How might it change your perspective if you thought of every trial as God's way of making you steadfast, mature, and complete?

Q. Reflect on your life experiences- How has God used your trials to make you more steadfast, mature or complete as a man, husband, father or leader?

Let's consider these characteristics more closely.

1. Steadfast: Endurance under trial.

Q. How does resistance training make you stronger? How might trials have the same type of impact?

2. Perfect: Maturity in all things.

Q. How can trials expose areas in which we are not as mature as we assumed? Example?

3. Complete: Lacking in nothing.

Q. How can trials distinguish the differences between what you truly lack and what you perceive you lack? How can trials also reveal the importance of the things you already have?

Conclusion: **"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."** James 1:12. Those who endure... win! If you endure in your marriage... you win. If you endure in your parenting... you win. If you endure in your faith, you win. God has made this promise to those who love Him- If you remain steadfast under trial, you will receive the crown of life.

Next Week: **Week 2: Finding Answers For Your Marriage & Family:** *"We have no idea what we are doing."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Proverbs 2

Scripture Memory Verse: **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."** James 1:5



Week 2: Finding Answers For Your Marriage & Family: *"We have no idea what we are doing."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Proverbs 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** James 1:5

Introduction: Have you ever tried to assemble a piece of furniture only to realize that you made a crucial mistake that will require you to disassemble it and put it together again? It is so much faster the second (or third) time because you have learned from your mistakes and had a little practice. Some guys may be good with assembling furniture but building a marriage or a family doesn't always come with the clearest instructions.

Q. Describe a time in your life, marriage or family when you thought (or said), *"We have no idea what we are doing?"*

Whether it is buying your first house, navigating your first fight, changing a dirty diaper, or teaching your teenager to drive, there are plenty of opportunities to learn the hard way.

Q. Where do you go to find wisdom when you have questions, fears or doubts?

READ: James 1:5-8

Insight: Last week, we learned to count it all joy when we face trials of various kinds. These trials produce steadfastness and endurance, and the more we endure in Christ, the more we become like Christ. Trials force us out of our comfort zones and out of our self-reliance. When you are in the middle of a challenging and trying season, you feel disoriented, and you begin to ask a lot more questions. Our first response when facing a trial is to ask the question- *"Why?" "Why are you doing this God?" "Why am I going through this God?"* These are good questions, and God gives us the answer- God is using our trials to grow us into the likeness of Christ. However, we must not stop there... the next questions are just as important- *"What do you want me to learn from this trial?" "What do you want me to do?"* and *"How am I supposed to do it?"*

Q. How has a trial knocked you out of a rut and brought you to a place of seeking wisdom?

Q. Why is it important to turn our "Why" questions into our "What" questions?

How Wisdom Works In Your Life, Marriage and Family

1. Wisdom comes from seeking God. (James 1:5)

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James 1:5

Insight: With Google, Siri, Alexa, and other instant search tools available, we have become so accustomed to "easy answers" and "instant information" that we often neglect to "ask God."

Q. With endless information available to most people, why are we so short on wisdom?

Q. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

Q. Why do we neglect to ask God for wisdom more often?

Read: ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."*** Proverbs 1:7



Insight: Many people attend church, pray, and read the Bible, but are not living wisely. What is missing? Proverbs 1:7 gives us two keys to building wisdom- 1) Submission to God and 2) A Teachable Spirit. The common denominator among all people who grow in wisdom is a willingness to be coached. A willingness to admit, "I don't know what I am doing" and a willingness to receive wisdom from the Lord and others. Like an athlete who refuses to be coached, a man who refuses to accept and apply Godly wisdom will soon be sitting on the bench, or worse yet, disqualified.

Q. How have you seen a refusal to be coached impacted you or others in sports, or in life?

Q. How receptive to coaching (correction, instruction, and direction) are you from God, God's Word and godly mentors?

Read: ***"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning."***

Proverbs 9:8-9

Insight: A scoffer is a fool who believes his way is better than God's. The word "reprove" means to "call out someone's foolishness." How you respond to godly correction will reveal whether you are wise or a fool.

God's Response To Our Request For Wisdom

1. He gives "without reproach." God never criticizes us or makes us feel bad for lacking wisdom. God knows you lack wisdom, and it is a sign of a wise man to ask for more wisdom.

Q. Have you ever pretended to know something, because you were embarrassed to ask?

2. He "gives generously." When we ask God for wisdom... He gives it to us... generously.

Q. Do you ever secretly feel like God is holding back on you?

Insight: God has gives us His wisdom generously through three primary sources- 1) The Bible 2) The Holy Spirit 3) The Church.

Q. How fully are you engaging in these three sources of wisdom? Could it be that God is giving wisdom to you generously, but you are not looking in the right places?

2. Wisdom comes through consistently applied faith in God. (James 1:6-8)

Q. How many of you took a shower or put on deodorant in the last 24 hours? Why?

Like deodorant or soap, wisdom is only effective when it is applied. An untouched Bible is as ineffective as an untouched bar of soap.

Q. Why do you think there is so often a disconnect when it comes to knowing and applying wisdom in men's lives?

Conclusion: A question worth repeating to yourself is- *"Do I really believe that God's way is the best way for my life?"* James' words about *"faith"* and *"doubt"* are really related to that question- Do I believe that God's way is the best way for my life, or do I believe that my way is the best way for my life? Faith is making the decision in advance, *"I will do whatever God tells me to do, whenever and however God wants me to do it."* Doubting, on the other hand, being divided between God's way and your own. James paints the picture of a doubting man being like a wave that gets tossed to and fro by the wind. He is double-minded, because he goes back and forth between trusting in God's wisdom and living for our own desires.



Q. Will you commit to do things God's way? What if you dedicated yourself in advance to allowing God's wisdom to determine and direct the steps you take in your marriage, family and career?

"If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15

Next Week: **Week 3: Money, Materialism & What Matters:** *"We can't keep up financially."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Luke 18

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*** James 1:17



Week 3: Money, Materialism & What Matters: “We can’t keep up financially.”

ABC Bible Study Method: Luke 18

Scripture Memory Verse: **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”** James 1:17

Opening: In the late 80’s and early 90’s the popularity of trading cards (baseball, basketball and football) hit its zenith. Thousands of kids and adults spent millions of dollars purchasing and preserving cards they believed would one day be valuable. Today, most of those cards are essentially worthless. As the hype and popularity faded, it became clear that the supply far outpaced the demand.

Q. Share an example of how something you once prized has since become essentially worthless?

Q. Why is it that we are often so susceptible to the hype and popularity of the latest and greatest?

Read James 1:9-11

Scripture Context: James was the Pastor of the church in Jerusalem. The first church... ever. The church that Peter and the apostles started. Now, they were facing incredible persecution and were barely hanging on amid a brutal famine. Things got so bad for the church in Jerusalem, that the Apostle Paul would appeal to the Greek churches in Macedonia and Corinth to help provide for their needs. Could there have been anything more humbling and field leveling for a church made up primarily of converted Jews than receiving financial support from one of the Gentile Churches?

Q. Have you ever been in a position financially where you had to rely on the support of others? If so, how did that shape the way you viewed yourself?

Insight: In this passage, James turns normative thinking on its head by inverting the values that we have been taught to believe. James challenges us to consider how God’s economy is very different than the world’s.

In God’s Economy...

1. You are not worthless because you are worth less. “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation” James 1:9

Insight: As is often the case today, the wealthy were being given preferential treatment over the poor. Like getting VIP access, the wealthy were catered to, while the poor were being marginalized. James’ uses the description “lowly brother” (tapeinos in the Greek) which means “insignificant in the world’s eyes, lowly, relatively poor and powerless.” This designation was not a description given by God, but rather how the poor were seen through the world’s lens.

Q. Why do we elevate certain people based on their affluence, education, and material success?

Q. Where does God tell us our value comes from?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:6-7

Engagement Ring: When a woman gets engaged, she often delights in showing her friends and family her new ring. Never once has a woman proudly displayed the box that the ring came in. We are the box, and Jesus is the ring. We are the jar, and Jesus is the treasure! It makes no difference what the box or the jar is like, it is the treasure we have in Christ that truly matters.



2. You cannot purchase what is priceless. *“and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.”* James 1:10-11

Exchange Rate: The exchange rate for earthly wealth to heavenly riches is 0 cents on the dollar. When we get to heaven, we will discover that our money is no good there.

Q. In light of this eternal “exchange rate,” how would you advise someone to invest their lives?

Consider the following 3 verses as they relate to time and money-

“You do not even know what will happen tomorrow! What is your life? It is just a vapor, appearing for a little while, and then vanishing.” James 4:14

“God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” Ecclesiastes 3:11

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his soul?” Mark 8:36

Q. Our time on earth is short, but our time in eternity is never ending. If gaining the world at the expense of your soul is a bad investment, what are some ways you can invest more heavily in your soul?

Q. How might a man rethink his time and spending habits in his marriage and family considering eternity?

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliott

3. The best gifts are free, but not cheap. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...”* James 1:17

Insight: The greatest gift in the universe is that God would give us Jesus, His perfect Son. While a great cup of coffee, a beautiful vacation, or even getting a dream job are all good, the pale in comparison to God’s perfect gifts.

Q. In God’s economy, how would you distinguish between God’s “good gifts” and God’s “perfect gifts?” Take a look at the list below and add your own ideas to each category.

<u>God’s Good Gifts</u>	<u>God’s Perfect Gifts</u>
Good Health	The Gospel of Jesus Christ
Education	The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
Family and Friendships	The Bible
Material Blessings	Fruits of the Spirit (Love, Joy, Peace...etc)
Enjoyable Experiences	Forgiveness and Reconciliation
A Beautiful Day	Hope

Q. What did you add to your lists?

Q. What happens when we place greater emphasis on God’s good gifts than on God’s perfect gifts?

Conclusion: President Theodore Roosevelt once wrote in a letter to William Bigelow in 1898, *“Comparison is the thief of joy.”* Before suburbia, before social media, before the mass proliferation of wealth in Western culture, President Roosevelt uncovered one of the most powerful insights of the 21st century. Do not let comparison of others steal your joy. Be grateful for the good and perfect gifts that God has given you and lead your family to count those blessings as well.



Next Week: **Week 4: Moral Failure and Spiritual Victory:** *"I messed up... really bad."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Psalm 51

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."*** James 1:13-14



Week 4: Moral Failure and Spiritual Victory: *"I messed up... really bad."*

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Opening: Scandal, outrage, utter stupidity. Far too often, another man is in the headlines after making a series of disastrous decisions that left his life, marriage and family looking like the victims of a Category 5 hurricane. Perhaps you have been the victim of egregious sin, or, you may even be reaping the consequences of your own sinful choices. Whatever your experience, the Bible is full of hope for the man left saying... *"I messed up... really bad."*

Q. How have you seen moral failure, or devastating sin wreck a ministry, marriage, or family?

Preventive vs. Diagnostic Care: There are two times to treat a physical sickness, disease or condition, either before (preventive) or after (diagnostic). Similarly, God has provided spiritual healing and wisdom both to prevent us from sinning and heal us when we do sin.

Q. Clearly, preventive care is more preferable because it is less invasive and painful. Why do so many men neglect preventive care, thus creating the circumstances for requiring diagnostic care?

PREVENTIVE APPROACH TO SIN

2 Types of Sin: Understand the two primary ways we become entangled in sin.

1. Instinctual Sin: Instinctual sin is when we sin reactively as a result of unchecked habitual reactions based on our sinful nature and our upbringing.

Examples- Fighting with your spouse over the budget, indulging in a lustful thought about another woman, getting defensive and speaking negative about others at work.

Q. What are some ways that you fall into instinctual sin?

Q. Have you ever found yourself shell-shocked, asking, "How did that escalate so quickly?"

2. Intentional Sin: When we choose to indulge in an act of self-gratification in disobedience to the explicit commands of God's Word, we commit an intentional sin. Intentional sin is the pre-meditated, thought out decision to do something that you know is not right, yet you choose to pursue it anyway.

Examples- Choosing to lie to your spouse about your spending or engaging in pornography.

Q. Why does anyone ever intentionally choose to sin?

Why We Sin And Who Is To Blame? (Read James 1:13-16)

James clearly articulates the origin and mechanics of sin in the life of a believer. When we understand the way sin entraps us, we are better prepared to recognize it and overcome it in our lives.

1. Sin is built on a lie. ***"Do not be deceived, my beloved brother."*** James 1:16

Insight: Satan is the Father of Lies. He is the Serpent who lied to Adam & Even in the garden. He continues to lie and deceive in our world today. Apostle John describes Satan as, ***"that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world."*** Revelations 12:9. He lies about sin. He tells us we can't trust God. He tells us God will not come through. He tells us God's commands are keeping us from really enjoying life. He even tells us that God is the source of temptation! Any teaching that denies God's truth or twists the explicit teaching of Scripture is called a heresy.



- Q. How can people be deceived to believe that right is wrong and wrong is right?
- Q. What kind of damage can it do when someone believes that God has directed them into a pattern of sin?

2. God is never responsible for our sinful behavior. ***“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.”*** James 1:13

Insight: In week 1, we learned that the Greek word “Peirasmos” can have two meanings- 1) Temptation 2) Trial/Test. When the “peirasmos” comes from God, it is a trial or a test, when it comes from Satan, it is a temptation. God will never lead you into sin. If you ever feel like you are being “led” to do something that the Bible calls sin, you can be sure it is not from God.

“The Spirit of God will never contradict the Word of God.” - Warren Mainard

- Q. Why is it important to recognize that God will never lead you to do something He has already spoken to us about in His Word?

3. Sin is the result of fallenness. ***“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”*** James 1:14

There are three contributing forces that guide believers into sin. Sin is a result of...

- 1) **A Fallen Angel**- We are “lured” by Satan, the enemy of God, who once was an angel of God. Isaiah 14:13-14 describes how Satan fell from God because of his pride and rebellion.
- 2) **Our Fallen World**- We are “enticed” by the glitz of the world, even though it is fools gold.
- 3) **Our Fallen Nature**- All men are tempted by the urges and stimulations of the flesh.

- Q. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the strength or power that temptation has over you?
Read: ***“The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.”*** 1 Corinthians 10:13

DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO SIN (How To Find A Way Out Of Sin)

“So, get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.” James 1:21

Insight: Overcoming sin’s control in your life is not easy, but it can be accomplished through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This verse gives us 3 steps to defeating sin.

1. Confess your Sin: Do not IGNORE your sin. Do not HIDE your sin. Do not JUSTIFY your sin. CONFESS your sin. Call sin, SIN. It is not a mistake. You did not make a spiritual boo boo... it is ***“filth and evil.”*** Our God is a Holy God and He hates the presence of sin in your life.

- Q. Why is it so difficult to call sin, “sin” these days?
- Q. What is the importance in admitting your fault and failure to God or others you have sinned against?
- Q. In a world in which nobody takes personal responsibility for their decisions, how might confessing your sin set you apart from others?

2. Repent from your Sin: The truth is we tolerate a lot more sin than we ought to. We do not hate sin as we should and we allow it to fester in our lives. If you want to get serious about defeating sin, you must be willing



to **“get rid of all”** sin in your life. Repentance is the decision to actively put away sin and refocus your heart’s attention and allegiance towards Christ.

Q. If you want to eat healthy or go on a diet, you probably shouldn’t spend much time at a Donut shop. What patterns, places or even people do you need to replace in your life in order to follow God and avoid sin?

3. Humbly Receive the Gospel: The Gospel is **“the word God has planted in our hearts”** that **“has the power to save our souls.”** Every day, we need to be refocusing our lives on the Gospel. Every day, we should be pointing our wives and children towards the Gospel.

Q. How many times have you said, *“I am sorry, I will try to do better.”*

Q. The Gospel is not about trying or achieving, it is about receiving God’s grace and inviting Jesus to abide within us. How are you regularly abiding in your relationship with Christ?

Conclusion: No marriage, family or church will be perfect or sin proof. We are all broken sinners in need of a Savior. The goal is not to be perfects, but to defeat sin by learning to – Confess, Repent, Receive and Repeat.

Next Week: **Week 5: Communication & Respect:** *“I just can’t talk to you.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: Genesis 16 & 17

Scripture Memory Verse: **“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”** James 1:19-20



Week 5: Communication & Respect: *"I just can't talk to you."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Genesis 16 & 17

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*** James 1:19-20

Opening: Imagine being on a nature hike and crossing paths with an angry bear. Your body immediately responds- Pupils dilate, heart rate increases, blood flows from your brain and heart to your legs & arms, the hypothalamus in your brain tells your adrenal glands to release cortisol (the stress hormone), your breathing quickens and your hands begin to shake. Your body is completely overstimulated, and your only options are to either fight the bear, flee from the bear or faint. Primal humanity at its finest.

Strangely, the same physiological response we may have to an angry bear on the path, can also appear in our marriage & family. We become a different person when we are angry.

Anger often causes us to-

Lash out- We say and do things we would normally never say or do.

Run out- We avoid that person or conflict at all costs.

Check out- We become numb to the conflict, mentally & emotionally disconnected.

Q. How do you most commonly react when you become angry or get into an argument with your spouse or family?

Q. Consider our SMV for this week- When has getting angry produced the righteousness of God in your life?

Most of us will acknowledge that lashing out, running out or checking out will not get us where we want to go relationally. What we really need to learn is how to work it out. Thankfully, James gives us

5 Steps to Conflict Resolution In Your Marriage And Family (Read James 1:19-21)

1. Listen Carefully (Quick to Listen): Q. When are men allowed to say, "Shut up and Listen!"? A. When you say it to yourself!

Q. Have you ever tried to talk to someone with a walkie talkie? What happens if both people are holding down the talk button at the same time?

Q. How can we be guilty of "holding down the talk button" when our spouse or someone else is talking?

Q. What are some ways that we can demonstrate care through active listening?

2. Wait to Speak Thoughtfully (Slow to Speak): Listen carefully, then take a deep breath to form a thoughtful response. Do not react with feelings but respond with a thoughtful answer based on understanding & empathy. Speaking with humility and patience, can take the physiological impact of our fight or flight response back down to a healthy state.

Read: ***"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."*** Proverbs 15:1

Q. Have you ever witnessed this Proverb play out in your own relationships? Explain.

Q. How does listening carefully and considering what someone has to say prayerfully help you to speak wisely?

According to Ecclesiastes 3:7 there is ***"a time to be silent and a time to speak."*** Wisdom is not always having the right thing to say... it is often knowing the right time to remain quiet. When we speak too often & listen



too little, even if what we say has merit and value, we unintentionally communicate we think our perspective is more important than others.

- Q. When you are thirsty, would you rather drink from a water fountain or a fire hose? Why?
- Q. How might the amount of words you say become counterproductive, like drinking water from a fire hose?

Challenge: Try keeping a mental stopwatch on your conversations. Remember to make it a dialogue, not a monologue. Learn to read the facial expressions and body language of your spouse and kids... if you talk too much and they begin to check out... don't keep talking! Ask a reflective question- let them process, feel valued & revive their interest.

- Q. Do others walk away from conversations with you feeling their opinions & perspectives are valued?

3. Measure Your Response (Slow to Anger): Many people chalk their anger up as *"righteous anger."* They think, *"I'm right & I'm angry."* Truthfully, most "Righteous anger" is often just "self-righteous anger."

- Q. Do you find yourself regularly justifying your anger? What are some of your common excuses for getting angry?

Read: ***"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil"*** Ephesians 4:26–27.

- Q. Would you say you regularly get angry without sinning? How might your anger be giving an opportunity to the devil?
- Q. Do you maintain the spirit of James 1:19-20 online (Texting, Email, Twitter & Facebook) as well as in person?

Challenge: Be sure that you are carefully measuring out your anger. Ask, "is my level of anger commensurate with this situation? Sometimes, we find ourselves far too angry about a minor offense. This is the sign of a deeper issue that needs more reflection.

4. Seek Reconciliation through Repentance (produce the righteousness of God): Nothing diffuses anger and self-righteous attitudes like repentance. When you confess to God & others how ***"filthy and wicked"*** your own heart and attitude is, the walls come crashing down. Most people refuse to repent, not because they don't believe they are wrong, but because they believe the other person is "more wrong."

- Q. Is there anything to be gained by determining who is "more wrong" in an argument?
- Q. If both people are responsible ("wrong"), than is there anything to be lost by admitting your sin first?

Big Idea: If prideful sin is the fundamental problem in our marriages; then humble repentance is the fundamental solution.

- Q. What lessons do you teach your kids if you never admit that you are wrong and ask forgiveness? What lessons do you teach them when you do?



Challenge: Remove the word **“but”** from your repentance. (Ex. *“I was a jerk, but you were driving me crazy.”*) Apologize for your part in the dust up and acknowledge the pain you may have caused, then stop talking. You may be amazed what happens next.

5. Practice Gospel-Driven Meekness: Do not be confused, meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control. Gospel-driven meekness means choosing not to retaliate, but instead honor God and others by responding with empathy and grace.

Q. How do you know if you are practicing meekness in your relationships?

Consider these antonyms for meekness: “Bossy, Arrogant, Proud or Superior.” These antonyms to meekness show up in marriage as a person who is 1) Domineering. 2. Demeaning. 3. Devious.

Q. Would anyone ever use any of those words to describe you? If so, now is the time to repent.

Conclusion: *“The goal in relational conflict is to win hearts, not win fights. You can win the argument but lose the relationship.”* – Warren Mainard. Gospel-Driven Meekness teaches us to respond to conflict with grace, stress with patience, and sin with forgiveness. How are you doing in those areas relationally?

Next Week: **Week 6: Personal & Spiritual Growth:** *“I am not seeing any improvement.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: James 2

Scripture Memory Verse: *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”* James 1:22 & 25



Week 6: Personal & Spiritual Growth: *"I am not seeing any improvement."*

ABC Bible Study Method: James 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."*** James 1:22 & 25

Opening: *"I am not seeing any improvement."* The odds are, either you or someone else in your workplace or family has said that. Whether a boss to an employee, a wife to a husband, a father to a child or a man to the mirror, we all face moments when we are frustrated and perplexed by the stagnant growth in ourselves or others.

Q. In what circumstances have you heard or said the words, "I am not seeing any improvement"?

Q. Why is it often so difficult for people (including ourselves) to change?

Read James 1:22-25

Context: In this letter written by Pastor James, he gives his own sermon illustration- The man who looks into the mirror and then walks away, forgetting what he has seen in the mirror. James continues on the theme of "do not be deceived" throughout this chapter. Wrong belief will result in wrong living. Self-deception is the greatest enemy of personal growth.

Q. Why is it so difficult for people to be really honest with themselves about their weaknesses, sins, and areas of vulnerability?

Scouting Report: In sports and in military engagement, a scouting report is a necessary tool for evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities and assets of your opponent or enemy. The most diligent Coaches and Commanders take it a step further and perform a "Self-Scouting report." Use the attached guide and take yourself, and your family through a "Scouting Report."

3 Lies That Keep Christians From Growing Spiritually: Until you can be honest about yourself, you will remain stuck in a spin cycle of stagnant growth. Consider what lies may be holding you back.

1. "My sin is not that bad"

Q. When someone kindly lets you know that you have food in your teeth, or that your fly is down, do you get angry with them or are you grateful that they told you? Why?

Q. If someone points out an attitude or behavior in your life that is not aligned with God's truth or will for your life, do you get angry with them or are you grateful that they told you? Why?

Q. "It's not like I am a murderer..." What is the danger of minimizing the impact of your sinful attitudes or behaviors?

Challenge: Give the people closest to you permission to call you out when you are out of line. Then, do not be surprised or upset when they do! Listen to what they have to say and take it to God and His Word for affirmation.

2. "God's Word is not that great."



Fortune Cookies- Do you or your family enjoy opening Fortune Cookies after eating Chinese food? We crack them open, read it flippantly and then discard it and move on with our day. It may be mildly interesting or entertaining, but certainly not something to build your life on.

Q. How can we be guilty of treating God's Word like a fortune cookie?

Q. What "authority" does the Bible have in your life?

3. *"I already know that."*

"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." Romans 2:13

Q. When driving a car, we know that we need to keep gas in our tank and change the oil every 3,000(+/-) miles. What happens if we do not "do" what we already "know"? How is this like our spiritual lives?

Insight: Even more important than what we "do" as men, husbands, fathers and leaders, is what kind of man we want to "be." James communicates how our "being" will impact our "doing."

3 "Be's" To Spiritual Breakthrough

1. Be a "doer" of the Word.

Read: ***"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*** – Jesus (Luke 11:28)

Q. What would your life be like if you had applied every sermon, Bible study, quiet time you have ever heard? ***"God's Word can only grow in the soil of obedience."*** (Life Application Study Bible)

Q. What steps of obedience to you need to take right now?

2. Be an Intentional student of the Word.

Insight: ***"looks intently"*** The Greek word ***"Kataneo"*** used in this passage means "to give careful consideration with great concern." We live in a "scrolling" culture. We peruse things. We watch the first 6 seconds of a video and if it doesn't catch our attention, we keep scrolling. We often take this same mentality into our Bible study and it can make us shallow, impotent believers.

Q. What is the danger of casually (or carelessly) handling scripture?

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15

Q. Do you have an intentional plan for growing in God's Word? A failure to plan is a plan to fail.

Challenge: Develop a Scripture Growth Plan: Take time to develop an effective Bible study plan. See the attached resource and be sure to include the following details in your plan- A time (when I will read Scripture), a place (where I will read Scripture), a method (how I will read Scripture) and a measure (how I will grow in Scripture).

Example- I will spend time every morning in my office reading one chapter of Psalms, writing notes in the margin of my Journal Bible and will share one truth I have learned each day with someone else.

IMPACT Resource: Scripture Growth Plan SOAP- Scripture Observation Application Prayer Graphic (Keys to Growing/Stagnant Faith)

Keys to Growing Christianity Through God's Word. 1) Read. 2) Study. 3) Act. 4) Repeat.

Keys to Stagnant Christianity Through God's Word. 1) Skim. 2) Ignore. 3) Forget. 4) Repeat.



3. Be Steadfast in the Word.

Insight: Disciples are made daily, not in a day. As author Eugene Peterson puts it, *“Discipleship is long obedience in the same direction.”* The word **“perseveres”** in the Greek is “parameno” means “to remain in place” (opposite- to run away). The one who grows spiritually is the one who holds his ground and does not scatter when things get hard or wander when distractions arise.

Q. Describe something in your life in which you have been “steadfast” and have “persevered”. What insights from that experience can you apply to your spiritual endurance?

Insight: **“perfect law, the law of liberty”** God’s Word is not a self-help book of inspirational stories, tips, best practices and life hacks. It is God’s law. These are the perfect, trustworthy commands of God. This may sound heavy handed, but God’s law brings our liberty! The Scripture is the law of liberty because it brings us to Jesus. Jesus is the Truth that sets us Free.

Q. If you have ever taught music or coached sports, you know that there are “rules” or “laws” that once learned and applied, actually help a child become more “free” to become the musician or player they want to be. How might following God’s laws, actually help you to be more free as a husband, father or leader?

Closing: When you are continually acknowledging and addressing your own need areas of growth, you will open up the door to help others do the same. Jesus gives us a pattern to follow- deal with your own stuff first, then you will be more able to address the needed changes of others.

“How can you think of saying, ‘Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.” Luke 6:42

Next Week: **Week 7: From Good To Great**: *“I want to have a good Christian family.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: 1 Samuel 1 & 2

Scripture Memory Verse: **“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.”** James 1:26



Week 7: From Good To Great: *"I want to have a good Christian family."*

ABC Bible Study Method: 1 Samuel 1 & 2

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless."*** James 1:26

Q. When you hear the words, **"Good Christian Family"** what comes to your mind?

Opening: Most people have some sort of cliched image of what a "Good Christian Family" looks like. Most imagine a sanitized traditional family made up of cheerful members who follow religious expectations, such as going to church, having good morals, always getting along and knowing all of the answers in Sunday School. This idea of a "Good Christian Family" can be demoralizing and disillusioning for many who feel they will never live up to the expectations. For others, it can create a sense of spiritual pride when they feel like they are doing it better than most everyone else.

Q. How can the picture of a "Good Christian Family" set you up for disappointment?

Read James 1:26-27

Insight: The first church, like all churches ever since had people on a wide spectrum of spiritual maturity and personal holiness. We are all on a journey, and we are susceptible to 2 potential dangers- 1) To think your marriage/family is too messed up to be pleasing to God, or, 2) To think that you are more spiritually mature than you really are. This is why James continues to remind us, ***"do not be deceived."*** Don't fool yourself or be fooled.

"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." James 1:26.

Q. Why would a church person think he is more religious than he really is?

Q. Why would a person in church think he (or his family) is too much of a failure to belong?

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Q. What is the point that Jesus is trying to make in His story?

Q. Did you grow up in a religious environment? What was that like?

Insight: In this passage, James tackles an important deception head on- Religious activity can become a substitute for spiritual growth. It can happen very subtly, when our motivations change and we start going through the motions, we can become disconnected from Christ, even as we are doing "Christian stuff." Before long, our lives get out of sync from our faith. In the Jerusalem church, it was pride, jealousy, favoritism, materialism, gossip, grumbling and a lack of concern for the poor, helpless and vulnerable.

Q. How do you feel about the word "Religion?" Does it accurately describe your faith?

Watch: **Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus** (<https://youtu.be/1IAhDGYlpqY>)

James contrasts the difference between a "worthless religion" and "true religion." Many people have rejected Christianity because they have only observed "worthless religion." The word "worthless" in the Greek means "empty or fake."

Ove Gloves: In the early 2010's, the "Ove Glove" came on the market as a glove that would allow you to pick up items of up to 540 degrees. The heat-proof glove, made of meta-aramid fibers and cotton, with strips of



silicone has been endorsed by Consumer Reports, Good Housekeeping and other reviewing agencies. The problem is, that many knock offs and counterfeits flooded the market and thousands of customers were literally “burned” by the fake Ove Glove.

Q. What would you say to someone who has been burned by an experience with a fake, counterfeit Christian religion?

Insight: The New American Commentary defines religion this way, *“Religion is the external, observable qualities of the life of faith in Christ.”* Religion is the part of our faith others can see. Our faith should be personal, but it should not be private. Others should be able to observe the personal relationship you have with Christ by the life you live and the practices you engage in. While James does not intend to describe the sum of our Christian faith, he does describe...

3 Characteristics Every Christian Family Should Desire:

A Christian family should strive toward demonstrating...

1. Respect and self-control with their words. *“bridle his tongue”*

Our words can do a world of good or harm. (See James 3:1-12)

What God’s Word Has To Say About Our Words	
About Cursing	<i>“Don’t use dirty or foolish or filthy words. Instead, say how thankful you are.”</i> Ephesians 5:4
About Insults	<i>“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”</i> Ephesians 4:29
About Lying	<i>“Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.”</i> Psalm 34:13
About Gossip	<i>“Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”</i> Colossians 4:6
About Excessive Talking	<i>“The more you talk, the more likely you are to sin. If you are wise, you will keep quiet.”</i> Proverbs 10:19

Q. How are you doing at “bridling your tongue”? Is there one of the above areas that is particularly challenging for you right now?

Challenge: If you have hurt or disappointed a family member with your words, even if they also hurt you, be the bigger man and seek forgiveness. Tell them again how much you love and value them.

2. Compassion for the Vulnerable. *“visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”*

Q. Is James saying that to be a Christian family, you must adopt an orphan or take into your home a widow?

Insight: There is no doubt that orphans and widows have always had a special place in the heart of God. The Bible describes God as ***“a father to the fatherless, a defender of widow”*** Psalm 68:5. God commands us, ***“Defend the weak and the fatherless; to uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.”*** Psalm 82:3. The orphan and the widow in this passage represent those who cannot speak up or stand up for themselves.

Q. How can we grow in our compassion, service, and generosity toward the vulnerable among us?

Q. Who are some of the vulnerable groups of people in our community?

3. A Growing Desire for Holiness. *“keep oneself unstained from the world.”*

Q. What is the difference between behavior modification and character transformation?

Q. How do we try to point our focus as men, husbands of fathers on character transformation?



Insight: Our goal is not to “appear Christian,” but to “be Christian.” At the heart is our focus on building a deep love for Christ and God’s Word. This also impacts our rules, boundaries and discipline with our children. When we discipline our children, we should not ignore the behavior, but, we should major on character.

Conclusion: As parents, we must remember that while we have a great responsibility to raise our kids to love God, every child must choose for himself as he gets older. The end goal is not to raise well-rounded, moral children, but to raise Christ loving disciples. This begins with praying for every child to have a personal, life changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Whatever your view of the term “Good Christian family,” God calls us to lead our families to love, follow and serve Christ. We should all strive to echo the words of Joshua who said, **“Choose this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”** Joshua 24:15. When we do that, we will go from “good to great.”

Next Week: **Week 8: Invitation to the Lonely:** *“I have never felt like I even have a family.”*

ABC Bible Study Method: Ruth

Scripture Memory Verse: **“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”** James 1:27



Week 8: Invitation to the Lonely: *"I have never felt like I even have a family."*

ABC Bible Study Method: Ruth

Scripture Memory Verse: ***"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."*** James 1:27

Opening: People are experiencing greater levels of isolation and loneliness today more than ever before. In spite of having hundreds or even thousands of online "friends" or acquaintances, social media and smart phones have only left us more disconnected than ever before.

Q. What are some of the reasons why many people feel lonely today?

"A happy family is but an earlier heaven." - George Bernard Shaw

If a happy of family is a taste of heaven, then many people the smack of hell on their lips. To have an absent or broken family can be emotionally and spiritually devastating. Jesus had a biological family (James was His brother), just as we all do. The family is God's idea and He created families to be a reflection of His love, compassion, discipline and care.

Q. How has your experience with family shaped the way you see yourself, others, and God?

Insight: Every family is flawed and broken by sin. Many families are completely decimated by the curse of sin on our world. Divorce, abuse, neglect, and abandonment are issues that are familiar to far too many people in our world today. This was never God's intent. God created the family, loves the family, supports the family, and provides for the family. However, we cannot escape the realities of our world broken by sin. Whether you have a healthy relationship with your biological family or not, God has created for us another family, a spiritual family.

Challenge: Have you ever created a Genogram? Watch this video produced by Emotionally Healthy Discipleship (https://youtu.be/A3-WiX_jUC4) and then consider going through their Genogram process here (<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/team/resources/>)

1. God is our Perfect Father

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13

The Impact of Absent Dads- There are currently 14 million single parents, caring for over 22 million children under the age of 18. 82% of the single parents are women, trying to raise their children without a father at home. Fatherlessness is one of the greatest issues of our time and many people here today have long lasting scars and painful pasts related to the role of their father in their lives. Issues with a Father can ultimately impact our relationship with God, family, friends and even the church.

Q. Is the concept that God is our perfect Father encouraging or unsettling to you? Why?

Q. How would you describe your relationship with God as a Father?

2. Jesus is our Perfect Brother

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." Romans 8:29



Q. Did you have a big brother? What was he like?

Q. How would you describe the perfect big brother?

Insight: We rarely think about Jesus as our brother, because we do not want to ever communicate that we see ourselves as equals with Christ. Yet, Jesus is Son of God the Father. This does not mean that Jesus is created by God or that He did not exist in eternity before creation with God. What it means is that he has taken the role of the firstborn son- "firstborn" implies preeminence and position. Jesus is the heir to the Father's riches and the protector and provider for the rest of the family of God.

Q. What would be a healthy way that seeing Jesus as a big brother might shape your relationship with Him?

3. The Church is God's Beautiful but Broken, Dysfunctional but Restored, Forever Family

"you are no longer foreigners and outsiders but citizens together with God's people and members of God's family." Ephesians 2:19

Insight: The church is not *like* family; it *is* family. God is literally our Father, Jesus is literally our elder brother, and we are literally brothers and sisters in Christ. Family is the primary way the early church identified themselves. The family of God is deeper than blood, it is united by God's Eternal Holy Spirit.

Q. What is your relationship with the church right now? Are you experiencing regular community within the family of God?

Q. The local church has taken a lot of criticism over the past several years. Yet, it is still the "bride" of Jesus Christ. How do you think Jesus would like for us to think and talk about His bride?

While there are a lot of adjectives that can be used to describe the church as the family of God, here are four that encapsulate what is lovely and unbecoming about the church as we know it.

4 Words To Describe God's Family (The Church)

1. Beautiful: The family of God stretches across every age group, social-economic level, language and ethnicity. It is the most beautiful Kaleidoscope of colors, tones, backgrounds, and people groups. (See Galatians 5:26-28 & Revelation 7:9-10)

Q. How is it that God's family can be so diverse and distinct, yet still be one family?

Q. What makes diversity so beautiful? What makes it so difficult?

2. Broken: ***"When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."*** Mark 2:17

Q. If Jesus came to heal the sick and call the sinners, why do we get the idea that church people are supposed to have their act together?

Q. If we started thinking about church people as those who have placed themselves under the care of Jesus, the Great Physician, how might that change our perceptions?

3. Dysfunctional: A dysfunctional family is one that is not functioning as it was intended. As long as there are broken and sinful people, there will be dysfunction within the church.

Same Old, Same Old

Consider all the problems taking place in the early church 2,000 years ago.



Underline any you still see happening today.		
Racial tensions.	Conflict over circumcision's role in salvation.	Rebellion against the authority of the government.
Debate over what Christians should eat, drink or wear.	Division about the role of women in the church.	False teachers taking advantage of people for money and power.
People leaving the church and abandoning the faith.	Disunity among believers in the church.	Christians getting caught up in church celebrities.
Sexual immorality.	People being selfish and infantile.	People fighting over money.
Spiritual abuse.	Church Leaders falling into sin.	Lawsuits between believers.

Q. As you consider these problems in the church from 2,000 years ago, how does it make you feel about the church today?

Q. With all these problems, how could the church have lasted for over 2,000 years?

“I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” – Jesus (Matthew 16:18)

4. Restored: “And He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Revelation 21:5

Insight: In spite of our current brokenness and dysfunction, we are in a family that is being restored and will be fully restored by God’s grace in the new Kingdom that Jesus is coming to establish.

Q. How does it feel to know that God has not turned a blind eye to our problems, but He has a plan to restore all things, making them even better than before sin entered into the world?

Q. Would it surprise you to learn that you and I are a part of God’s plan to restore all things?

“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

Insight: God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He calls us to seek reconciliation between us and God, one another, and the world and to share the message of reconciliation to a lost world separated from God. We seek to restore the brokenness in our world and we seek to bring justice where there is none. This is what James tells us in this verse to care for the orphans and the widows (or the vulnerable in general.) What this teaches us is that while our world is still plagued with problems rooted in the dysfunction of our sinful nature, God has called us to demonstrate His restorative grace to one another and the world.

Conclusion: Consider this description of our heavenly Father. ***“Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; He sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.”*** Psalm 68:5-6. God cares about the lonely and the vulnerable and He has given us a family, the family of God. Choose today to embrace God’s family, with all of its failures and faults, believing that He will restore it beautifully in the end.