

the
every man
series

being God's man...

in tough times

R e a l M e n . R e a l L i f e . P o w e r f u l T r u t h .

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BEING GOD'S MAN...IN TOUGH TIMES

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welcome to the every man

Bible study series

As Christian men, we crave true-to-life, honest, and revealing Bible study curricula that will equip us for the battles that rage in our lives. We are looking for resources that will get us into our Bibles in the context of mutually accountable relationships with other men. But like superheroes who wear masks and work hard to conceal their true identities, most of us find ourselves isolated and working alone on the major issues we face. Many of us present a carefully designed public self, while hiding our private self from view. This is not God's plan for us.

Let's face it. We all have trouble being honest with ourselves, particularly in front of other men.

As developers of a men's ministry, we believe that many of the problems among Christian men today are direct consequences of an inability to practice biblical openness—being honest about our struggles, questions, and temptations—and to connect with one another. Our external lives may be in order, but storms of unprocessed conflict, loss, and fear are eroding our resolve to maintain integrity. Sadly, hurting Christian men are flocking to unhealthy avenues of relief instead of turning to God's Word and to one another.

We believe the solution to this problem lies in creating opportunities for meaningful relationships among men. That's why we

designed this Bible study series to be thoroughly interactive. When a man practices biblical openness with other men, he moves from secrecy to candor, from isolation to connection, and from pretense to authenticity.

Kenny and Todd developed the study sessions at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, where they teach the men's morning Bible studies. There, men hear an outline of the Bible passage, read the verses together, and then answer a group discussion question at their small-group tables. The teaching pastor then facilitates further discussion within the larger group.

This approach is a huge success for many reasons, but the key is that, deep down, men really do want close friendships with other guys. We don't enjoy living on the barren islands of our own secret struggles. However, many men choose to process life, relationships, and pressures individually because they fear the vulnerability required in small-group gatherings. *Suppose someone sees behind my carefully constructed image? Suppose I encounter rejection after revealing one of my worst sins?* Men willingly take risks in business and the stock market, sports and recreation, but we do not easily risk our inner lives.

Many church ministries are now helping men win this battle, providing them with opportunities to experience Christian male companionship centered in God's Word. This study series aims to supplement and expand that good work around the country. If these lessons successfully reach you, then they will also reach every relationship and domain that you influence. That is our heartfelt prayer for every man in your group.

how to use this study guide

As you prepare for each session, first review the **Key Verse** and **Goals for Growth**, which reveal the focus of the study at hand. Discuss as a group whether or not you will commit to memorizing the Key Verse for each session. The **Head Start** section then explains why these goals are necessary and worthwhile. Each member of your small group should complete the **Connect with the Word** section *before* the small-group sessions. Consider this section to be your personal Bible study for the week. This will ensure that everyone has spent some time interacting with the biblical texts for that session and is prepared to share responses and personal applications. (You may want to mark or highlight any questions that were difficult or particularly meaningful, so you can focus on those during the group discussion.)

When you gather in your small group, you'll begin by reading aloud the **Head Start** section to remind everyone of the focus for the current session. The leader will then invite the group to share any questions, concerns, insights, or comments arising from their personal Bible study during the past week. If your group is large, consider breaking into subgroups of three or four people (no more than six) at this time.

Next get into **Connect with the Group**, starting with the **Group Opener**. These openers are designed to get at the heart of each week's lesson. They focus on how the men in your group relate to the passage and topic you are about to discuss. The group leader will read the opener for that week's session aloud and then facilitate interaction on

the **Discussion Questions** that follow. (Remember: Not everyone has to offer an answer for every question.)

Leave time after your discussion to complete the **Standing Strong** exercises, which challenge each man to consider, *What's my next move?* As you openly express your thoughts to the group, you'll be able to hold one another accountable to reach for your goals.

Finally, close in **prayer**, either in your subgroups or in the larger group. You may want to use this time to reflect on and respond to what God has done in your group during the session. Also invite group members to share their personal joys and concerns, and use this as “grist” for your prayer time together.

By way of review, each lesson is divided into the following sections:

To be read or completed *before* the small-group session:

- **Key Verse**
- **Goals for Growth**
- **Head Start**
- **Connect with the Word** (home Bible study: 30-40 minutes)

To be completed *during* the small-group session:

- Read aloud the **Head Start** section (5 minutes)
- Discuss personal reaction to **Connect with the Word** (10 minutes)
- **Connect with the Group** (includes the **Group Opener** and discussion of the heart of the lesson: 30-40 minutes)
- **Standing Strong** (includes having one person pray for the group; challenges each man to take action: 20 minutes)

everyday life: no do-overs!

Have you ever wanted to rewind your life and start over? It would be like playing a country-western song backward: the dog would come home, the truck would get fixed, and the wife would return. If only it were that simple to deal with life's problems! Stuff happens, and it's not always the kind of stuff we've planned for. We certainly can't make it "un-happen."

If this is how you feel, you're not alone. You're not the only one going through tough times. This is the everyday life of the ordinary man. In fact, we're all ordinary men going through extraordinary and often painful circumstances.

In the Bible, the young David had his difficult days as well. He was perfectly happy being a shepherd boy in the countryside of Israel. Wild beasts were the greatest threat to David, but he learned to handle them. It was the rest of life that wore him down. People like King Saul constantly harassed him, and he often had to run for his life—even after he became a great national leader. Yet enemy armies were easier to deal with than family issues back home.

Can you relate? We conquer giants at work, but on the home

front, battles continue to rage. Whether we're battling with a tough marriage, an out-of-control temper, a disabling illness, or even kids gone wild, our problems often seem insurmountable.

Most of us have come to realize that every day we enter a world of circumstances that are beyond our control. (It only took us about forty years to figure that out.) What *might* go wrong *will* go wrong. (And if you don't believe us, you're still in your thirties!) The stove will break just after we fix the fridge. The car's transmission will give out just as we're agonizing over how to finance braces for the middle child. The company will decide to downsize and eliminate our department just after we've moved clear across the country for a better job and a better life.

What are you going to do about it? Are you going to fight and squirm and shake your fists at God? Are you going to demand a do-over? Or are you going to learn from everyday life and draw closer to God in tough times? The secret to coping with tough times is realizing that you can't control what happens to you. *You can only control the way you respond.*

Our study takes us through the life of David. His adventures and challenges will be our road map as we investigate how he responded to tough times.

We have discovered that most of life is lived between identifying where we want to go...and getting there. That is, life is not as much about *arriving* as it is about *traveling*. We spend most of our lives trying to get somewhere. Most men don't achieve peak performance early in life. We don't become successful in our twenties or thirties. Instead, we struggle to do our jobs, raise our kids, and make our mar-

riages go the distance. But looking back, we find that the road we've traveled has become the substance of our lives. In David's case, he didn't just move from the hills of Palestine to a palace in Jerusalem. There was a lot of rough road in between.

Most of us want to get somewhere in life, without realizing that it will take most of our lives to get there. Few of us figure this out when we are young, nor do we arrive early. Along the way there will be plenty of rough roads—the kind God uses to do His best work in us. So David's life is a lot more like ours than we might have thought. We can learn a lot from him. He traveled the first half well.

Our goal in this study is to stimulate personal reflection and honest dialogue with God and with other men. As you work through each session, look in the mirror at your own life and ask yourself some hard questions. Whether you are doing this study individually or in a group, realize that being completely honest with yourself, with God, and with others will produce the greatest growth.

May you be moved to embrace God's plan during the tough times in a way that will leave an ongoing legacy of faith. As you do, you'll bring glory to God and hope to your brothers in Christ.

refusing to compromise

Key Verse

Now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command. (1 Samuel 13:14)

Goals for Growth

- Recognize that God requires obedience.
- Realize the danger of selective obedience in the heat of the moment.
- Commit to pursuing real obedience to the Lord during tough times.

Head Start

Men experience tough times; God never promised we wouldn't. And though the Bible doesn't reveal how to escape our hardships, it does show us how to get through them. James 1:2 says, "*Whenever you*

face trials...” (emphasis added). So, it’s not *whether* we will face tough times, but *when*.

We can learn a lot about dealing with tough times from David. First, in the midst of hardship, he didn’t compromise—which says a lot about the kind of man David was. Many men cave under pressure, but David held strong. Here’s what was going on at the time. Israel was involved in a religious war. The priesthood was corrupt, and the judges were dishonest and abusive. To add insult to spiritual injury, the enemy Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant. The cumulative impact this had on the people of Israel was to plunge them into spiritual darkness. They refused to listen to the prophet Samuel’s warnings, and they openly rebelled against God’s Word. With their eyes diverted from God, they looked at the world around them and saw what appeared to be the perfect solution: a king.

Although the prophet Samuel warned the people about the consequences of demanding a king, their tunnel vision and lack of concern for God’s plan created a powerful movement to find a king. (See 1 Samuel 8.) So God gave Israel over to its careless and impatient demands and allowed the Plan B king to take the throne. This king set the stage for Israel’s long and tumultuous history.

The man Samuel anointed as king was a tall, impressive, good-looking young man named Saul. This man and his exploits significantly shaped David’s own destiny. In fact, we often find that Saul serves as the classic bad example when we contrast his actions with David’s. Saul became David’s employer, nemesis, and bounty hunter. Since David had to deal with Saul during the early years of his reign as the second anointed king of Israel, we need to understand the rival king who caused David so much grief.

As we will discover in this session, Saul typically reacted to challenges very differently than David. Instead of obeying God and refusing to compromise, he caved in and tried to engineer the circumstances to his own benefit. Sound familiar? So the big question to keep in mind as you proceed: *When times get tough, are you more like Saul or David?*

Connect with the Word

Read 1 Samuel 13:1-14.

1. Why did Saul feel “compelled” to disobey the instructions God gave through the prophet Samuel?
2. What do you think Saul’s panic revealed about his relationship with God?
3. What did Saul say to Samuel when the priest confronted his disobedience?

4. In what kinds of situations today do men respond as Saul did?

5. When have you faced a time of panic or confusion like Saul did?
What were your options? What did you choose to do?

6. What can a man do to prepare himself to make good choices at such times?

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-3,7-12.

7. How did Saul get “creative” with God’s very clear instructions?

8. What reasoning did Saul use to convince himself to take the action he did (verse 9)?

9. What is the problem with selective obedience to God?

10. As you look at your own life, in what specific areas do you practice selective obedience to God?

11. What does verse 12 suggest about Saul's heart? Does this verse speak to your own heart right now? Explain.

12. If you were to rate yourself on the "Saul Scale" (a scale of 1 to 10: 1 = Saul and I are total opposites; 10 = Saul and I are twins), how like or unlike him would you consider yourself to be? Why

did you give yourself this rating? (*Suggestion:* Jot down some notes that you can share with your group.)

Connect with the Group

Group Opener

Read the group opener aloud and discuss the questions that follow.

(Suggestion: As you begin your group discussion time in each of the following sessions, consider forming smaller groups of three to six men. This will allow more time for discussion and give everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts and struggles.)

I (Todd) worked in commercial real estate for five years right out of college. Those were good years to be in the market. Developers were buying up land faster than we could find it. Office morale was high, and most of us were making a fairly good living. On Friday afternoons we would get together for a few beers to celebrate the week. Not a big deal. As employees, we were free to choose whether or not we wanted to participate. We could stay a few minutes or a few hours. It was up to each of us. Still, not a huge deal.

The problem came when guys had a little too much to drink and called in the strippers. As a Christian I had decided ahead of time what I would participate in and what I wouldn't. I wanted to be with the guys, but I didn't want to be exposed to this kind of sin and

Standing Strong

We've all probably noticed at least one or two tendencies in our lives that match something we saw in Saul's life. Take a moment and write down a few of these tendencies:

What first step can you take to make a change in one of these areas?

Along with the other group members, commit to carrying out your plan and be ready to share your progress at the next session.