

EVERY MAN COMPLETE (EMC)

Men's Bible Study: Sanctifying the Inner Man

A Study on Motives and Intentions

SERIES OVERVIEW

Purpose: To examine the motives and intentions that drive our actions, exposing fleshly patterns and cultivating Spirit-led transformation from the inside out.

Target: Men who are tired of surface-level Christianity and ready to do the hard work of heart transformation.

Duration: 10-12 weeks

Format: 90-minute sessions including teaching, discussion, and accountability

Memory Verse for the Series: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."* (Psalm 139:23-24, NASB)

GROUP COVENANT

Before beginning, have each man commit to:

1. **Confidentiality** - What's shared in the group stays in the group
2. **Honesty** - No pretending, no religious performance
3. **Accountability** - Permission to ask hard questions
4. **Attendance** - Commit to the full series
5. **Preparation** - Complete weekly homework
6. **Prayer** - Pray for other men in the group

SESSION 1: THE MIND SET ON FLESH

Diagnosing the Problem

Opening Question: *What's the difference between looking good spiritually and actually being spiritually healthy?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Romans 8:5-6 *"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."*

Supporting Texts:

- Jeremiah 17:9 - *"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"*
- Proverbs 21:2 - *"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts."*
- 1 Samuel 16:7b - *"For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

Key Concepts

The Flesh Defined: Not just physical body, but the self-centered orientation toward life—self-protection, self-promotion, self-justification.

Three Characteristics of Fleshly Motives:

1. **Self-directed** - What's in it for me?
2. **Self-protective** - How do I maintain my image?
3. **Self-promoting** - How do I establish my significance?

Quote: *"The essence of sin is the refusal to let God be God."* - Sinclair Ferguson

Discussion Questions

1. What areas of your life look spiritual on the outside but might be driven by fleshly motives on the inside?
2. How do you know when you're serving from flesh versus from Spirit? What's the "gut check" difference?
3. Where are you most tempted to:
 - o Protect your image/reputation?
 - o Promote yourself?
 - o Justify your actions?
4. **The Hard One:** If someone followed you around with a camera for a week, capturing what you actually think about, worry about, and focus on—what would that reveal about where your mind is set?

Practical Application

This Week:

- Keep a "motive journal" - Note when you catch yourself serving, giving, or working from fleshly motives
- Memorize Romans 8:5-6
- Ask your wife or a close friend: "Where do you see me performing instead of being genuine?"

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. Did you keep the motive journal? What did you discover?
2. What fleshly pattern surfaced most frequently?
3. Did you have the conversation with your wife/friend? What did they say?

SESSION 2: THE ADAMIC PATTERN

How We've Been Running Since the Garden

Opening Question: *When you mess up, what's your default response—own it or explain it?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Genesis 3:8-13 *"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"*

Supporting Texts:

- Psalm 32:3-5 - Hiding vs. confession
- Proverbs 28:13 - *"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."*
- James 5:16 - *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed."*

Key Concepts

The Four-Step Adamic Pattern:

1. **RUN** from God's presence (Genesis 3:8)
 - Skip prayer, avoid Scripture, miss church when guilty
2. **HIDE** our true selves (Genesis 3:10)
 - Construct false selves that look good

- Maintain the image while concealing reality

3. **COVER** with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7)

- Religious performance, good works, busyness
- "At least I'm not as bad as..."

4. **BLAME** others (Genesis 3:12-13)

- Shift responsibility
- Justify actions by others' failures
- "If you had..." / "If they hadn't..."

Quote: *"We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."* - C.S. Lewis

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the four steps (Run, Hide, Cover, Blame) is your default when you sin?
2. What "fig leaves" do you use to cover your actual condition?
 - Ministry activity?
 - Theological knowledge?
 - Comparison to others?
 - Past victories?
3. **For married men:** How does this pattern show up in your marriage? Do you run, hide, cover, or blame when your wife confronts you?
4. **For all men:** What would it look like to reverse this pattern—to run TO God instead of FROM Him when you fail?

Case Study: David vs. Saul

David's Response to Sin (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51):

- Immediate confession: "I have sinned against the LORD"
- No excuses, no blame-shifting
- Deep repentance and brokenness
- Humility before God

Saul's Response to Sin (1 Samuel 15:13-21):

- Denial: "I have carried out the command of the LORD"
- Justification: "But the people took..."
- Blame-shifting: It was them, not me
- Concern for appearance: "Please honor me before the people"

Discussion: Which pattern do you more naturally follow?

Practical Application

This Week:

- When you mess up, practice the opposite of the Adamic Pattern:
 - **RUN TO** God, not from Him
 - **REVEAL** yourself, don't hide
 - **RECEIVE** His covering, don't construct your own
 - **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**, don't blame
- Confess one thing to your accountability partner that you've been hiding
- Memorize Proverbs 28:13

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. Did you practice running TO God this week? What happened?
2. What did you confess to your accountability partner?
3. Where did you catch yourself blaming instead of owning?

SESSION 3: THE DECEITFUL HEART

Why You Can't Trust Your Own Assessment

Opening Question: *How good are you at lying to yourself?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Jeremiah 17:9-10 *"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds."*

Supporting Texts:

- Proverbs 14:12 - *"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."*
- Proverbs 16:2 - *"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives."*
- 1 Corinthians 4:3-4 - *"But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."*
- Galatians 6:3 - *"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

Key Concepts

Three Ways the Heart Deceives:

1. Minimizing Sin - "It's not that bad"

- Comparing down instead of to Christ's standard
- Categorizing sins as "little" vs. "big"
- Justifying based on circumstances

2. Maximizing Righteousness - "I'm doing pretty well"

- Focusing on what we're doing right
- Forgetting grace in favor of performance
- Building confidence in religious activities

3. Rationalizing Motives - "My intentions were good"

- "I was just trying to help"
- "I only said it because I care"
- "I'm doing this for God's glory" (while building our platform)

Quote: *"There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'"* - C.S. Lewis

Discussion Questions

1. Where are you most skilled at self-deception? (Work? Home? Ministry? Finances?)
2. What sin do you minimize by comparing yourself to others who are "worse"?
3. **Tough one:** What religious activity or theological knowledge are you using to convince yourself you're spiritually healthy when your heart might not be?
4. Think about a recent conflict. What narrative did you tell yourself about it? What might the other person's narrative be? What might GOD'S narrative be?

The Pharisee Test

Luke 18:11-12 - *"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'"*

Signs You Might Be Pharisee-ing:

- Your prayers focus on what you're doing right
- You're more aware of others' sins than your own
- You compare yourself favorably to other Christians
- You're confident in your spiritual assessment of yourself
- You're surprised when someone points out your sin
- You can't remember the last time you wept over your own sin

Discussion: Which of these signs hit home?

Practical Application

This Week:

- Ask 3 people (wife, close friend, coworker): "What's a blind spot you see in me?"
- Don't defend, explain, or justify—just listen and thank them
- Pray Psalm 139:23-24 daily: "Search me, O God..."
- Journal about what God reveals
- Memorize Jeremiah 17:9-10

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. Did you ask the three people about blind spots? What did they say?
2. What was your gut reaction—defensive or humble?
3. What did God reveal through Psalm 139:23-24 prayer this week?

SESSION 4: WITHOUT LOVE, I AM NOTHING

The Ultimate Test of Motives

Opening Question: *What's the most impressive thing you've ever done for God? Now why did you really do it?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 "*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*"

Supporting Texts:

- John 13:34-35 - "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"
- 1 John 4:19 - "*We love, because He first loved us.*"
- Matthew 23:23 - "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.*"

Key Concepts

What Paul Systematically Dismantles:

Without love, these are WORTHLESS:

- Speaking in tongues (spectacular spiritual gifts)
- Prophesying (influential spiritual ministry)
- Understanding mysteries (impressive theological knowledge)

- Mountain-moving faith (powerful spiritual results)
- Giving everything to the poor (radical sacrifice)
- Martyrdom (ultimate commitment)

Not "less valuable"—NOTHING. Zero. Worthless.

Four Fleshly Motives Masquerading as Love:

1. Ministry for Recognition

- Would you do it if no one knew?
- Are you resentful when service goes unacknowledged?

2. Giving for Status

- Do you need people to know you gave?
- Does your giving create obligation?

3. Sacrifice for Manipulation

- "After all I've done for you..."
- Creating emotional debt

4. Prophecy for Power

- Using "words from God" to control
- Wielding spiritual gifts as weapons

Quote: *"Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained."* - C.S. Lewis

The Love Litmus Test

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Applied to Your Ministry/Service:

Love Is...	Application Question
Patient	Am I patient with people's slow growth, or do I get frustrated?
Kind	Do I serve people's actual needs or my need to be needed?
Not jealous	How do I respond when someone else succeeds in "my" area?
Does not brag	Can I serve without needing credit?
Not arrogant	Do I serve from superiority or from solidarity?
Does not act unbecomingly	Do I treat people as projects or as image-bearers?
Does not seek its own	Am I building their maturity or my ministry?
Not provoked	What happens when my service isn't appreciated?
Does not take into account a wrong suffered	Am I keeping a mental ledger of what I've done?
Rejoices with truth	Can I celebrate when someone doesn't need me anymore?
Bears all things	Do I bail when serving gets hard?
Believes all things	Do I assume the best or the worst about people?

Love Is...	Application Question
Hopes all things	Am I optimistic about their transformation?
Endures all things	Is my love conditional on their response?

Discussion Questions

1. **The brutal one:** Look at your ministry/service/work. If God removed the recognition, the results, the appreciation—would you keep doing it?
2. Think about someone you're "helping." Are you genuinely serving them toward their independence, or are you subtly creating dependency because you need to be needed?
3. Where are you using people (including family) to meet your needs while calling it "love"?
4. **For fathers:** Are you loving your kids toward who they're becoming, or are you using them to validate your parenting?
5. **For married men:** Are you serving your wife to love her, or to obligate her?

Martin Buber's I-Thou vs. I-It

I-Thou: Relating to a person as a person—genuine encounter, authentic love
I-It: Relating to a person as an object—using them for your purposes

Test: When the person no longer provides what you wanted from the relationship, how do you feel?

- **Genuine love:** Celebrates their growth, even when they outgrow needing you
- **Using:** Feels threatened, resentful, or bereft when they no longer need what you offer

Practical Application

This Week:

- Complete the 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 assessment for one key relationship or ministry
- Identify one person you might be using rather than loving—confess it to God
- Do one act of service that no one will know about (not even this group)
- Ask God: "Where am I serving for recognition rather than from love?"
- Memorize 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. What did the 1 Corinthians 13 assessment reveal?
2. What anonymous act of service did you do?
3. Where did God expose recognition-seeking in your service?
4. What's one relationship where you need to shift from using to loving?

SESSION 5: GRACE THAT EXPOSES AND TRANSFORMS

Where Sin Abounded, Grace Abounded All the More

Opening Question: *What's scarier—having your sin exposed or staying in denial about it?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Romans 5:20 "*The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*"

Supporting Texts:

- Titus 2:11-12 - "*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.*"
- Romans 6:1-2 - "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*"
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 - "*And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'*"
- Hebrews 4:16 - "*Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*"

Key Concepts

The Paradox of Grace:

Grace doesn't minimize sin—it exposes it more thoroughly than law ever could.

Why?

- Law exposes what you did (external)
- Grace exposes why you did it (internal—motives)

- Grace can expose deeply because it promises to heal what it exposes

Quote: *"Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is power, not just pardon."* - John Piper

Two Competing Gospels:

1. False Gospel of Self-Improvement:

- "Try harder, do better"
- "You're not quite good enough yet, but you can be"
- Measures progress by visible improvements
- Produces exhaustion and either pride or despair

2. True Gospel of Grace:

- "Come as you are, broken and unable to improve yourself"
- "Receive transformation as gift"
- Measures by faithfulness, not perfection
- Produces rest and sustainable transformation

The Treadmill of Religious Achievement:

- More is always needed
- Rest equals failure
- Value measured by output
- Comparison is constant
- Grace is theoretical, not experiential

The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:1-11)

Notice the Order:

1. **Acceptance FIRST** - "I do not condemn you" (v. 11a)
2. **Transformation SECOND** - "Go. From now on sin no more" (v. 11b)

Not:

- "Clean up your act, then I'll accept you"
- "Stop sinning and maybe I won't condemn you"

But:

- "You're already not condemned. Now live from that freedom."

Discussion Questions

1. Which gospel have you actually been living by—self-improvement or grace? Be honest about what drives you, not what you know theologically.
2. Where are you exhausted because you're trying to transform yourself through effort rather than receiving transformation as gift?
3. **The fear question:** What sin or pattern are you afraid to bring fully into the light because you're not sure grace is really sufficient for it?
4. How would your Christian life change if you truly believed you're already fully accepted right now, not based on your progress?

Confession Born of Grace

1 John 1:9 - *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Performance-based religion produces:

- Admission when caught
- Minimizing when confronted

- Justifying when questioned
- Hiding what isn't discovered

Grace-based relationship produces:

- Proactive confession before being caught
- Honest acknowledgment without minimizing
- Taking responsibility without justifying
- Bringing darkness into light voluntarily

Why? Because no level of honesty results in rejection when you're secure in grace.

Practical Application

This Week:

- Identify one area where you're operating from "try harder" rather than from grace
- Bring one hidden sin into the light—confess it to God and to one trusted person
- When you fail this week (you will), practice immediate confession without explanation or justification
- Read Romans 5-8 slowly, marking every reference to grace
- Memorize Romans 5:20

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. What area did you identify where you're trying to improve yourself rather than receiving grace?
2. What hidden sin did you confess? To whom?
3. How did they respond? Did grace prove sufficient?
4. What did you learn from Romans 5-8 about grace?

SESSION 6: THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Why the Path to Power Goes Through Pain

Opening Question: *What's the hardest thing you've been through, and what did it expose about you?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Philippians 3:10 "*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*"

Supporting Texts:

- Romans 5:3-5 - "*And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint.*"
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 - "*For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.*"
- 1 Peter 1:6-7 - "*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Key Concepts

Notice the Order in Philippians 3:10:

1. Know Him
2. Power of His resurrection

3. Fellowship of His sufferings
4. Being conformed to His death

We want: Power without suffering **God offers:** Power through suffering

Why Suffering Precedes Power:

Suffering exposes what prosperity conceals:

- **When ministry succeeds**, fleshly motives can hide behind results
- **When ministry fails**, fleshly motives are revealed
- **When resources are abundant**, we don't know what we really trust
- **When resources disappear**, what we actually trust is exposed
- **When relationships are smooth**, we can use people without realizing it
- **When relationships break**, our using is revealed

Quote: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." - C.S. Lewis

The Refining Fire (1 Peter 1:6-7):

The refiner puts gold in fire to expose and remove impurities. The fire doesn't create the impurities—it reveals them. Without the fire, the impurities remain mixed with the gold.

What Suffering Reveals

About Your Ministry:

- Are you serving for God's glory or your significance?
- Would you minister if no one recognized it?
- Is your identity in the role or in Christ?

About Your Finances:

- Are you trusting God's provision or your savings?

- Where is your actual security?
- What controls you—money or God?

About Your Relationships:

- Are you loving people or using them?
- Do you need them to need you?
- Are you building their maturity or your value?

About Your Identity:

- Is your worth in what you accomplish?
- Can you rest when you're not productive?
- Who are you when you can't perform?

Being Conformed to His Death

Dying to:

- Self-promotion - No longer needing recognition
- Self-protection - Releasing control of your reputation
- Self-justification - Taking responsibility without defending
- Self-sufficiency - Admitting you need God desperately

Quote: *"The one thing Satan cannot do is crucify you; only you can do that."* - Oswald Chambers

Discussion Questions

1. What has suffering revealed about your motives that prosperity allowed you to hide?
2. **For married men:** How did losing a job, facing financial pressure, or experiencing ministry failure reveal what you were really trusting in?

3. When something you built your identity on was stripped away (position, success, ability, relationship), what did you discover about yourself?
4. What are you still trying to control that God might be calling you to surrender?
5. **The hard one:** What would devastate you more—failure in your career/ministry or failure in your walk with God? (Your honest answer reveals your actual priority.)

Case Studies from Scripture

Moses:

- Tried to deliver Israel in his own strength → killed Egyptian, fled (Exodus 2)
- 40 years in wilderness → death of self-sufficiency
- Then God used him powerfully → but through weakness, not strength

Peter:

- Self-confident: "I will never deny You!" (Matthew 26:33)
- Denial and brokenness (Matthew 26:69-75)
- Restoration and transformation (John 21)
- Powerful ministry flowing from brokenness (Acts 2)

Paul:

- Religious achievement and zeal (Philippians 3:4-6)
- Struck blind, broken (Acts 9)
- "Thorn in the flesh" kept him dependent (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
- Power perfected in weakness

Pattern: Self-sufficiency → Suffering → Death to self → Resurrection power

Practical Application

This Week:

- Identify one area where you're still operating from self-sufficiency
- Journal about what past suffering has revealed about your motives
- Share with the group one thing suffering exposed that you hadn't seen
- Pray: "God, I surrender my need to control [specific area]"
- Memorize Philippians 3:10

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. What area of self-sufficiency did you identify?
2. What did your journaling reveal?
3. What specific thing are you surrendering control of?
4. Where are you experiencing the "dark night of the soul" right now?

SESSION 7: SEARCH ME, O GOD

Inviting God's Examination

Opening Question: *On a scale of 1-10, how accurately do you think you assess your own spiritual condition? Why?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Supporting Texts:

- Psalm 139:1-6 - God's complete knowledge of us
- Psalm 19:12 - "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults."
- Proverbs 20:27 - "The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being."
- Hebrews 4:12-13 - "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Key Concepts

The Shift:

- FROM: Self-examination (unreliable)
- TO: God-examination (accurate)

Why Self-Examination Fails:

- Our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9)
- We have blind spots we cannot see

- We justify what should convict us
- We minimize what should concern us
- We're biased toward a favorable assessment

Why God's Examination Succeeds:

- He knows us completely (Psalm 139:1-6)
- He sees what we cannot see
- He's motivated by love, not condemnation
- His purpose is healing, not harm
- He reveals what we're ready to handle

The Prayer Has Four Parts:

- 1. "Search me, O God, and know my heart"**
 - Invitation for complete examination
 - Surrender of control over what's discovered
- 2. "Try me and know my anxious thoughts"**
 - Anxiety reveals where we're trusting self, not God
 - Worry exposes misplaced control
- 3. "See if there be any hurtful way in me"**
 - Patterns that damage us and others
 - Subtle sins we've learned to tolerate
- 4. "And lead me in the everlasting way"**
 - From my way to God's way
 - From self-deception to truth

Quote: *"Be patient with yourself. God is."* - Brennan Manning

Anxiety as Diagnostic Tool

Philippians 4:6-7 - *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

What Your Anxieties Reveal:

Anxiety About... Reveals Trust In...

Finances My ability to provide, not God's provision

Others' opinions Their approval, not God's acceptance

Health My body, not God's sovereignty

Future My planning, not God's purposes

Ministry results My competence, not God's faithfulness

Hurtful Ways That Sabotage

Bitterness - Nursing offense, refusing forgiveness

- Hebrews 12:15 - *"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."*

Jealousy - Resenting others' success

- James 3:16 - *"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."*

Pride - Subtle superiority, need to be right

- James 4:6 - *"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

Self-Righteousness - Comparing favorably, feeling superior

- Luke 18:9-14 - Pharisee and tax collector

Discussion Questions

1. What are you most anxious about right now? What does that reveal about where your trust actually is (not where you say it is)?
2. Which "hurtful way" do you most struggle with:
 - Bitterness (holding grudges)?
 - Jealousy (resenting others' blessings)?
 - Pride (needing to be right)?
 - Self-righteousness (feeling superior)?
3. **The vulnerable one:** What sin or pattern are you hiding that you need to bring into the light with this group?
4. If God were to search your heart right now, what would He find that you're most afraid of facing?

Guided Prayer Exercise

Take 15 minutes individually, then share as God leads:

1. Pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart"
 - Sit in silence. What does God bring to mind?
2. Pray: "Try me and know my anxious thoughts"
 - List your anxieties. What do they reveal?
3. Pray: "See if there be any hurtful way in me"
 - What patterns is God highlighting?
4. Pray: "Lead me in the everlasting way"
 - What's God's way versus your way in these areas?

Practical Application

This Week:

- Pray Psalm 139:23-24 every morning
- Journal what God reveals each day
- Confess to one person what God exposes
- For each anxiety, identify what it reveals about misplaced trust
- Memorize Psalm 139:23-24

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. What did God reveal through daily praying Psalm 139:23-24?
2. What did you confess to someone else?
3. What anxiety did you identify and what misplaced trust does it reveal?
4. What specific thing is God calling you to surrender?

SESSION 8: WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

Daily Dependence vs. Self-Effort

Opening Question: *How much of your Christian life is about trying harder versus trusting more?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Galatians 5:16, 25 "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh... If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

Supporting Texts:

- Romans 8:5-6 - "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."
- John 15:4-5 - "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."
- Galatians 5:22-23 - The fruit of the Spirit
- Romans 8:13-14 - "For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Key Concepts

Abiding vs. Striving:

Striving Says:

I must work harder to be spiritual

I have to discipline myself to overcome flesh

My transformation depends on my effort

I'm responsible for making myself holy

Abiding Says:

I must remain connected to the Source

I depend on the Spirit for what I cannot do

My transformation depends on His work in me

I'm responsible for surrendering to the One who makes me holy

Quote: *"The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'"* - Billy Graham

Fruit vs. Works:

Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23):

- Grows naturally from connection to the Vine
- Can't be manufactured through effort
- Emerges organically from abiding
- Evidence of Spirit-filled life

Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:19-21):

- Produced through self-effort
- Result of disconnection from the Vine
- Natural output of flesh-directed life

- Evidence of self-dependent life

The Mind Set on Spirit vs. Flesh

Romans 8:5-6 - Where Is Your Mind Actually Set?

Mind set on flesh thinks about:

- What people think of me
- How to secure my interests
- What I can control and accomplish
- How to protect my reputation
- Comparing myself to others

Result: Death (of joy, peace, relationships, authentic worship)

Mind set on Spirit thinks about:

- God's character and promises
- His purposes and plans
- His provision and faithfulness
- His glory and kingdom
- Who I am in Christ

Result: Life and peace

Discussion Questions

1. In your actual daily life (not your theology), are you striving or abiding? What's the evidence?
2. Where are you exhausting yourself trying to produce through effort what only the Spirit can produce through surrender?
3. **Diagnostic question:** When you fail morally/spiritually, what's your first move:

- Try harder next time (striving)?
- Cry out for the Spirit's help (abiding)?

4. Looking at the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control)—which is most absent in your life? What does that reveal about your connection to the Vine?
5. **The honest one:** Where is your mind actually set most of the time—on flesh or on Spirit?

Moment-by-Moment Dependence

Throughout the Day:

In the morning: Before feet hit the floor, acknowledge need for Spirit's guidance

In conversations: Pause before responding, especially in conflict—ask for Spirit's words

In decisions: Consult the Spirit before choosing, large or small

In temptation: Immediately cry out for Spirit's power from the first whisper

In ministry: Serve from overflow of what Spirit is doing, not from own effort

In difficulty: Turn to Spirit for comfort and perspective before trying to manage

In rest: Entrust yourself to Spirit's care, resting in His provision

Practical Application: Daily Practices

Morning (choose 2-3):

- Morning surrender prayer before checking phone
- Scripture reading before any other input
- Identify challenges and pray for Spirit-power
- Set hourly reminders: "Where is my mind set?"

Throughout Day (choose 2-3):

- Use transitions as triggers to reconnect
- Recognize and redirect fleshly thoughts
- Brief "arrow prayers" constantly
- Real-time gratitude

Evening (choose 2):

- Evening Examen (review day with God)
- Journal what God revealed
- Confess specifically, receive fully
- Scripture meditation before sleep

This Week:

- Choose specific practices from above and commit to them
- When you catch your mind on flesh, practice the redirect: acknowledge
→ confess → redirect → trust
- Memorize Galatians 5:16
- Track: How many times did you catch yourself striving vs. abiding?

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. Which practices did you commit to? How did they go?
2. How many times did you catch yourself striving instead of abiding?
3. Where did you see fruit of the Spirit emerge this week?
4. Where did you depend on the Spirit instead of yourself—what happened?

SESSION 9: LIVING FROM APPROVAL

The Security That Changes Everything

Opening Question: *What would you do differently if you truly believed God's approval of you is complete and unchanging right now?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Supporting Texts:

- Ephesians 1:3-6 - *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."*
- Romans 8:1 - *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*
- 1 John 3:1 - *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are."*
- Matthew 3:17 - *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*
(Before Jesus did anything)

Key Concepts

Two Ways to Live:

LIVING FOR APPROVAL:

- I serve to prove I'm valuable

- I give to secure blessing
- I obey to earn favor
- I perform to avoid rejection
- Failure is devastating—threatens acceptability
- Success is fleeting—never enough

LIVING FROM APPROVAL:

- I serve because I've been served
- I give because I've been given to
- I obey because I trust the One who loves me
- I'm already accepted—now I live from that freedom
- Failure is disappointing but not devastating—acceptability is secure
- Success is celebrated but not needed—worth already established

Quote: *"The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us."* - C.S. Lewis

The Father's Declaration

Matthew 3:17 - Before Jesus performed one miracle, preached one sermon, healed one person—the Father declared:

- "This is My beloved Son" (IDENTITY)
- "In whom I am well-pleased" (APPROVAL)

The order matters:

1. Identity established (beloved Son)
2. Approval declared (well-pleased)
3. Ministry begins (only after identity and approval secured)

We reverse it:

1. Ministry/performance
2. Hoping to secure approval
3. Trying to establish identity through achievement

God's order:

1. Identity given (you are My beloved child)
2. Approval declared (I am well-pleased with you in Christ)
3. Now live from that security

How This Changes Everything

In Ministry:

- FOR approval: Serving to validate worth, needing recognition
- FROM approval: Serving from overflow, content in hiddenness

In Work:

- FOR approval: Worth tied to achievement, identity in productivity
- FROM approval: Excellence for God's glory, identity in being His child

In Relationships:

- FOR approval: Using people to feel valuable, needing their validation
- FROM approval: Free to genuinely love without needing anything back

In Failure:

- FOR approval: Devastating—proves unworthiness
- FROM approval: Disappointing but not devastating—worth already secure

In Success:

- FOR approval: Temporarily satisfying but never enough
- FROM approval: Grateful but not needed—already accepted

Discussion Questions

1. **The diagnostic:** Think about your week. Were you living FOR approval (trying to earn) or FROM approval (already secure)? What's the evidence?
2. In what area of life are you most enslaved to others' opinions?
 - Work performance?
 - Ministry effectiveness?
 - Parenting success?
 - Physical appearance?
 - Financial status?
3. **For fathers:** How would your parenting change if you didn't need your kids' success to validate your worth as a father?
4. **For married men:** How would your marriage change if you didn't need your wife's approval to feel like a man?
5. **The freedom question:** What would you do differently if you truly believed you're already completely approved by God right now?

Freedom from People-Pleasing

Galatians 1:10 - *"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ."*

Signs You're Enslaved to People-Pleasing:

- Can't say no without guilt

- Constantly anxious about what others think
- Changing behavior based on who's watching
- Need constant reassurance and validation
- Avoiding necessary conflict to keep people happy
- Resentful when service isn't appreciated

Freedom Living FROM Approval Brings:

- Can say no when needed
- Others' opinions don't control you
- Consistent character regardless of audience
- Secure without constant validation
- Can speak hard truth in love
- Serve joyfully without needing thanks

Practical Application

This Week:

- Identify one area where you're living FOR approval—commit to living FROM approval there
- Do something that serves God but might disappoint people (say a needed no, speak an uncomfortable truth, choose faithfulness over popularity)
- Daily: Read and meditate on your identity verses (Ephesians 1:3-6, Romans 8:1, 1 John 3:1)
- Ask: "Am I doing this FROM love or FOR love?"
- Memorize Matthew 11:28-30

Accountability Questions for Next Week

1. What area did you identify where you're living FOR approval? What happened when you tried to live FROM approval there?
2. What did you do that served God but risked people's disapproval? How did it go?
3. Where did you catch yourself performing FOR approval this week?
4. How did meditating on your identity verses affect you?

SESSION 10: THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

Sanctified Motives in Action

Opening Question: *What's different about you now compared to when we started this study?*

Scripture Foundation

Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 5:17 "*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*"

Supporting Texts:

- Philippians 1:6 - "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"
- Romans 12:1-2 - "*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"
- 1 Corinthians 10:12 - "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*"
- James 5:16 - "*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.*"

Key Concepts

The Tension We Live In:

Already Sanctified:

- Positionally holy in Christ
- Declared righteous
- Fully accepted
- Complete in Him

Not Yet Fully Sanctified:

- Progressively being made holy
- Being conformed to His image
- Growing in maturity
- Still struggling with sin

Both are true simultaneously.

Quote: *"We are not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."* - C.S. Lewis

What Sanctified Motives Look Like

In Work:

- Excellence without idolatry
- Working as for the Lord (Colossians 3:23-24)
- Identity in Christ, not in career
- Able to rest without guilt

In Relationships:

- Love without manipulation
- Giving without keeping score
- Serving toward their independence, not our necessity
- Celebrating their growth beyond needing us

In Ministry:

- Service without recognition-seeking
- Genuinely happy when others succeed in "our" area
- Content with behind-the-scenes faithfulness

- Measuring by obedience, not by results

In Giving:

- Generosity without strings attached
- Anonymous when possible
- No mental ledger
- Cheerful, not grudging

In Worship:

- Genuine intimacy vs. religious performance
- Worshiping God whether feelings are high or flat
- Monday-Saturday obedience, not just Sunday singing
- God Himself as satisfaction, not worship experiences

Ongoing Vigilance

1 Corinthians 10:12 - *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."*

The moment you think you've arrived is the moment you're most vulnerable.

Why Vigilance Is Needed:

- The flesh never fully dies this side of heaven
- Old patterns try to reassert themselves
- New areas of needed transformation are constantly revealed
- Pride creeps in when we see progress

Remaining Teachable:

- Stay open to Scripture's searching
- Receive correction without defensiveness

- Maintain humility about spiritual maturity
- Seek feedback from trusted people
- Acknowledge when you're wrong

Quote: *"Be patient with yourself. God is."* - Brennan Manning

Community and Accountability

James 5:16 - *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed."*

Why You Need Community:

- You cannot accurately assess yourself alone
- You have blind spots you cannot see
- Sin thrives in secrecy
- Isolation breeds shame
- Accountability provides protection

Characteristics of Safe People:

- Demonstrate grace, not just judgment
- Honest about their own struggles
- Keep confidences
- Can speak truth in love
- Point you to Christ
- Accessible and consistent

Moving Forward Together:

- Continue meeting regularly
- Keep asking hard questions

- Maintain the no-pretense culture
- Celebrate growth
- Confess struggles
- Pray for each other

Discussion Questions

1. **Celebration:** Where have you seen genuine transformation in your motives over these 10 weeks?
2. **Honesty:** Where are you still struggling? Where do fleshly motives still dominate?
3. **Looking ahead:** What practices will you continue to maintain transformation?
4. **Accountability:** Who in this group can you commit to staying connected with? Who will you give permission to ask hard questions?
5. **Application:** What's one specific change you're committing to based on what God has shown you?

Creating Your Personal Plan

Answer these questions:

1. **What are my top 2-3 areas of needed ongoing transformation?**

2. **What daily practices will I maintain?**

- Morning:

- Throughout day:

- Evening:

3. **Who will be my accountability partner(s)?**

- Primary partner:

- Secondary support:

- Meeting frequency:

4. What triggers my fleshly patterns most?

- At work:
- At home:
- In ministry:
- With finances:

5. What Scripture will I memorize and meditate on?

6. How will I review progress?

- Weekly check-in:
- Monthly review:
- Quarterly deep dive:

Practical Application

This Week:

- Complete your personal plan (above)
- Schedule ongoing accountability meetings
- Choose your continuing daily practices
- Share your plan with accountability partner
- Identify one person you'll confess to regularly

Going Forward:

- Daily: Continue chosen spiritual practices
- Weekly: Meet with accountability partner
- Monthly: Review progress and adjust plan
- Quarterly: Deep examination using Psalm 139:23-24

- Ongoing: Stay connected to this group

Final Charge

Men, you've done hard work.

You've examined motives you'd rather ignore. You've faced patterns you'd rather hide. You've confessed sins you'd rather justify. You've invited searching you'd rather avoid.

But this isn't the end—it's the beginning.

Transformation is a journey, not a destination. You're not finished, but you're on the path. You haven't arrived, but you're moving forward.

Remember:

You cannot transform yourself—that's the Spirit's work. You can cooperate with transformation—through surrender and dependence. You don't do this alone—you have brothers and the Spirit.

Trust the promise: *"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6)

Now go:

- Live from approval, not for approval
- Walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh
- Serve from love, not for recognition
- Depend on grace, not on effort
- Rest in His faithfulness

And remember: You are beloved sons of God. You are being transformed from glory to glory. You are not alone in this battle.

Let's pray together.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father,

Thank You for these ten weeks. For what You've revealed—we're grateful. For what You're transforming—we're hopeful. For what You will complete—we're confident.

We confess we cannot transform ourselves. We acknowledge we need Your Spirit's power. We surrender our motives to Your searching. We trust Your faithfulness to complete what You've begun.

Continue Your work in us: Expose what we cannot see. Transform what we cannot change. Purify what we cannot cleanse. Sanctify what we cannot perfect.

Keep us dependent on You. Keep us honest with each other. Keep us growing in grace. Keep us walking by the Spirit.

And until the day when transformation is complete, When we see You face to face, When we are finally fully like You— Sustain us by Your grace. Strengthen us by Your Spirit. Secure us in Your love.

To You be the glory, In the church and in Christ Jesus, To all generations forever and ever.

Amen.

APPENDIX: RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED GROWTH

Weekly Accountability Questions

For your ongoing meetings, use these questions:

1. Where did you see the Spirit's fruit this week?
2. Where did fleshly motives surface?
3. What did you confess and to whom?

4. Where are you striving instead of abiding?
5. What Scripture is God using to transform you?
6. Where do you need prayer and support?
7. What's one specific way you're living FROM approval rather than FOR approval?

Monthly Review Questions

Once a month, go deeper:

1. Looking at the past month, where do I see genuine transformation?
2. What patterns are persisting that need continued attention?
3. How are my daily practices going—what needs adjustment?
4. Where am I experiencing God's grace most powerfully?
5. What new areas is God highlighting for transformation?
6. Am I staying connected to community or isolating?
7. What's one thing I'll focus on this coming month?

Key Scriptures to Return To

- **Romans 8:1-17** - No condemnation, living by Spirit
- **Galatians 5:16-26** - Walking by Spirit, fruit vs. works of flesh
- **Ephesians 1:3-14** - Identity in Christ, chosen and beloved
- **Philippians 3:7-14** - Knowing Christ, pressing on
- **1 Corinthians 13** - Love as ultimate test of motives
- **Psalm 139** - God's searching and our invitation
- **Matthew 11:28-30** - Coming to Jesus for rest

Recommended Reading

- **The Ragamuffin Gospel** by Brennan Manning
- **The Pursuit of Holiness** by Jerry Bridges
- **Respectable Sins** by Jerry Bridges
- **The Divine Conspiracy** by Dallas Willard
- **Knowing God** by J.I. Packer
- **The Mortification of Sin** by John Owen (modernized version)

LEADER'S NOTES

Facilitating EMC Sessions

Your Role as Leader:

1. **Model Honesty** - Be the first to be vulnerable about your struggles
2. **Create Safety** - Enforce confidentiality, respond with grace
3. **Ask Follow-up Questions** - Don't let surface answers pass
4. **Keep it Real** - This isn't a lecture; it's a discussion among brothers
5. **Point to Christ** - Always bring it back to grace, not just self-improvement
6. **Hold Men Accountable** - Love them enough to ask hard questions
7. **Pray** - For each man, each session, for transformation

Session Format (90 minutes):

- 0-10 min: Opening, accountability from last week
- 10-30 min: Teaching on the session's topic
- 30-60 min: Discussion questions

- 60-75 min: Application and commitment
- 75-90 min: Prayer (for each other specifically)

Ground Rules:

- No phones during session
- No advice-giving unless asked
- No "fixing" each other
- Respond to confession with grace, not judgment
- What's shared here stays here
- Challenge each other, but in love

When Men Resist:

- Some will resist honesty—model it yourself first
- Some will intellectualize—keep bringing it back to heart
- Some will minimize—don't let them off easy
- Some will perform—call it out gently but firmly

Prayer for Leaders:

Father, give me wisdom to lead these men well. Help me model the vulnerability I'm asking of them. Give me courage to ask hard questions. Give me grace to respond to confession. Make me a safe person. Use this group to transform us all. In Jesus' name, Amen.

EMC: Every Man Complete *"That we may present every man complete in Christ."* (Colossians 1:28)