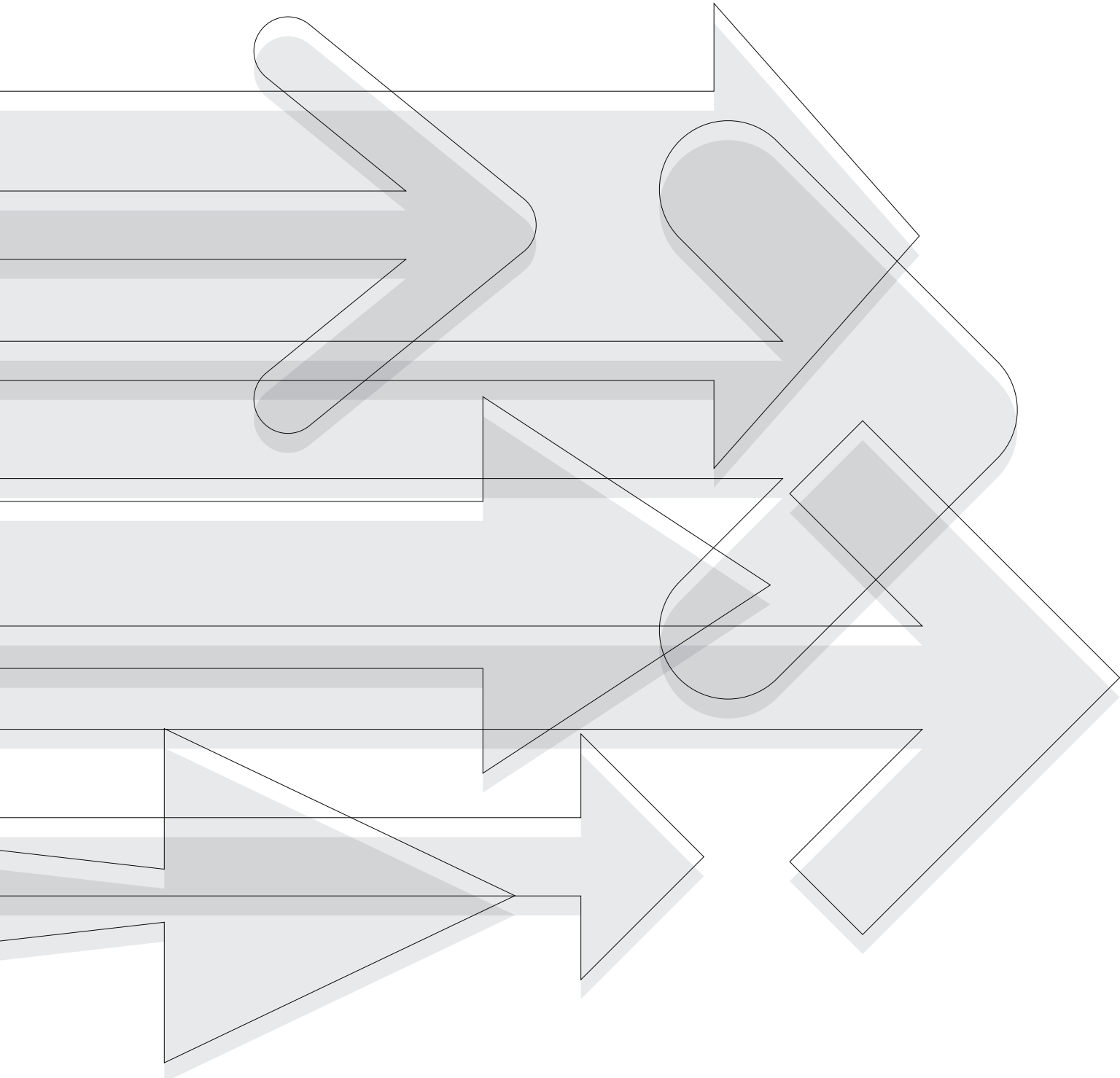
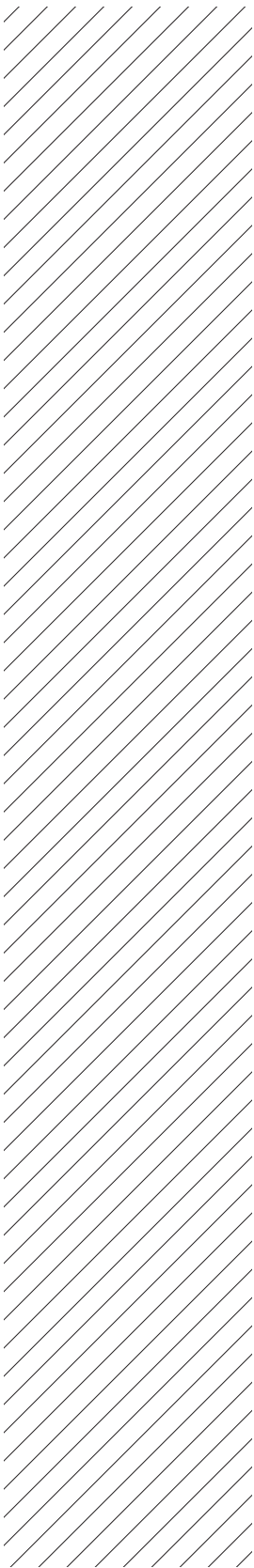


Pursuers

A BIBLE STUDY SERIES FOR MEN





Pursuers is a Bible study series designed to be used for personal study, discipleship or small groups. It is free of charge and may only be copied or sent to others electronically at no charge. It may not be reprinted for commercial publication.

Tom Petersburg, 2019

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Introduction

God wired men for action—to protect, provide, initiate, love, lead. It is in our DNA.

The Scriptures call us to action and intentionality with words like seek, press on, strive and pursue. These words describe how to approach God, how to protect our marriages and lead our families. They are words that drive our spiritual growth and our engagement with Kingdom purposes. They are words that mark a pursuer.

The *PURSUERS* Bible study series looks at what it means to pursue our Maker, our maturity, our masculinity, our mate and our mission. Pursuit takes us to greater depths in knowing and following Jesus. As a result, we will discover greater impact in serving Him.

HOW TO USE THE PURSUERS STUDY SERIES

You can study this series on your own. Better yet, find a brother or two who will interact over the passages. This is a Proverbs 27:17 opportunity—

■ **“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”**

PURSUERS is designed for you to begin by drawing your conclusions from the Scriptures. It will push your convictions to a deeper level. Take the passages apart, identify key applications and commit to next steps. Then pick up a book or two listed at the end of the study to uncover more detail.

If you are studying this series with a group, it could be helpful to spend two meetings on each chapter, making it a 12-session series. For each chapter, spend one meeting in the passages and the following meeting discussing the questions and applications.

Two things will maximize the impact of this study:

1. Reflection. Ask yourself:

- a. How am I doing?
- b. Where am I going?
- c. What is God showing me in His Word?

2. Action. Process your conclusions into practical steps that move you from what you want to do, to what you *begin* to do.

The *PURSUERS* series begins with *The Great Escape*, a snapshot in the life of an Old Testament character named Isaac. Isaac is a contrast to the life of a pursuer; he sets the stage for the following chapters.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Genesis 26 pictures a man who retreated when he could have stepped up to a challenge. As you examine the circumstances recorded in Genesis 26, notice how Isaac managed his life, marriage and work.

GENESIS 26:1-5 — ISAAC'S SITUATION

Describe the situation in your own words.

What did God ask of Isaac?

Gerar was in southern Palestine, about 10 miles south of Gaza. It was a wealthy city, probably located along an important trade route.

The area was ruled by Abimelech, king of the Philistines. As other men are called Abimelech in Genesis, it was possibly a title like Pharaoh (Egyptian kings) or Caesar (Roman kings).

Isaac's father, Abraham, is the subject of a similar episode in Genesis 20 that occurred over 90 years earlier. Abraham was no longer living at the time of Genesis 26.

GENESIS 26:6-11 — ISAAC, THE HUSBAND

How would you characterize Isaac in this scene?

How would you characterize Abimelech?

GENESIS 26:12-25 — ISAAC, THE WELL-DIGGER

What was the result of Isaac's obedience by settling down in Gerar?

Describe the recurring conflict with the Philistines. Isaac named the wells to depict the struggle: Esek (“dispute”), Sitnah (“opposition”) and Rehoboth (“plenty of room”).

GENESIS 26:26-33 – ISAAC, THE NEGOTIATOR

What is your reaction to Abimelech’s claims, and to his request for a treaty? Were they valid?

Describe how Isaac responded. How would you have responded?

THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE

What pattern do you see in Isaac’s life when you observe him as a husband, a well-digger and a negotiator? Look at this chapter as a whole—what do you think drove Isaac?

Identify the words and phrases in the text that bring you to that conclusion.

What questions do verses 22 and 32 raise in your mind?

What single word would you use to describe Isaac?

SUMMARY

There are many words that we could use to describe Isaac. A common response is “passive.” Passivity is defined as “existing without being active, enduring without resistance.” It is marked by silence, resignation or disinterest. It is driven by fear, risk, manipulation or inadequacy. As a result, passivity often thrives at the expense of our integrity.

There is a pattern in Isaac’s life. God told Isaac to settle in Gerar, where He would bless him and give him all the lands He had promised to Abraham. Isaac passed his wife off as his sister in order to protect his own life. Each time Isaac dug a new well for his flocks, the Philistine herdsmen laid claim to them and he simply moved down the road. Abimelech boasted that they had done “nothing but good to you.” So without objection, Isaac threw them a feast, put them up for the night and exchanged oaths of peace in the morning. You can’t miss the final line in verse 32 – Isaac’s servants came in the same day to announce they had struck water in another well!

Isaac did not protect his wife or hold the ground that God promised to him and his descendants. He operated out of fear rather than obedience. His passivity made him a runner, an avoider, a self-protector. Passivity is the “Great Escape.”

Is the charge of passivity too harsh on Isaac? His passivity undermined the husband and the God-follower he was wired to be. The collateral damage showed up in Genesis 25-27. He was disrespected by his enemies, deceived by his wife and disengaged from his sons.

DECEPTIVE PASSIVITY

As difficult as it is for men to admit, there is a lot of Isaac in most of us. It is readily seen in the men who have gone before us, beginning with Adam in the Garden of Eden. When Satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, Adam stood *silently* in the background. He watched and followed when he should have warned and led her. We copied our fathers who were absent or passive in the home. We joined our friends’ silence when classmates were bullied. Passivity has taken on a sense of normalcy in men in our culture.

We often fail to recognize our passivity because we don’t function that way in particular areas of our lives. It is masked by our success or accomplishments. A company executive may effectively lead a thousand employees, but freeze the minute he arrives home to a family of five. A church elder can be the most actively involved dad and husband in the neighborhood, but freeze at the first hint of conflict in the church family. A professional athlete may sacrifice life and limb for the team on the field, but avoid critical responsibilities at home.

Passivity fails to set off alarms in our lives because we can so easily cover or excuse it by emphasizing other admirable traits in our lives, like insightfulness, thoughtfulness or kindness. The self-protective nature of passivity disguises our reality. Passivity sacrifices God's best for our lives and the lives of those under our care.

Passivity is a man's great escape from responsibility, from accountability, from decisions and from engagement. We all have episodes of it in our lives. Trouble arrives when passivity becomes a pattern, eroding the potential impact for which God has created us.

When we recognize passivity in our own lives, something in us yearns for the courage and freedom to stand up, step up or speak up. When life calls for something from us that our passivity repeatedly allows us to avoid, our sense of masculinity takes a hit. In contrast, breaking through passivity is powerfully liberating and fulfilling.

CHOOSE PURSUIT OVER PASSIVITY

Passivity becomes a stronghold in our lives when we maintain it for a purpose: defense, safety, escape or security. Breaking that pattern begins with a choice, but passivity is not conquered by a one-time decision. We gain new ground by identifying aspects of passivity in our lives and recognizing the damage left in its wake. Initiating change moves us to trust God in new ways, to act in the midst of uncertainty and to experience impact in the world.

Answer these questions:

1. When is my passivity obvious? What am I trying to avoid or prevent?
2. When did I decide that my presence or leadership didn't matter? (a defining or painful event)
3. How does my passivity affect others? (wife, children, co-workers, friends)

It is a challenge for us as men to take stock of the passivity that is lodged in the core of our lives. Does the destructive nature of passivity disturb us? Coming to terms with its damage should launch us into an active relentless battle to break its hold.

Practice overriding your passivity:

1. Identify situations where you need to initiate, take responsibility or engage. Step into them.
2. Ask a trusted friend to help you see your blind spots of passivity.
3. Choose courage. Study Joshua 1 and 2 Timothy 1:7. See how God's men chose courage.
4. Build strength, not hardness. You are striving to be an initiator, not a dictator or a tyrant.
5. Learn to stand alone. Seek to function without the approval of others.
6. Determine to stay the course. Your initial choice must grow into a new pattern.

SOME HEALTHY CAUTIONS

Breaking from passivity changes the way men love, live and lead. Getting there can be a little bumpy. As a man becomes more engaged, it may change the dynamics of his marriage and family. These changes can be disruptive to a wife who is accustomed to carrying the load. The “new man” may not be the man she married, so she needs to be able to process the changes that are unfolding.

When we are in a process of breaking a pattern, it is easy to drop back into a previous default mode. It helps to think in terms of building a new pattern, not just avoiding an old pattern. Though it takes time, we have the same promise that God gave to Joshua—

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

PURSUERS

The following five chapters identify five areas of our lives where pursuit can open a whole new dimension of following Jesus.

Hold these questions in the back of your mind as you study through the material: Is this worthy of pursuit? What does pursuit look like in this area of my life?

Notice how the words of the cited passages call us to action and initiative in contrast to passivity.

PURSUE YOUR MAKER

The apostle Paul seemed to get a reaction wherever he talked about Jesus. Athens was no exception. The philosophers of the city hauled him before the Areopagus, the council in charge of religious and educational matters. They wanted to hear Paul defend his teaching. Aware of the Athenian practice of worshipping idols, Paul declared—

24) “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25) neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; 26) and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27) that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28) for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring.’” Acts 17:24-28

Notice the progression of Paul’s statement. God created all things, gave them life and breath, made all nations from one and designated their boundaries *that they should seek God*. Paul just summarized God’s ultimate purpose and desire for the people He created on earth.

God wants us to seek Him. The Bible uses the word “seek” over 75 times to describe a state of mind in pursuing God, to inquire of Him, to secure His blessing or a relationship with Him. The Old Testament prophets spoke of seeking God as moving toward Him in contrast to moving away from Him. There is not a neutral position with God – we are either moving toward Him or away from Him.

TAKE SOME NOTES FROM THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES ABOUT PURSUING GOD:

1 Chronicles 16:7-12 _____

Psalms 27:8 _____

Psalms 34:10 _____

Psalms 63:1-8 _____

Psalms 105:4 _____

Psalms 119:2 _____

Hosea 6:3 _____

Jeremiah 29:11-13 _____

Hebrews 11:6 _____

SUMMARIZE YOUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PURSUING GOD:

WHY PURSUE GOD IF WE ALREADY KNOW HIM?

BECAUSE GOD IS

Eternal
Infinite
Omnipresent
Omniscient
Omnipotent
Unchanging
Wise
Sovereign
Faithful
Holy
Good
Truthful
Just

BECAUSE GOD

Created us
Chose us
Adopted us
Blessed us

BECAUSE GOD GIVES

Love
Grace
Mercy
Forgiveness
Care
Guidance
Comfort
Hope
Healing
Security

BECAUSE JESUS

Died for us
Redeemed us
Saved us
Forgave us
Justified us
Sanctified us
Secured us

BECAUSE JESUS IS

Our Savior
Our High Priest
Our Master
Our King
Our Shepherd
Our Friend

BECAUSE HIS SPIRIT

Regenerated us
Baptized us
Sealed us
Gifted us
Indwells us
Reveals God to us
Intercedes for us
Convicts us
Leads us
Teaches us
Empowers us

Return to the definition of passivity: existing without being active; marked by silence, disinterest. Passivity in our walk with God shows up as disinterest, inactivity or lack of initiative. We are passive when we have to be coaxed, motivated or pushed into spending time with God. We are passive toward God when our relationship with Him is haphazard or irregular. We are passive when we spend time in the Scriptures so that we won't feel guilty.

The most reasonable response is to seek God in order to know Him, glorify Him, love Him, serve Him and proclaim Him. The magnitude of His character should compel us to engage with Him.

As Jesus' public ministry expanded, the crowds swelled. His miracles relieved their hunger and healed their illnesses. Jesus knew that was the reason they followed Him. As His teaching became more difficult, many of His disciples bailed out. So Jesus turned to Simon Peter and asked why he followed Him.

Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." John 6:68-69

MAKE A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF YOUR CURRENT PURSUIT:

Why do you pursue God?

What does your pursuit of God look like? How would you describe it?

What tends to intensify your pursuit of God?

POTENTIAL HINDERANCES TO PURSUING GOD

There is nothing more amazing in life than God, in all His majesty, holiness, omnipotence and sovereignty, wanting us to seek Him and to know Him personally. Yet, our best intentions in seeking Him can easily be undermined by things like sin, guilt or dissatisfaction. Make some notes about what God says about these issues.

SIN

2 Chronicles 12:14 _____

Psalms 66:18-20 _____

Matthew 5:23-24 _____

Hebrews 4:12-16 _____

Hebrews 12:1-3 _____

1 John 1:8-10 _____

GUILT

Psalms 32:1-5; 103:12 _____

Romans 5:1-2 _____

LORDSHIP

Romans 12:1-2 _____

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 _____

PERSONAL IDOLS

Colossians 3:5 _____

Exodus 20:3 _____

DISSATISFACTION WITH GOD

Psalms 84:11-12 _____

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 _____

Ephesians 3:20-21 _____

HOW DO WE PURSUE GOD?

Pursuit begins by asking God to reveal things in our lives that hold us back. Is there a spirit of independence (we want to do things our own way), a commitment to autonomy (we will make our own choices) or an attitude of pride (we will call on God if we need Him)? Do we keep God at arm's length because He has failed to meet our expectations or wishes? It is hard to pursue God wholeheartedly when these issues remain unresolved.

All of our sin is a declaration of autonomy or rebellion, and at some level creates some distance from God. (Isaiah 29:13) Yet, because of grace, His forgiveness remains complete and continuous. He has always said to His people, "Come to me..." Pursuit begins with bringing our sin before God.

There is the potential of becoming stuck in legalism, fearing that we still must earn God's approval. If boredom or weariness invades our Christian walk, we plod through life projecting an image that all is well with our souls. We then reduce the Christian life to gaining bits of information about God and the Bible, but it never really satisfies the soul.

Fullness of life is found in a wholehearted pursuit of God. We engage by pursuing the forgiving, loving, sovereign King of the universe. His Word comes alive to us; it quenches our thirst. We become more occupied with Him than with His blessings. Trusting Him becomes easier. Therefore, we:

PURSUE—

Like a hunting dog with a good nose! Psalm 63:8 (KJV) says, "My soul followeth hard after Thee..." Pursuit is current, deliberate and determined. God asks us to take bigger steps toward Him.

God invites His people to seek His face in Psalm 27:8. God's face represents aspects of personal communication—that He sees, hears and speaks. He will meet us in prayer and in the Scriptures. Unhurried and undistracted time with God enables us to genuinely connect with Him.

PROCESS—

The process is enhanced by: meditating on God's care and character, and discussing our discoveries with other men. Psalm 63:6-8 refers to mulling over the words and works of God. Reflection deepens our convictions and understanding.

PRACTICE—

Variety improves every good relationship. When we struggle with passivity in our walk with God, the last thing that is needed is another rut to be stuck in. Break out in worship songs. Pray on your knees—it has a way of breaking pride. Keep a journal of the things that you see God do.

Variety in Bible study is good. Memorize a few verses that address heart issues. Chase down the passages that use a particular word—grace, faith, obedience, forgiveness. Spend a month of devotions in one Old Testament book. Read the same chapter every day for a week. Ask a Bible teacher to expand your Bible study skills. Explore the internet sites that offer study resources.

PERSIST—

Good relationships take time to develop, even with God. In Lamentations 3:23-24, Jeremiah reminds us that God's love and faithfulness are new every morning.

God reminded His people even when they were so prone to wander,

“Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you *search* for Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:12-13

PURSUE YOUR MATURITY

“Now flee from youthful lusts, and *pursue* righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

In the following passages, identify what you see as the key *words*, *actions* and *attitudes* that will affect your growth toward maturity in Christ.

PURSUIT

Romans 12:1-2

Ephesians 4:14-16

1 Timothy 4:6-10

1 Timothy 6:9-16

Hebrews 12:1-3

QUESTIONS:

1. What words in these passages emphasize movement, commands or pursuit?

2. Paul tells us to both “flee” and “pursue.” (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22) Why is one without the other inadequate?

3. 2 Peter 1:1-11 can be broken into two distinct sections (verses 1-4 and 5-11). How would you contrast the primary focus in each of the two sections? What are the implications for walking with God?

PRACTICE

What do you learn about pursuing spiritual maturity from these passages?

2 Peter 1:5-11 _____

Philippians 4:8-9 _____

POWER

God places the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer at the moment of salvation. He is the One who enables us to live as God intends us to live. List some conclusions about the role of the Holy Spirit:

John 16:7-14 _____

Romans 8:9-11 _____

Galatians 5:16-25 _____

Ephesians 4:30 _____

Ephesians 5:15-21 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:19 _____

SOME HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

1. **Filled**—to be controlled and empowered, a continuously repeated action
2. **Fruit**—character traits produced by the Holy Spirit
3. **Grieve**—to cause sorrow, to do (sin) what the Scriptures tell us not to do
4. **Quench**—to extinguish, as in quenching a fire, to not do what the Scriptures tell us to do

God provides supernatural enablement to live a supernatural life. The Holy Spirit makes the Scriptures clear, convicts us of sin, moves us to repentance, prays for us and guides us. The primary action that God commands us to do regarding the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the Spirit. In being filled with the Spirit we are depending on His empowerment rather than our own human efforts.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled and empowered by the Spirit. When we are not filled with the Spirit, He is still present in our lives—but He is not in *control*. A person is filled with the Holy Spirit by meeting the conditions for being filled. The conditions for being filled with the Spirit are:

1. **Confession:** to agree with God when He specifically convicts us of our sin (1 John 1:9)
2. **Lordship:** to submit to God’s control of our lives (Romans 12:1-2)
3. **Not grieving** the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)
4. **Not quenching** the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

The New Testament contains several references to the Holy Spirit and His role in the lives of believers. The following grid is a brief description of the many functions of the Holy Spirit.

MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Terms Used	Primary Passages	His Purpose	Explanation
Baptism of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12:13	Places us in the Body of Christ	True of all believers. A one-time event at our conversion. A non-experiential event.
Filling of the Spirit	Ephesians 5:18	Empowers us to live for Christ	We are filled when we give Him full control of our lives. A repeated experience in our lives.
Fruit of the Spirit	Galatians 5:22-23; John 15	Evidence of Christ-likeness	The development of godly qualities in our everyday life. Requires time and dependence.
Gifts of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:7-16;	Equips us for ministry	Every believer is given one or more (never all) of the spiritual gifts in order to serve.
Ministries of the Spirit	John 16:7-15; Romans 8:1-30	Convicts, leads, teaches, prays	Daily involvement of the Holy Spirit in our lives to help us know and follow Christ.

SUMMARY

Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds us of this process in 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)—“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Two crop farmers illustrate our involvement in God’s transforming work. One farmer spends his days sipping lemonade on the back porch instead of working his fields. The other farmer spends his days plowing, planting, fertilizing and weeding. Only this second farmer will harvest a decent crop when October rolls around.

Neither farmer can cause his seeds to germinate, coax the clouds to release their rain or regulate the warmth of the sun. Only God does those things, causing a tiny seed to grow into a grain-producing plant. But, the farmer had to prepare and cultivate the soil.

The example of our crop farmers provides a timeless principle in life. In terms of pursuing our spiritual maturity, we cannot do it without Him, but He will not do it without us. The Spirit convicts, guides, teaches and empowers us. We need to plant the Word in our hearts, plow the hardened soil (confession), fertilize (fellowship) and pull the weeds (flee sin) if we expect to see consistent growth.

QUESTIONS:

1. What sidetracks you from pursuing your spiritual maturity?

2. In light of the passages in this chapter, what steps will you take to pursue your spiritual maturity?

PURSUUE YOUR MASCULINITY

“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” 1 Corinthians 16:13

The apostle Paul uses a series of sharp exhortations that read like a military metaphor. He warns the readers of being surrounded by needs, dangers and temptations that require a response from men. It begins with being alert to danger, then standing firmly against attack, and meeting it with courage and strength. “Act like men” comes from one word in the original language, used nowhere else in the New Testament. It is literally “to act manly.” God intended for men to have a particular trait. Several Bible translations substitute “act like men” with the words “be courageous.” This verse identifies traits that we can pursue in developing masculinity: attention, resolve, courage and strength.

As Job struggled through his trials, he drew faulty conclusions about God’s character. God challenged Job saying,

“Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me!” Job 38:3; 40:7

In Job’s day, to gird up your loins meant to gather your robe and tuck it into your belt to be ready for tiring work or a difficult battle. God was saying to Job, “Man up! Brace yourself like a man; give Me a response.”

God calls men to demonstrate particular traits that are dominant in masculinity.

In his book on raising boys to be men, Steve Farrar defines masculinity—

“So what is masculinity? It’s a willingness to lead, to accept responsibility, and be a self-starter. Masculine men take initiative. It’s an inclination to despise passivity and do the right thing. It’s a willingness to stand alone and be unpopular. It is a desire to protect and provide for one’s family and those who are weak and disadvantaged. It requires courage, honor, and the willingness to sacrifice, even if necessary, one’s own life for the good of others.”
(*King Me*, p. 120)

The lines have become so blurred. Men are being numbed into an acceptance of society's flight from a distinctive masculinity. The Scriptures make it clear. Men and women are created equal but very different—in anatomy, roles, and dominant traits. As humans created in the image of God, men and women share many traits, but there are some traits that dominate males and females. God designed the two sexes differently so that a husband and wife would complement and complete each other.

Many men have stained the attractiveness of masculinity by the way they have treated women. Men have confused being strong with being harsh, mean, authoritarian or domineering.

Unfortunately, society is succeeding in requiring men to diminish their Biblical masculinity in favor of feminine traits. Nice, meek and mild have become far more acceptable than strength, courage, and sacrifice in our men, especially in the church.

The results are damaging to men, women, marriages, children and churches. Men retreat to places of comfort or competence instead of growing in strong leadership. As with Isaac in Genesis 26, a man can selfishly make safety his goal, but fear and uncertainty will still pervade his life.

We face a double challenge today. Our sin nature has warped the expression of Biblical masculinity and our culture has disparaged the expression of Biblical masculinity. Here's the good news—because God wired men to be masculine, we have the capacity to break from passivity and to grow in masculinity despite the challenges of our culture.

To get a better grip on the four commands in 1 Corinthians 16:13, draw some conclusions in the following sections.

BE ON THE ALERT - ATTENTION

To be alert is to be watchful, vigilant, sober, on guard. According to these passages, what requires our attention?

Mark 14:38 _____

Luke 21:34-36 _____

Ephesians 6:18-20 _____

1 Peter 1:13-16 _____

1 Peter 5:6-9 _____

What is required of you to be alert to the condition of your wife, your kids and your own life?

A sentry on the wall or a guard at the gate has a 2-fold responsibility:

1. To recognize the threat of danger. Satan's schemes are deceptive. Do I know the Scriptures well enough to recognize the counterfeits Satan offers, the idols he promotes, and the human desires that he appeals to?

2. To do something about the threat of danger. Do I know how to counter temptation? Have I established adequate boundaries in my life? Am I humble enough to invite accountability? Do I know how to enter my wife's world and my children's world?

In what areas of your life are you most vulnerable to temptation? What can you do about the threat?

What do your kids face at school that affects their well-being, their faith, or their relationships? How can you help them?

What does your wife need from you to feel secure, cherished and valued? (Ask for her opinion)

STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH - RESOLVE

It is one thing to know what we believe. It is a step further to stand firm on what God says is true, especially when it is inconvenient or disruptive. What do these texts have to say about why to stand firm and on what to stand firm?

Joshua 23:6-8 _____

Galatians 1:10 _____

Ephesians 6:10-14 _____

Philippians 1:27-28 _____

2 Thessalonians 2:15 _____

What conclusions do you draw from these passages to apply to your own life?

The Book of Daniel is the story of a young man being squeezed to conform to his captors' pagan culture. The key to his rise in prominence can be summarized by Daniel 1:8 - "Daniel *made up his mind* that he would not defile himself." Where does standing firm in your faith begin for you?

ACT LIKE MEN - COURAGE

Of the four admonitions in 1 Corinthians 16:13, courage may be the one trait that men need most in order to exercise the other three traits.

Winston Churchill, who led Great Britain through the devastation of WWII, said,

“Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities... because it is the quality which guarantees all others.”

In other words, without courage, all other virtues lose their meaning.

An NFL wide receiver can possess All-Pro hands and speed, but his abilities are meaningless in the game if he lacks the courage to run routes over the middle of the field where he is likely to be leveled by a large angry linebacker. In the same manner, the integrity of a business executive will have little impact on his company without the courage to speak boldly.

Christian counselor and author Larry Crabb defines courage as movement in the midst of chaos. Situations that require decisions and initiative can be threatening. Chaos paralyzes men because there are no formulas or steps to follow in navigating the potential disruption. The risks are heightened when men must make decisions and take action without an operating manual.

What do you conclude about courage from the following passages?

Deuteronomy 31:1-8 _____

Joshua 1:1-9 _____

1 Chronicles 28:20 _____

2 Chronicles 32:7-8 _____

John 16:33 _____

Summarize God’s answer to fear in the previous passages.

Let’s face it—men need courage because of their fear. Courage would not exist if there was no fear. We fear rejection, failure, disrespect and criticism. God addressed fear in the lives of almost every major Old Testament character because He asked them to do some very fearful things.

John Wayne said it best,

“Courage is being scared to death...and saddling up anyway.”

Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is a decision resulting in action in the presence of fear.

BE STRONG - STRENGTH

Men need strength to battle the flesh, to exercise self-control and to lead in the midst of darkness. What do you learn about strength in these passages?

Isaiah 40:28-31 _____

Jeremiah 17:5-8 _____

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 _____

Ephesians 3:14-21 _____

Colossians 1:9-12 _____

The later chapters in the Book of Daniel record prophecies that describe the tumultuous times that God's people were about to experience. The conflict between nations in the region included an attempt to extinguish the faith of those who looked to God. In the midst of loss and persecution, many people walked away from Him.

Tucked into the middle of these prophecies is a statement that offers both hope and instruction:

“The people who know their God will display strength and take action.” Daniel 11:32b

These are the people who would not be paralyzed by their circumstances.

The word “know” means to know by “observing and experiencing” God. Knowing God is more than a casual awareness of God or an academic understanding of what the Bible says about Him. Strength is built on the experiential knowledge we have of God's character. It is our confidence in Him and His promises that gives us the needed strength to stand firm or take action.

SUMMARY

Paul describes the Christian life as a fight in both of his letters to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). God calls men to be warriors because following Christ puts us in conflict with the world, our fleshly desires and the devil. We face lifelong, never-ending battles of relational friction, lust and discouragement. Those battles are fought in the context of growing in our faith and pursuing holiness.

It is no mistake that God wired men to be masculine, to develop attentiveness, resolve, courage and strength. Passive men are sitting ducks, lined up squarely in Satan's sights. By developing masculine traits, we can break from patterns of passivity. We need masculine traits to lead and love the people whom God has placed under our care.

QUESTIONS

Our culture has deceived men into measuring masculinity by athletic abilities, economic success and relational popularity. How do those things fall short of the masculine traits of 1 Corinthians 16:13?

As you consider the responsibilities of masculinity, what is your reaction? What does it stir in your mind and heart? (Fear, hope, resolve, excitement, fulfillment...?)

How do you think your wife, your children or your friends are affected by your pursuit of masculinity?

Why does fear make men feel restrained? Why does courage make men feel free?

PURSUE YOUR MATE

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” Ephesians 5:25

CAPTURE THE TONE OF GOD’S INSTRUCTION IN EPHESIANS 5:21-20

(Circle all of the action words asked of husbands.)

21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. **22** Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. **24** But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. **25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; **26** that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. **28** So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; **29** for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, **30** because we are members of His body.

DESCRIBE THE PARALLEL BETWEEN CHRIST AND HUSBANDS?

A husband and wife are completely equal, have no moral or spiritual distinctives and should submit to one another. God also describes particular functions for the husband and wife within a Biblical marriage. He has set the husband as the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church.

WHAT DID CHRIST DO (AND CONTINUES TO DO) FOR HIS CHURCH?

A husband's headship is not about domination, but responsibility and initiative. When God asks a woman to submit to her husband, she is then abandoned if her husband does not take the responsibility for leading and loving her.

The apostle Paul does not use the word *pursue* in Ephesians 5, but the word captures the action needed for a husband to love his wife. Love requires sacrifice, initiative and responsibility, the traits that mark masculinity. Passivity falls short in conveying love. Ephesians 5:23-30 identifies at least 3 actions that communicate love to a wife:

1. Sanctify Her (Ephesians 5:25-27)

To sanctify her means to set apart, to protect her from the world's contamination, to protect her purity and holiness. What do you need to do to encourage and protect your wife's holiness?

2. Nourish Her (Ephesians 5:28-30)

To nourish means to meet her physical needs, to give strength and encouragement, to enable her to move toward maturity. What can you do to nourish your wife?

3. Cherish Her (Ephesians 5:28-30)

Cherish is a word meaning "to heat, to keep warm," as a bird covering her young with her feathers. In his book *Cherish*, Gary Thomas describes cherishing your wife as the most meaningful expression of your love for her. To cherish a wife is to honor, value and enjoy her. What makes your wife feel cherished?

WHAT WILL IT REQUIRE TO PURSUE YOUR WIFE?

In Luke 9:23, Jesus talked about the need to die to ourselves in order to follow Him. We will need to die to ourselves in order to love and lead as He demonstrated to us. Good marriages develop as two people choose to serve each other, but God calls the husband to set aside his wants and needs to be sure his wife's needs are met. What insights do these verses give you about sacrificing for her?

Ephesians 5:1-2 _____

Philippians 2:1-4 _____

Colossians 3:12-19 _____

1 Peter 3:7-9 _____

CONSIDER YOUR GENDER DIFFERENCES

In his book *His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, Dr. Walt Larimore reveals some significant differences between men and women and how they affect our relationships.

Genesis 2:7 God formed Adam. In Hebrew, formed means to squeeze into a shape or mold into a form, like a potter forms a clay pot.

Genesis 2:18 God said it was not good for man to be alone, so He made a helper suitable for him. A helper suitable means a perfect match, an exquisitely dovetailed opposite. It expresses the idea of an indispensable companion. The Hebrew word used for suitable means an opposite part, a counterpart, a mate.

Genesis 2:22 God fashioned Eve. In Hebrew, fashioned means literally to complexly design and build. In other verses it is used to describe the intricate construction of a building or a city, using a planned design to build complex, beautiful necessities.

Adam was molded, but Eve was a workmanship of architectural arts and masterpieces. For example, when a man's brain is at work, neurons turn on in highly specific areas. When a woman's brain works on similar tasks, so many brain cells light up that her brain scans look like a night view of a large city.

He is wired to solve and fix things. She is wired to talk at great lengths without a solution. He relieves stress by solving a problem; she relieves stress by talking about a problem.

Men's brains lock out emotions, moving them more quickly to action. Women's brains record more emotional experiences, making conflict more painful. A woman's brain is wired to read subtle facial expressions and voice tone, so she knows when you are upset. A man's brain doesn't have a clue until he sees tears or temper. Men focus on getting from Point A to Point B. Women focus on relationships between A and B.

Pursuing our wives involves learning how uniquely they are wired, and valuing them because of those differences. God designed our gender differences to enrich our relationships.

Counselor and author Dr. Michael Misja comments on valuing our wives:

“We are male and female with radically different characteristics and capacities, yet God designed us to function as one to achieve His purposes (rule, subdue, multiply, etc). Since the curse left men fearing exposure of inadequacy, we can see our wives’ strengths as a threat, exposing our weakness and mocking our strength. We typically dismiss them instead of seeing them as our greatest asset (mutual) in accomplishing God’s work. When we see them as having gifts and strengths intended to enhance our lives, we begin to value them instead of being threatened by them. If a wife submits her incredible beauty, strength, and wisdom to our leadership, great things can happen, but we must value them, allowing them to exercise their dignity in the context of our one flesh relationship. This should result in pursuit of the beauty God has given them.”

What does passivity communicate to your wife? What does pursuit communicate?

COURAGEOUS QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR WIFE

1. What do I do that makes you feel valued?
2. What causes fear in your life? What makes you feel secure?
3. What could I do that would safeguard holiness in our home?
4. What do you sense that is intruding into our relationship?
5. What are the needs in your life that you don't feel that I see or understand?
6. What can I do that would make you feel more cherished?
7. What do you wish we would focus on to grow in our relationship?
8. What is the most meaningful aspect of our times together?

God calls the husband to be the initiator, to love and cherish his wife as Christ loved the Church. It requires pursuit. We are compelled to follow His lead:

- Intentional love (active without cause)
- Persistent love (unchanged by her response) and
- Sacrificial love (costly without gain).

PURSUE YOUR MISSION

**“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 3:12-14**

“Press on” comes from the same word that is translated “pursue” in 1 Timothy 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:22. Paul was intent on pursuing all that God had in mind for him when He saved him. He wanted God’s purposes to be fleshed out in his own life mission.

If *purpose* is why God has saved us, then *mission* is the action or the expression of that purpose. Purpose is why we do something; mission is what we do. While God has called all believers for a similar purpose, He has uniquely shaped each of us to serve Him wherever He has planted us across the globe in order that we might display the goodness of God and point others to Him.

Understanding where *mission* fits in our lives begins with embracing God’s purpose for our lives.

Embrace God’s Purposes

GOD ESTABLISHED HIS PURPOSE FOR US BEFORE WE BEGAN TO GROW IN OUR MOTHER’S WOMB—

“Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” Psalm 139:16

GOD GAVE US NEW LIFE ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE—

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” 2 Timothy 1:8-9

THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL GOD'S PURPOSE FOR US BY THE TERMS THAT HE USES FOR US—

He refers to believers as servants, fellow-workers, light, witnesses and ambassadors. They are terms that convey the way that God uses us to do His work on earth.

IN HIS PRAYER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, JESUS COMPARED OUR PURPOSE TO HIS PURPOSE—

“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” John 17:3

“As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” John 17:18

The implication in John 17 is that Jesus sent the disciples into the world to reveal the Father. Wherever we live and whatever we do, God's purpose for us involves making Him known to a lost and dying world.

Knowing that God has a purpose for our lives changes the way we live. It brings meaning and clarity to our lives. Purpose fuels the way we serve—we will run harder, persist longer and risk more when we embrace the reason or the purpose that God has for our lives.

God uses us in many ways to reveal Himself to the world. Consider these three ways:

1. BY REFLECTING GOD

Light is a common metaphor in the Scriptures. Draw some observations from these passages.

Matthew 5:14-16 _____

John 8:12 _____

Acts 13:46-47 _____

Philippians 2:14-16 _____

Jesus spoke of Himself as the light of the world and He called believers the light of the world. The difference is that His light is the source of our light. Just as the light from the moon is a reflection of the sun's light, so the believers' light is a reflection of Jesus' light. When we faithfully walk with Him, we inevitably appear as lights in the world.

What is the purpose of a light? What are the implications to our lives?

2. BY GLORIFYING GOD

God's primary goal is that His name (character) is glorified, meaning that He is acknowledged, praised, exalted and honored. Make some observations about glorifying God.

Matthew 5:16

1 Corinthians 10:31

1 Peter 4:10-11

A magnet helps to explain what it means that our lives and works glorify God. In an ordinary piece of metal, billions of individual atoms lie in multiple chaotic directions. In contrast, the atoms in a magnet are aligned and point in the same direction.

When a metal screwdriver (common metal) is stuck to a large magnet for a period of time, the magnet causes the chaotic arrangement of atoms in the screwdriver to be rearranged into a common direction. As a result, a screwdriver made of common metal takes on a magnetic quality similar to the magnet.

Drop the screwdriver on a messy workbench and it will attract small nails and metal filings just like the large magnet will. The screwdriver has become magnetic from being closely connected to the magnetic bar. Because the screwdriver now exhibits a measure of the characteristics and actions of the magnet, you could say that the screwdriver glorifies the magnet. In like manner, as we live godly lives, do godly things and attribute it all to God, He is glorified.

3. BY REPRESENTING GOD

Go back to Matthew 5:16. If people are going to glorify God (instead of us), they need to know that the changes in our lives are not the result of a self-reform project, but rather the work of God. He is the One Who transforms lives. What conclusions do you draw from the following texts?

Romans 10:13-15 _____

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 _____

1 Peter 2:9-10 _____

Describe the life of an ambassador: who, what, where, why? How does the life of a Christian parallel the life of an ambassador?

Find Your Mission

“The mission of God requires that believers leverage their lives for His glory.” Willis/Coe, Life on Mission

It can seem overwhelming to engage in some form of personal ministry. Where do you start? What do you do? How do you squeeze it into a busy schedule? Church leaders, Christian friends, opportunities and the Holy Spirit are all major factors in finding your mission.

A pursuer has already decided he will go beyond just watching Jesus to joining Jesus in His work. Before you begin thinking you have to pack up and sail to a remote island in the South Pacific or trek through the Amazon forest to an isolated native tribe, take a closer look at God’s hand in your preparation.

PREPARED FOR MISSION

From these verses, summarize how God is involved in preparing you for ministry:

Ephesians 2:10 _____

Ephesians 4:11-16 _____

2 Timothy 3:16-17 _____

1 Peter 4:10-11 _____

God has uniquely prepared us for ministry in so many ways: transformation, relationships, spiritual gifts and life experiences. He intends to use it to advance His kingdom.

God has given a few (not all) spiritual gifts to each believer for the purpose of building up each other in the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are a spiritual capacity for development—their impact and effectiveness grows with training and use. For further study of spiritual gifts, see Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12-14.

USED IN MISSION

What do these passages tell you about God's desires to use us?

Proverbs 16:1-3, 9 _____

Matthew 9:36-38 _____

Matthew 28:18-20 _____

2 Timothy 4:1-5 _____

We can view “mission” as the role, focus or influence of our lives that God will use to further His Kingdom. It could be a task in our church, a role in one of its ministries or involvement in a ministry in the workplace arena. It may involve reaching teens, discipling young believers or expanding the technology capabilities of a mission agency. We may be drawn to influence a certain segment of our society: youth, men, disadvantaged, executives, athletes, media or unreached people groups.

The following list of questions can help you think through where God may be leading you.

1. What are your primary spiritual gifts?
2. What expertise, training or influence do you have that will help others? Or another cause?
3. How has God already used you in others’ lives? In your church? In another ministry?
4. What kind of impact do you lay awake at night thinking about?
5. What are you motivated to do to bring about some change, relief, resolution or development?
6. What platform do you have for influence? (position, opportunity, access, relationships)
7. What kind of impact have mentors had in your life that you could pass on to others?
8. How can you respond to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) in your sphere of influence?
9. What roles do you thrive in? (leading, building, creating, supporting, implementing)?
10. What counsel or insights about your spiritual gifts have you received from other believers?
11. What makes you hesitant about ministry? (unknowns, inadequacy, details, training, time)
12. What are the barriers or hurdles that keep you from engaging in ministry opportunities?

A pastor or a trusted friend can offer great insight. Most people discover their mission in life as they engage in different ministries, develop their gifts and build relationships with ministry leaders.

A spiritual gifts test or inventory can be helpful in identifying our spiritual gifts. (The tests can be found online or through your pastor.) At the same time, there are some cautions when using a spiritual gifts test. It is important to guard against limiting ministry to the things that utilize our primary spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit may lead us into ministry situations that don’t always align with our gifts. In other situations, we can make the mistake of relying on our gifts instead of the Holy Spirit.

Mission is more than just fulfilling a ministry responsibility; it is engaging in building the Kingdom of God. Mission can have both earthly and eternal consequences—it can change people's lives and their destiny. Mission also has personal consequences for us in stimulating our growth in faith.

Passivity tells us to let the other guy do the ministry. We are too busy, too untrained and too limited. Don't fall for it; men are wired for impact, for influence, especially because you follow Jesus. Mission gives men a front row seat to see God do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think.

In the words of the apostle Paul, press on!

FINAL SUMMARY

In terms of spiritual direction, we choose to be a backslider, a floater, a drifter or a pursuer. It takes initiative to be a pursuer, but the payoff is monumental.

The chapters in this series were not designed to just present more information about one's Maker, maturity, masculinity, mate or mission. They were designed to ignite a new level of pursuit in these aspects of life. A pursuer on the move will discover far more information on his own than could be contained in these pages.

Two things are needed to squeeze the most you can out of this study series:

Reflection. This seems like a luxury to busy men, but taking time to think about where you are and where you want to go helps to shift good intentions into action.

Connection. No one does life very well alone. Find a group, start a group or whatever it takes to create a setting where you can process these issues openly and honestly with other men.

God is gracious and persistent. Every man is a life-long work in progress. None of us function full speed ahead in every area of our lives all the time. But, in response to how God has designed us and called us to live and lead, we can ask God to develop a mindset of pursuit in us. Through faith and courage, pursuers can discover the fulfillment that God intended by His design.

PURSUE YOUR MAKER -
TO BRING HIM GLORY

PURSUE YOUR MATURITY -
TO BECOME CHRISTLIKE

PURSUE YOUR MASCULINITY -
TO FULFILL GOD'S DESIGN

PURSUE YOUR MATE -
TO LOVE HER AS CHRIST LOVES HER

PURSUE YOUR MISSION -
TO REVEAL GOD TO THE WORLD

Further Reading

THE GREAT ESCAPE

No More Mr. Nice Guy! by Stephen Brown

The Silence of Adam by Larry Crabb

PURSUE YOUR MAKER

The Bible

PURSUE YOUR MATURITY

Foundational Bible studies – most discipleship ministries

Trusting God by Jerry Bridges

Growing Your Faith by Jerry Bridges

The Bible Knowledge Commentary (2 Volumes) by John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck

Living By The Book by Howard G. Hendricks & William D. Hendricks

PURSUE YOUR MASCULINITY

Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood by Dennis Rainey

Point Man by Steve Farrar

The Masculine Journey by Robert Hicks

www.authenticmanhood.com – Small group materials

PURSUE YOUR MATE

Cherish: The One Word That Changes Everything for Your Marriage by Gary Thomas

Men and Women, Enjoying the Difference by Larry Crabb

Thriving Despite a Difficult Marriage by Michael Misja & Chuck Misja

Love and Respect by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can

Strengthen Your Marriage by Walt Larimore, M.D. & Barb Larimore

PURSUE YOUR MISSION

Life On Mission by Dustin Willis & Aaron Coe

Halftime by Bob Buford

The Externally Focused Church by Rick Rusaw & Eric Swanson

The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert E. Coleman

Design for Discipleship by J. Dwight Pentecost

In A Pit With A Lion On A Snowy Day by Mark Batterson

www.catapultministries.org – resources, studies

