OCHORUS ORIGINALS

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Sons of the King

Strong: who you are, whose you are,
and the brave men who went before you

Ochorus

Sons of the King – 30 Days with God for Guys – Book 1

Strong: who you are, whose you are, and the brave men who went before you

Ochorus Originals

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OCHORUS

About Ochorus

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Matthew 10:8

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About this work

Sons of the King is an original Ochorus devotional series for boys aged 9 to 12, a brother to Daughters of the King and our co-ed series Rooted. Its anchor is God's promise in 2 Corinthians 6:18: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters." This first book is about identity and strength: what makes a guy strong, when the world keeps measuring him by his scores, his muscles and how tough he looks.

The first week hears what God says about him: a new name like Peter's, worth that is more than his score, a son and heir, a compassionate Father, strength from God, and Gideon, the least. The second is about strength under control: Samson, anger, Cain and the sin at the door, revenge, the gentleness of Jesus, and why real men cry. The third is about friends and brothers, from iron sharpening iron and Barnabas the encourager to finding a mentor, treating girls with respect, and standing up for the kid nobody likes. The fourth is about courage with Caleb, Jonathan, Elijah, Stephen and the boy king Josiah. The fifth is about work, honor and faith, ending with "Be men of courage... Do everything in love."

Every day follows the same short pattern: a Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible, a teaching, a question to think about, one thing to try, and a prayer. Each week ends with a true story from our Brave for God books: Samuel Crowther, Festo Kivengere, C.T. Studd, Eric Liddell and William Carey. The book builds character and faith through the men of Scripture

and does not teach adult roles. Many boys will enjoy reading it with a father, grandfather or mentor.

Introduction: You Are a Son of the King

What makes a guy strong?

Ask around and you'll get lots of answers. Muscles. Being fast. Winning. Being the best at a game. Never looking scared. Never crying. Being the one everybody looks up to.

Some of those things are fine. It's great to be fast or to win a game! But the Bible has a very different idea of what real strength looks like. And it starts with a very different question: not *What can you do?* but ***Whose are you?***

> *"And: 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'"*
> *— 2 Corinthians 6:18 (BSB)*

If you belong to Jesus, you are a **son of the King**. The Lord Almighty, the most powerful being in the universe, calls Himself your Father. That's where real strength comes from.

Being a guy today isn't always easy. There's pressure to prove yourself. To be tough. To win. To look like you've got it all together. To laugh at things you know aren't funny, and to hide what you really feel. It's easy to measure yourself by your scores, your stats, your level in a game or how many people think you're cool. And it's easy to forget who you really are.

That's why we're going to spend 30 days remembering.

What's in this book

- **Week 1 — Who I Really Am.** What God says about you, and why your worth isn't your score.
- **Week 2 — Strength Under Control.** Anger, revenge, gentleness, and why real men can cry.
- **Week 3 — Friends and Brothers.** Friends who make you better, mentors, and respecting girls.
- **Week 4 — Courage.** Caleb, Jonathan, Elijah, Stephen and a boy king.
- **Week 5 — Work, Honor and Faith.** Working hard, keeping your word, guarding your eyes and standing firm.

At the end of each week, you'll also meet a real man from history who trusted God in amazing ways. You can read their whole stories in the *Brave for God* books.

How each day works

Every day takes about five to ten minutes and has five parts:

1. **The verse.** A short passage from the Bible. Read it slowly.
2. **The teaching.** What the verse means for a guy like you.
3. **Think about it.** A question to think about, or talk about with your dad, a friend or a leader.
4. **Try this.** One small thing to do today.
5. **The prayer.** A prayer to pray. Add your own words too!

Tips

- **Grab a notebook.** Write down your answers, your prayers and anything God shows you.
- **Read with someone.** A dad, grandpa, uncle, older brother, coach or youth leader would be a great reading partner.
- **Be real.** You don't have to act tough with God. He already knows everything.
- **Missed a day? Just keep going.** He isn't keeping score.

Let's find out what the King says about His sons.

For parents, grandparents and leaders

Sons of the King is an Ochorus devotional series for boys aged 9 to 12, written alongside our series for girls, *Daughters of the King*, and our co-ed series *Rooted*. Book 1 focuses on identity and character: worth that comes from God rather than performance, and strength that is under control. It covers anger, friendship, courage, integrity and work, through men of the Bible who trusted Him. It aims to build character and faith, and it doesn't address adult roles. Scripture is quoted from the Berean Standard Bible. Each week ends with a short true story from our *Brave for God* series. Two days may deserve a conversation. Day 17 is about treating girls with respect. Day 27 is about guarding what you look at, especially on screens, and it tells boys to tell a parent if they see something online that troubles them.

Day 1 — A New Name

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John's testimony and followed Jesus. He first found his brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated as Christ). Andrew brought him to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which is translated as Peter)."
— John 1:40–42 (BSB)

Andrew had just met Jesus, and he couldn't keep it to himself. He ran and found his brother Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah!" Then he brought Simon to meet Jesus.

Simon was a fisherman. He was loud, bold and a little rough around the edges. He often spoke before he thought. He wasn't a scholar or a priest or anyone important.

But when Jesus looked at Simon, He saw something more. Jesus said, "You are Simon son of John. **You will be called Cephas.**" *Cephas* is an Aramaic word, and *Peter* is the Greek word. Both mean **rock**.

Think about that. The first time Jesus met Simon, He gave him a new name. Not a name that described who Simon was that day, but who Simon would **become**. Simon wasn't very rock-like yet! He would mess up many times. He'd sink when he tried to walk on water. He'd even deny Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested.

But Jesus saw the man Peter would become: a rock-solid leader who would preach to thousands, lead the church and stand strong for Jesus his whole life.

People give us names too. Some are nice. Some aren't. *Klutz. Slow. Loser. Nerd. Troublemaker.* Sometimes we even give ourselves names: *I'm just not good at anything. I always mess up. I'm the weird one.*

But Jesus sees you differently. He doesn't only see who you are today, with all your mistakes. He sees who you can become with Him. And the most important name He gives you is this one: **son**. Son of the King.

The names other people call you don't get the final word. Jesus does.

Think about it: What "names" have people called you, or have you called yourself? What do you think Jesus would call you instead?

Try this: Write your name in your notebook. Next to it, write "Son of the King." Then write one thing you think Jesus sees in you that you might not see yet.

Dear Jesus, thank You that You saw Peter for who he would become, and You see me that way too. Help me listen to what You say about me, not the names other people call me. Thank You that I am a son of the King. In Your name, Amen.

Day 2 — More Than My Score

"Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the wealthy man in his riches. But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, who exercises loving devotion, justice and righteousness on the earth—for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.
— Jeremiah 9:23–24 (BSB)

Scores. Stats. Grades. Levels. Rankings. Followers. Guys are surrounded by numbers that seem to say how good they are.

Maybe you're the best player on your team, and everybody knows it. Maybe you're always picked last. Maybe you have the highest grades in your class, or maybe school is a constant struggle. Maybe you're at the top of the leaderboard in your favorite game, or maybe you can never get past a certain level.

It's easy to believe that your number is your worth. If you win, you matter. If you lose, you don't.

God said something to His people through the prophet Jeremiah that turns all of that upside down. "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom" (being smart), "nor the strong man in his strength" (being athletic and tough), "nor the wealthy man in his riches" (having money and cool stuff).

Those were the three big things people bragged about back then. They're pretty much the same things guys brag about today!

God isn't saying it's bad to be smart, strong or rich. Those can be gifts from Him. He's saying they're not the thing to build your life on. They don't last. Someone smarter, stronger or richer always comes along. And none of them can make you right with God.

So what *should* you boast about? "That he understands and **knows Me**." The most important thing about you isn't your score. It's whether you know God.

And look at what God says He's like: He shows "loving devotion, justice and righteousness." He's loving, fair and good. And He says, "I delight in these things."

When you know God, you don't have to prove yourself with numbers anymore. You already have the best thing there is. Win or lose, first or last, you're still a son of the King.

Think about it: What "score" do you tend to measure yourself by? How would it change things to boast in knowing God instead?

Try this: The next time you win or lose at something, say to yourself, "My worth isn't my score. I know God, and He knows me."

Dear God, help me not to find my worth in how smart, strong or cool I am. Help me care most about knowing You. Thank You that I matter to You whether I win or lose. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3 — Son and Heir

> *"And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, you are also an heir through God."*
> *— Galatians 4:6–7 (BSB)*

In the Roman world when Paul wrote this, there was a huge difference between a **slave** and a **son**.

A slave in a rich household might live in the same house as the family. He might eat their food and work in their fields. But he didn't belong. He had no say. He could be sold. And he would never inherit anything.

A son was completely different. A son belonged. He could come to his father anytime. And one day, everything his father owned would be his. He was an **heir**.

Paul says that if you belong to Jesus, you're not a slave to God. You're a **son**. And that means you're also an **heir**. Everything God has promised His family, forgiveness, His presence, eternal life and a place in His kingdom, belongs to you.

Some guys think about God like a strict boss. *I'd better do everything right, or I'll be in trouble.* They try to earn God's approval by being good enough. That's thinking like a slave.

But you don't have to earn your place in God's family. Jesus already earned it for you. You were adopted as a son, and nothing can undo that.

Look at the words Paul uses: God sent His Spirit into our hearts "crying out, '**Abba**, Father!'" *Abba* was the word little Jewish children used for their dad, something like "Daddy" or "Papa." It's a close, warm, trusting word. Jesus Himself used it when He prayed.

God doesn't want you to come to Him like a nervous employee going into the boss's office. He wants you to come like a son running to his dad.

That changes how you live. A son doesn't obey his father to *become* a son. He obeys because he already is one, and because he loves his dad.

Think about it: Do you usually think about God more like a strict boss or like a loving Father? Why?

Try this: When you pray today, start with "Abba, Father." Talk to Him like a son who knows he's loved.

Abba, Father, thank You that I'm not a slave but a son. Thank You that I don't have to earn my place in Your family. Help me come to You like a son who knows he's loved, and help me obey You because I love You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4 — A Father's Compassion

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are dust."
— Psalm 103:13–14 (BSB)

Imagine a little boy learning to ride a bike. He wobbles. He falls. He scrapes his knee and starts crying. What does a good dad do?

He doesn't yell, "Get up! Stop being a baby!" He runs over, kneels down, checks the scrape and gives him a hug. Then he helps him back onto the bike and holds the seat while he tries again.

That's **compassion**: caring about someone who is hurting or struggling, and wanting to help.

David wrote that God is like that: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him."

Then David explains why: "For He knows our frame; He is mindful that we are dust." God made us. He knows we're not perfect. He knows we get tired, scared and weak. He knows we mess up. He doesn't expect us to be superheroes.

Some guys have great dads who show them this kind of compassion. Some guys have dads who are tough, distant or rarely around. Some have dads who have hurt them. Some have a stepdad, a grandpa or an uncle who fills that role. Every guy's story is different.

If your dad is great, thank God for him! He gives you a picture of what God is like.

If your dad has let you down or isn't around, know this: God is the Father who never lets you down. He never gives up on you. He never gets tired of you. He is patient when you fail and gentle when you're hurting. (And if anyone at home is hurting you, please tell a trusted adult. God wants you to be safe.)

Some guys think they have to impress God, or that He's always disappointed in them. But Psalm 103 shows a Father who kneels down beside His son when he falls, helps him up and holds the seat while he tries again.

Think about it: How does it change things to know God understands you're "dust," that you're not expected to be perfect?

Try this: Think of a time you messed up and felt like God must be disappointed. Talk to Him about it, and picture Him as the dad kneeling beside the kid who fell off his bike.

Dear Father, thank You for having compassion on me. Thank You that You know I'm not perfect and You love me anyway. When I fall, help me run to You instead of hiding. Thank You for being the perfect Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5 — Strength from God

"I love You, O LORD, my strength... It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way clear. He makes my feet like those of a deer and stations me upon the heights."
— Psalm 18:1, 32–33 (BSB)

David was a warrior. He fought lions and bears as a shepherd boy. He killed a giant with a sling. He led armies into battle and won victory after victory. If anybody could brag about his own strength, it was David.

But look at how he started this song: "I love You, O LORD, **my strength**."

David knew where his strength really came from. Not from his muscles or his skill or his experience. From God. "It is God who arms me with strength."

David wrote Psalm 18 after God had rescued him from all his enemies, including King Saul, who had chased him for years. Looking back, David could see that it wasn't his own power that had kept him alive. God had been with him the whole time.

Then David uses a cool picture: "He makes my feet like those of a deer and stations me upon the heights." Have you ever seen a mountain goat or a deer leaping across steep rocks? They move with amazing balance and confidence in places where a person would slip and fall. David said God made him steady and sure-footed, even on dangerous ground.

This is the kind of strength God wants to give you. Not just the kind that lifts weights, but the kind that stands firm when life gets hard. The strength to do the right thing when it's unpopular. The strength to say no to temptation. The strength to keep going when you want to quit. The strength to be kind when you want to get even.

Physical strength is good. It's fine to work out, play hard and grow strong! But the strongest men in the Bible knew that their real strength came from God. And that kind of strength is available to every guy, whether you're the biggest kid in class or the smallest.

Think about it: Where do you need God's strength most right now: at school, at home, with friends, or in some struggle?

Try this: Memorize Psalm 18:32: "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way clear." Say it when you need courage today.

Dear God, You are my strength. Thank You that my strength doesn't have to come from me. Arm me with Your strength today. Make my feet steady when life feels slippery. Help me do what's right. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 6 — Gideon, the Least

"And the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and said, 'The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.'... 'Please, my Lord,' Gideon replied, 'how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.'"
— Judges 6:12, 15 (BSB)

Gideon was hiding.

For seven years, an enemy people called the Midianites had been raiding Israel. Every harvest, they swept in like a swarm of locusts and stole everything. God's people were so afraid that they hid in caves in the mountains.

So Gideon was threshing wheat in a **winepress**, a pit dug in the ground, trying to hide his little bit of grain from the enemy. He was scared.

Then an angel of the LORD appeared and said, "The LORD is with you, **O mighty man of valor**."

Valor means courage in battle. Can you imagine Gideon's face? *Mighty man of valor? Me? I'm hiding in a hole!*

Gideon had lots of reasons why God had the wrong guy. "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." In other words, *I'm the least important guy from the least important family. I'm nobody.*

But God didn't call Gideon a mighty man of valor because of what Gideon already was. He called him that because of what God was going to

do through him. "Go in the strength you have... Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14). And then God promised, "Surely I will be with you."

God later told Gideon to send most of his army home, because God wanted everyone to know that He was the one who saved them, not Gideon's strength or numbers. With just three hundred men, God gave Gideon a huge victory over the Midianites.

Maybe you feel like Gideon sometimes. Too young. Too small. Too scared. Not important. You might have a list of reasons why God couldn't use you.

But God loves to use guys who know they can't do it on their own. He doesn't need you to be the strongest or the bravest. He just needs you to trust Him and go.

A true story: When Samuel Crowther was about twelve years old, raiders attacked his town in West Africa and carried him away to be sold as a slave. He ended up chained below the deck of a slave ship, sure he'd never see home again. But a British ship chased the slave ship down and set everyone free. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, the boy who had been a slave learned to read, came to know Jesus, and later translated the Bible into his own people's language. The boy nobody thought mattered became the first African bishop of the Anglican Church. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: What reasons do you give for why God couldn't use you? What does Gideon's story say about them?

Try this: Write down one thing you think you're "too young" or "too small" to do for God. Then pray, "God, go with me, and I'll go."

Dear God, sometimes I feel like Gideon: too small, too young, too scared. Thank You that You see more in me than I see in myself. Go with me, and help me go in the strength You give. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7 — The Strongest Man Who Fell

"Then she called out, 'Samson, the Philistines are here!' When Samson awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him."
— Judges 16:20 (BSB)

Samson was probably the strongest man who ever lived. Before he was even born, an angel told his parents that God had chosen him to begin rescuing Israel from their enemies, the Philistines. He was set apart for God in a special way, called a **Nazirite vow**, and part of that vow was that his hair would never be cut.

God gave Samson incredible strength. He tore apart a lion with his bare hands. He carried away a city's heavy gates on his shoulders. He fought off whole groups of enemies by himself.

But Samson had a big problem: he couldn't control himself. He did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. He lost his temper. He took revenge. He made foolish choices and hung around people who didn't love God. He treated his special calling from God like it was no big deal.

Finally, Samson told his secret to someone who was working with his enemies. While he slept, they cut his hair.

Look at what happened next: "When Samson awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.' **But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.**"

That's one of the saddest sentences in the Bible. Samson thought his strength was his own. He'd been careless with God for so long that he didn't even notice when God's power left him. The Philistines captured him, took away his eyesight and made him work as a prisoner.

At the very end of his life, Samson prayed to God one more time, and God gave him strength once more. But Samson's story is mostly a warning. He had all the strength in the world, but no self-control.

Here's the lesson: **strength without self-control is dangerous.** A guy can be strong, talented and popular. But if he can't control his temper, his choices and what he wants, he'll end up hurting himself and others.

Real strength isn't just being powerful. It's being in control of your power.

Think about it: Why do you think Samson didn't notice that God had left him? What does it look like to be careless with the gifts God gives?

Try this: Think of one area where you struggle with self-control, like your temper, screens or food. Ask God to help you with it today.

Dear God, thank You for the strength and gifts You've given me. Help me not to be careless with them like Samson. Give me self-control, so I use my strength for You and not for myself. Keep me close to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 8 — Better Than a Warrior

"He who is slow to anger is better than a warrior, and he who controls his temper is greater than one who captures a city."
— Proverbs 16:32 (BSB)

Picture the toughest warrior you can imagine. Armor. Sword. Scars from a hundred battles. He's fearless. Nobody wants to mess with him.

Now picture a mighty general who leads an army against a walled city. For weeks, his soldiers attack. Finally, they break through and capture the whole city. Everyone cheers his name.

Those are pretty impressive guys, right?

But Solomon says someone is even **greater** than them: "He who is slow to anger is better than a warrior, and he who controls his temper is greater than one who captures a city."

That's surprising! Controlling your temper is harder than winning a battle? Yes. Because conquering a city means beating an enemy outside you. Controlling your temper means beating an enemy *inside* you. And that's often the hardest fight of all.

Think about how anger shows up for guys. Losing a game and throwing the controller. Getting fouled and shoving back. A brother taking your stuff, and you punching him. Someone insulting you, and you saying something even worse back. Slamming doors. Yelling at your parents.

In those moments, it can feel like being angry makes you strong. But it actually means your anger is in charge of you. A guy who explodes every

time he's angry isn't strong. He's controlled by his feelings.

The truly strong guy is the one who can feel angry and still choose what to do. He takes a breath. He walks away. He says, "I need a minute." He talks it through instead of fighting it out.

Being angry isn't always wrong. Some things *should* make us angry, like injustice or someone being bullied. But what we do with anger matters.

"Slow to anger" means you don't blow up at every little thing. You give people the benefit of the doubt. You let small stuff go.

Think about it: What usually makes you angry? What do you usually do when you're angry?

Try this: The next time you feel your anger rising, try this: stop, take three deep breaths, and ask God, "Help me control this."

Dear God, I want to be strong in the way that really matters. Help me be slow to anger and control my temper. When I feel angry, help me stop and choose what's right instead of exploding. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9 — Sin at the Door

"'Why are you angry,' said the LORD to Cain, 'and why has your countenance fallen? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you refuse to do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires you, but you must master it.'"
— Genesis 4:6–7 (BSB)

Cain and Abel were the first two brothers in history, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a farmer, and Abel was a shepherd.

One day, both brothers brought offerings to God. Abel brought the best of his flock. God was pleased with Abel's offering, but not with Cain's. The Bible suggests Cain's heart wasn't right, and he didn't bring his best.

Cain was furious. His face fell. He was jealous of his brother.

And God came to Cain and talked with him. That's amazing! God didn't just leave Cain alone with his anger. He came to warn him.

"Why are you angry? ... If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you refuse to do what is right, **sin is crouching at your door**; it desires you, **but you must master it**."

God described sin like a wild animal, maybe a lion, crouching just outside the door, waiting to pounce. And anger was opening the door.

God gave Cain a choice. *You can master this. You can rule over it. You don't have to let it win.*

Sadly, Cain didn't listen. He let his anger and jealousy grow, and later he attacked his brother Abel and killed him. The first murder in history started

with anger that wasn't mastered.

Most guys will never do anything like what Cain did. But the pattern is still the same. Anger and jealousy start small. *He got picked and I didn't. It's not fair. I hate him.* If you let those feelings sit and grow, they can lead you to say and do things you never thought you would.

The good news is that God still says what He said to Cain: "You must master it." With God's help, you *can*. You don't have to be controlled by your anger or jealousy.

How do you master it?

- **Notice it early,** before it grows.
- **Talk to God about it** honestly.
- **Talk to someone you trust.**
- **Do what's right,** even when you don't feel like it.

Think about it: Why do you think God described sin as "crouching at your door"? What doors does anger or jealousy open in your life?

Try this: If you're jealous of or angry at someone right now, tell God about it honestly, and ask Him to help you master it before it grows.

Dear God, thank You for warning me about sin, like You warned Cain. When anger or jealousy crouches at my door, help me master it. Help me do what is right, and keep my heart from growing bitter. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 10 — Don't Get Even

"Do not say, 'I will avenge this evil!' Wait on the LORD, and He will save you."
— Proverbs 20:22 (BSB)

Someone trips you in the hallway, and everybody laughs. A kid on the other team takes a cheap shot. Your brother breaks something of yours on purpose. A friend spreads a lie about you.

What's the first thing you want to do? **Get even.** Pay them back. Make them sorry.

That feeling is really strong, especially for guys. Sometimes guys think that if you don't get even, you look weak. Everyone will think they can push you around.

But Proverbs says something different: "Do not say, 'I will avenge this evil!' **Wait on the LORD**, and He will save you."

To *avenge* means to take revenge, to pay someone back for what they did. God says, *Don't do it. Let Me handle it.*

Why?

Revenge never ends. If you hit back, they'll hit back harder, and on and on. Revenge doesn't stop the fight. It keeps it going.

Revenge turns you into the bad guy. Now you're the one doing wrong.

God is the perfect judge. He sees everything that happened. He's fair. And He promises to make things right in His way and His time. You don't

have to carry that job.

Not getting even doesn't mean you let people keep hurting you. If someone is bullying you or hurting you, **tell a trusted adult**: a parent, teacher, coach or school counselor. That's not being weak. That's being wise. It's letting the right people handle it instead of taking matters into your own hands.

It also doesn't mean pretending it didn't hurt. You can be honest with God about how angry you are. David did that all the time in the Psalms!

But then you let it go. You "wait on the LORD." You trust Him to take care of it.

It takes a lot more strength to walk away than to throw a punch. Anybody can hit back. Only a strong guy can choose not to.

Think about it: Why do you think getting even feels so good in the moment? What usually happens afterward?

Try this: The next time someone wrongs you, instead of planning how to get back at them, pray, "God, I'm giving this to You."

Dear God, when people hurt me, I want to get even. Help me leave revenge to You. Give me the strength to walk away, the wisdom to tell a grown-up when I need help, and the faith to trust You to make things right. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 11 — Gentle and Strong

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."
— Matthew 11:28–29 (BSB)

Who is the strongest man who ever lived?

Not Samson. Not David. Not a superhero or a famous athlete. It's **Jesus**.

Jesus calmed storms with a word. He walked on water. He healed diseases, cast out demons and raised the dead. He faced down religious leaders, soldiers and the Roman governor without flinching. He carried His own cross and endured the worst suffering anyone has ever faced. And then He walked out of the grave, defeating death itself.

That's strength.

But look at how Jesus describes Himself: "I am **gentle** and humble in heart."

Gentle? The strongest man who ever lived calls Himself gentle?

Yes! And that shows us something important about real strength. Gentleness isn't weakness. It's **strength under control**. It's having power and choosing to use it carefully, kindly and for the good of others.

Think about a huge, powerful horse that lets a little kid ride on its back. The horse could throw the kid off in a second. But it carries him gently. That's strength under control.

Jesus was gentle with children, holding them in His arms. He was gentle with people who were sick, sad or ashamed. He was gentle with Peter after Peter denied Him. But He was never weak. When He saw injustice or people being cheated in God's temple, He stood up strongly.

That's the kind of man Jesus wants you to become: strong *and* gentle. Strong enough to stand up for what's right, and gentle enough to be kind to the weak.

Some guys think they have to be rough and hard all the time to be real men. But the most real Man who ever lived was gentle. Being gentle with a little sibling, careful with a kid who's hurt or kind to someone who's struggling doesn't make you less of a guy. It makes you more like Jesus.

Think about it: Why do you think some guys think gentleness is weakness? How does Jesus show that it's actually strength?

Try this: Be gentle with someone today, maybe a younger kid, a pet or someone who's sad. Use your strength to help, not to push.

Dear Jesus, You are the strongest and gentlest man who ever lived. Help me be strong like You and gentle like You. Help me use my strength to protect and help others, not to hurt them. In Your name, Amen.

Day 12 — Real Men Cry

"You have taken account of my wanderings. Put my tears in Your bottle—are they not in Your book?"
— Psalm 56:8 (BSB)

"Boys don't cry." "Man up." "Stop being a baby." "Walk it off."

Lots of guys hear things like that. And many guys learn to hide their feelings. They act like nothing bothers them. They keep sadness, fear and hurt locked up inside. Sometimes the only feeling they let show is anger.

But that's not what the Bible teaches.

David, the giant-killer and warrior king, cried a lot. He cried when his best friend Jonathan died. He cried when his son was killed. He cried when he had sinned. He wrote songs full of tears. In today's verse, he says to God, "Put my tears in Your bottle." In those days, people sometimes collected precious things in little bottles. David was saying, *God, my tears matter to You. You save every one.*

And then there's Jesus. When His friend Lazarus died, "Jesus wept." When He looked over Jerusalem and saw how the people had rejected God, He cried over the city. In the garden before His arrest, He was so upset that He prayed with loud cries and tears.

If David cried and Jesus cried, then crying isn't weak. **Real men cry.**

Feelings aren't bad. God gave them to you. Sadness, fear, loneliness and hurt are all normal parts of being human. Hiding them doesn't make them

go away. It just makes them heavier, and sometimes it makes them come out in other ways, like anger or bad choices.

Here's what God wants you to know:

- **You can tell God how you really feel.** He already knows, and He cares.
- **You can talk to someone you trust,** like your dad or mom, a grandparent, a coach or a youth leader.
- **It's okay to cry.** It's not weak. It's human.
- **God keeps track of every tear.** None of your sadness is invisible to Him.

Being a strong man doesn't mean feeling nothing. It means being honest about what you feel, and bringing it to God.

A true story: Festo Kivengere was a preacher in Uganda when a cruel ruler named Idi Amin took over. Amin's soldiers killed many people, including Festo's close friend, Archbishop Janani Luwum. Festo and his wife had to escape at night, climbing over the mountains to safety. He had lost his home and his friend, and it hurt terribly. Anyone would have understood if he hated Amin. But Festo remembered Jesus praying from the cross, "Father, forgive them," and he chose love instead of hate. He even wrote a book called *I Love Idi Amin*. That didn't mean the cruel things were okay. It meant hate wouldn't rule his heart. That's strength under control. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: Why do you think many guys are taught to hide their feelings? What might happen if you hide them for a long time?

Try this: Tell God honestly about one feeling you've been hiding. Then think of one trusted person you could talk to about it too.

Dear God, thank You that my tears matter to You, and that You keep track of every one. Help me be honest with You about how I feel. Thank You that even Jesus cried. Help me be a real man like Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 13 — Iron Sharpens Iron

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."
— Proverbs 27:17 (BSB)

Have you ever seen someone sharpen a knife? One way is to rub the blade against another piece of hard metal, back and forth. The two pieces of iron rub against each other, and the blade gets sharper.

Solomon says good friends are like that. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

A good friend makes you **better**. Sharper. Stronger. Wiser. More like Jesus.

What does that look like between guys?

- **A friend who pushes you to try harder,** in sports, school or your faith.
- **A friend who tells you the truth,** even when it's hard to hear. "Dude, that wasn't cool, what you said to him."
- **A friend who won't let you quit.**
- **A friend who prays with you** and talks about God, not just games.
- **A friend who holds you accountable,** which means he asks how you're doing with the things you're trying to change.
- **A friend who celebrates when you win,** and sticks with you when you lose.

Notice that sharpening involves some friction. Iron rubbing on iron isn't always smooth. Sometimes a good friend will challenge you, disagree with you or call you out. That might sting a little. But it's how you grow.

A friend who only ever tells you what you want to hear, or who goes along with anything you do, isn't sharpening you. And a friend who pulls you toward bad choices is making you duller, not sharper.

Here's the challenge: don't just look for friends who sharpen you. **Be** a friend who sharpens others. Encourage your friends. Push them to be their best. Tell them the truth kindly. Pray for them.

Some of the most important friendships in the Bible were like this: David and Jonathan, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Timothy. They made each other stronger in faith.

The right friends can change the whole direction of your life.

Think about it: Who are the friends who sharpen you? Are you sharpening anyone?

Try this: Encourage a friend today to do something good: study for a test, stick with a hard practice or do the right thing. Be his "iron."

Dear God, thank You for friends who make me better. Help me have friends who sharpen me, and help me be that kind of friend. Help us push each other to follow You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 14 — Barnabas the Encourager

"When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to abide in the Lord with all their hearts. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord."
— Acts 11:23–24 (BSB)

His real name was Joseph. But the apostles gave him a nickname: **Barnabas**, which means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Imagine being so encouraging that people change your name because of it!

Barnabas was always building people up. Look at a few things he did.

He stood up for Paul. After Paul became a Christian, the believers in Jerusalem were afraid of him, because he used to arrest and hurt Christians. Nobody trusted him. But Barnabas took Paul by the hand, brought him to the apostles and vouched for him. Without Barnabas, Paul might never have been accepted.

He celebrated what God was doing. When the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to check on new believers in a city called Antioch, he didn't criticize or find fault. The Bible says, "he rejoiced and encouraged them all."

He gave people second chances. A young man named John Mark once quit and went home in the middle of a missionary trip. Later, Paul didn't want to take him again. But Barnabas believed in him and gave him another chance. Years later, John Mark became so useful that Paul himself asked for him. And many believe he wrote the Gospel of Mark!

The Bible describes Barnabas simply: "Barnabas was a **good man**, full of the Holy Spirit and faith." And because of his encouragement, "a great number of people were brought to the Lord."

Guys don't always encourage each other. We often roast each other, tease and compete. Some joking around is fine and fun! But everybody needs encouragement too, especially when they're struggling.

You can be a Barnabas:

- Notice the kid nobody else believes in, and believe in him.
- Give a real compliment: "That was a great pass."
- Stand up for someone others are writing off.
- Give people a second chance.
- When a friend is down, remind him that God isn't done with him.

Think about it: Who has been a Barnabas in your life? Who could use a Barnabas right now?

Try this: Be a "Son of Encouragement" today. Give three sincere encouragements to three different people, including at least one guy who doesn't usually get encouraged.

Dear God, thank You for Barnabas. Help me be an encourager, someone who builds others up, believes in people and gives second chances. Fill me with Your Spirit, like Barnabas, so my encouragement points people to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 15 — Like a Son with His Father

"But you know Timothy's proven worth, that as a child with his father he has served with me to advance the gospel."
— Philippians 2:22 (BSB)

When Paul was traveling around telling people about Jesus, he met a young man named **Timothy**. Timothy's mother and grandmother were believers who had taught him the Scriptures since he was a boy. But his father wasn't a believer.

Paul took Timothy under his wing. Timothy traveled with Paul for years, watching how he preached, how he prayed, how he handled hard times and how he treated people. Paul taught him, trained him and trusted him with important jobs. Later, Paul made Timothy the leader of a church.

Paul called Timothy "my true child in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). And in today's verse, he says Timothy served with him "**as a child with his father**."

That's called **mentoring**. A mentor is an older person who helps a younger person grow. He teaches, encourages, gives advice and shows by example how to live.

Every guy needs a mentor. Some guys have a great dad who mentors them. Some guys have a grandpa, uncle, older brother, coach, pastor or youth leader who takes an interest in them. Some guys don't have anyone yet.

Why do you need one?

- **You learn a lot by watching.** Timothy learned by being with Paul.
- **Mentors have made mistakes** and can help you avoid them.
- **Mentors believe in you** when you don't believe in yourself.
- **Mentors point you to God.**

How can you find one? Look for an older Christian man you respect, someone who loves God, treats people well and seems wise. You could ask your parents to help. At church, you could ask a leader to meet with you, or just start by asking him questions: *How did you become a Christian? What helps you follow God? What do you wish you'd known at my age?*

Of course, a mentor should always be someone your parents know and trust, and time together should be in public places or with your parents' permission.

And one day, you'll be the older guy. Then you can be a Paul to a younger Timothy.

Think about it: Who is an older man you respect who loves God? What would you like to learn from him?

Try this: With your parents' help, ask an older Christian man a question about following God this week, and really listen to his answer.

Dear God, thank You for Paul and Timothy. Please give me men in my life who can help me grow, like Paul helped Timothy. Help me be humble and willing to learn. And someday, help me help younger guys too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 16 — Choose Your Crew

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"
— 1 Corinthians 15:33 (BSB)

Have you ever noticed that if you hang out with a certain group of guys long enough, you start talking like them, laughing at the same jokes and doing the same things?

That's normal. The people you spend the most time with shape who you become. That's why Paul gives a warning: "Do not be deceived: '**Bad company corrupts good character.**'"

Corrupts means to spoil or ruin, like when a rotten apple in a bag makes the other apples rot too. If your closest friends are always getting in trouble, disrespecting teachers, using bad language, being cruel to other kids or doing things you know are wrong, it's only a matter of time before you start doing those things too.

Notice Paul says, "Do not be **deceived**." Many guys think, *It won't affect me. I can hang out with those guys and still be myself.* But that's usually not how it works. Slowly, bit by bit, you change.

Think about Daniel and his friends in Babylon. They were surrounded by people who didn't follow God. But the four of them stuck together, and they helped each other stay strong.

This doesn't mean you should be rude to kids who make bad choices, or refuse to talk to them. Jesus was friends with people who were far from God, and He loved them. You should be kind to everyone.

But there's a difference between being **kind** to someone and choosing him as your **crew**, the guys you hang out with the most and let influence you.

Ask yourself about your closest friends:

- Do I feel pressure to do things I know are wrong when I'm with them?
- Do they respect my faith, or make fun of it?
- Am I becoming a better person because of these friendships, or a worse one?

If your crew is pulling you the wrong way, it might be time to make some changes. That's hard. But it's worth it.

And remember: you can be the good influence too. Be the guy who makes the group better.

Think about it: Is your crew making you better or worse? What's one way you could be a good influence on your friends?

Try this: Spend time this week with a friend who makes you better. Invite him over, sit with him at lunch or play together.

Dear God, help me choose friends who make me better, not worse. Help me be kind to everyone but wise about who influences me most. And help me be a good influence on the guys around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 17 — Treat Girls with Respect

"Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as to a father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."
— 1 Timothy 5:1–2 (BSB)

Paul was giving advice to Timothy, a young leader in the church, about how to treat different people. And his advice was simple: treat people like family.

Older men like fathers. Guys your age like brothers. Older women like mothers. And girls "as **sisters**, with absolute purity."

What does it mean for guys to treat girls like sisters? Think about how a good brother treats his sister. He might tease her a little. But he'd never let anyone else hurt her. He protects her. He respects her. He wants what's best for her. He wouldn't do or say anything to embarrass her or make her feel uncomfortable.

That's how God wants you to treat every girl: your sister, your cousins, the girls in your class, the girls at church. Not as someone to make fun of, show off for or push around, but as someone God made and loves, a daughter of the King.

Here's what that looks like:

- **Respect her.** Listen to her ideas. Don't talk over her or act like girls can't do things.

- **Don't make comments about girls' bodies.** Not to her, not about her and not to your friends. Every girl is made in God's image.
- **Don't join in when other guys do.** If your friends are making crude jokes or rude comments about girls, don't laugh along. You can say, "Come on, that's not cool."
- **Keep your hands to yourself.** No one should ever be touched in a way they don't want.
- **Stand up for her.** If someone is picking on a girl or making her uncomfortable, speak up or tell a trusted adult.
- **Be kind.** Include girls, encourage them and treat them as friends and teammates.

"With absolute purity" means your thoughts, words and actions toward girls should be clean and respectful, the kind you wouldn't be ashamed for God, or her family, to see.

Respecting girls doesn't make you less of a guy. It's one of the clearest signs that you're becoming a real man of God.

Think about it: How do you think God wants guys to treat girls? What's one thing guys your age do that doesn't treat girls with respect?

Try this: Treat the girls around you today like sisters. Be respectful, kind and protective, and refuse to join in if others aren't.

Dear God, help me treat girls the way You want: as sisters, with respect and purity. Help me never make fun of them or make them uncomfortable. Give me courage to stand up for them and to refuse to join in when others don't respect them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 18 — Do Justice, Love Mercy

"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"
— Micah 6:8 (BSB)

Every school has one. The kid nobody wants to sit with. The one who gets laughed at. Maybe he's awkward, or different, or new. Maybe he has a disability, or talks funny, or wears the wrong clothes. And sometimes, the other guys pick on him.

What do you do when you see that happening?

It's easy to go along with it. To laugh with everybody else, so you don't become the next target. Or just to look away and pretend you didn't see.

But God has shown us a different way. The prophet Micah summed it up in one verse: "What does the LORD require of you but to **act justly**, to **love mercy**, and to **walk humbly** with your God?"

Act justly means doing what's right and fair, especially for people who are being treated unfairly. Justice means standing up for what's right.

Love mercy means showing kindness to people who need it, even when they can't do anything for you. Mercy is compassion in action.

Walk humbly with your God means not thinking you're better than anyone else, and staying close to God as you go.

For guys, this can look like:

- **Refusing to join in** when others make fun of someone.
- **Saying something:** "Hey, leave him alone." It takes guts!
- **Sitting with the kid who's alone.**
- **Picking the kid who's always picked last.**
- **Telling a trusted adult** when someone is being bullied. That's not snitching. It's protecting someone.

Standing up for someone takes real strength. It's much easier to go with the crowd. But the strongest guys use their strength to protect people who are weaker, not to push them down.

Jesus always did this. He stood with the outcasts, the sick, the poor and people everyone else ignored. When you stand up for the kid nobody likes, you're standing where Jesus stood.

A true story: C.T. Studd was one of the most famous young men in England, a brilliant cricketer who played for his country, and he was heir to a family fortune. But he gave his heart to Jesus, and he couldn't be happy just playing games and spending money while millions had never heard of his Savior. With a band of friends who all gave up bright futures together, called the Cambridge Seven, he went to China as a missionary. When his fortune became his, he gave nearly all of it away to feed the poor and spread the gospel. He said that if Jesus really is God and died for him, no sacrifice could be too great. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: Have you ever seen a kid being picked on? What did you do? What could you do next time?

Try this: Look for the kid who's left out today. Sit with him, pick him for your team or just say hi and learn his name.

Dear God, help me act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with You. Give me courage to stand up for kids who are picked on, and to be kind to kids

nobody else is kind to. Help me use my strength to protect, not to push down. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 19 — A Different Spirit

> *"But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he has entered, and his descendants will inherit it."*
> *— Numbers 14:24 (BSB)*

After God rescued His people from Egypt, He brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. Before going in, Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land.

For forty days, the spies explored. When they came back, they brought a huge cluster of grapes so heavy that two men had to carry it on a pole! The land was amazing.

But ten of the spies were terrified. The people there were strong, they said. The cities were huge and had walls. There were giants, and next to them the spies felt like grasshoppers. *We can't do this!*

The people panicked. They cried all night and talked about going back to Egypt.

But two of the spies, **Caleb** and Joshua, spoke up. "The land we passed through and explored is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, He will bring us into this land... Do not be afraid of the people... the LORD is with us."

Ten spies saw the giants and forgot God. Two spies saw the giants and remembered God.

The people didn't listen to Caleb and Joshua. They even talked about stoning them! Because the people refused to trust God, they had to wander in the wilderness for forty years. But God said something special about Caleb: "My servant Caleb has **a different spirit** and has followed Me **wholeheartedly**."

Wholeheartedly means with his whole heart, holding nothing back.

Caleb was different. When everybody else was afraid, he trusted God. When everybody else complained, he stood firm. He wasn't going along with the crowd.

And God kept His promise. Forty-five years later, when Caleb was eighty-five years old, he said he was still as strong as the day Moses sent him out. And he asked for the hill country where the giants lived, and he took it (Joshua 14).

Being different from the crowd takes courage. It's easy to go along with what everyone else thinks and does. But God is looking for guys with a different spirit, guys who follow Him wholeheartedly, even when everyone else is scared.

Think about it: Why do you think ten spies saw only giants, but Caleb saw God? When have you been tempted to go along with the crowd?

Try this: Be "different" today in a good way. Speak up for what's right, even if you're the only one.

Dear God, give me a different spirit like Caleb's. Help me follow You wholeheartedly, even when everyone else is afraid or going the wrong way. Help me remember that You are bigger than any giant. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 20 — Jonathan's Climb

> *"Jonathan said to the young man bearing his armor, 'Come, let us cross over to the outpost of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will work on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.' His armor-bearer replied, 'Do all that is in your heart. Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.'"*
> *— 1 Samuel 14:6–7 (BSB)*

Before David came along, King Saul's son **Jonathan** was a brave young warrior. One day, Israel's army was in big trouble. They were badly outnumbered by the Philistines, and many soldiers were so afraid they were hiding in caves. Saul was sitting under a tree, not sure what to do.

But Jonathan had an idea. He turned to the young man who carried his armor and said, "Come, let us cross over to the outpost... Perhaps the LORD will work on our behalf. **Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.**"

Jonathan knew that God didn't need a big army. He could win with a thousand soldiers or with two guys.

And look at the armor-bearer's answer: "Do all that is in your heart. Go ahead; **I am with you heart and soul.**" What a friend!

So the two of them climbed up a steep, rocky cliff, using their hands and feet, straight toward the enemy outpost. When they got to the top, they fought bravely, and God was with them. Then God sent an earthquake, and the whole Philistine army panicked. Soon, the rest of Israel's army joined in,

and God gave them a great victory. It all started with two guys who trusted God.

Jonathan teaches us something about courage. He didn't wait until he had a big army or everything figured out. He trusted God and took the first step, even though it was risky.

Sometimes we think, *I'm just one kid. What difference can I make?* But Jonathan knew that with God, one or two people are enough.

Maybe you're the only Christian on your team. Maybe you're the only one in your friend group who won't join in when others do wrong. Maybe you're the only kid who'll stand up for someone. That can feel lonely. But nothing can hinder the Lord, whether by many or by few.

And don't miss the armor-bearer. Sometimes courage means being the friend who says, "I'm with you."

Think about it: Why do you think Jonathan believed God could win "whether by many or by few"? When do you feel like "just one kid"?

Try this: Be someone's armor-bearer today. When a friend wants to do something good or brave, tell him, "I'm with you."

Dear God, thank You that nothing can stop You, whether by many or by few. Give me courage like Jonathan's to take the first step, even when I'm the only one. And help me be a loyal friend who says, "I'm with you." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 21 — Choose!

"Then Elijah approached all the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, follow him.' But the people did not answer a word."
— 1 Kings 18:21 (BSB)

Israel had turned away from God. A wicked king named Ahab and his wife Jezebel had led the people to worship a false god called **Baal**. Only a few people still followed the LORD. And one of them was the prophet **Elijah**.

Elijah challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to a showdown on Mount Carmel. Everyone would gather. The prophets of Baal would build an altar and put a sacrifice on it. Elijah would do the same. But nobody would light a fire. "The God who answers by fire, He is God."

First, Elijah stood before all the people and asked, "**How long will you waver between two opinions?** If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, follow him."

Waver means to go back and forth, like someone who can't make up his mind. The people were trying to keep one foot with God and one foot with Baal. Elijah said, *Choose!*

And the people didn't answer a word.

The prophets of Baal went first. They prayed and shouted all morning. They danced around the altar. Elijah teased them, telling them to shout louder, because maybe their god was asleep! But nothing happened.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He rebuilt the altar of the LORD. He even had people pour water all over the sacrifice and the wood, so much that it filled a trench around the altar. Then Elijah prayed a simple prayer. And **fire fell from heaven** and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dirt and even the water!

When the people saw it, they fell on their faces and shouted, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

A lot of guys today try to live with one foot on each side. They want to follow Jesus at church, and then do whatever they want the rest of the week. They want to be Christians, but only when it's easy or popular.

Elijah's question is for you too: How long will you waver? If the Lord is God, and He is, then follow Him all the way.

Think about it: Are there areas of your life where you're trying to keep "one foot on each side"?

Try this: Choose one area where you've been wavering, and make a clear decision to follow God in it. Tell someone you trust about your decision.

Dear God, You are the Lord, and You are God. I don't want to waver between You and other things. Help me follow You all the way, with my whole life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 22 — Brave Enough to Say Sorry

"Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not hide my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the guilt of my sin."
— Psalm 32:5 (BSB)

When you think of courage, you might think of battles, adventures or standing up to bullies. But here's a kind of courage that a lot of guys struggle with: **admitting you were wrong**.

It's hard to say, "I did it." "I was wrong." "I'm sorry." It can feel embarrassing. It can feel like losing. So guys often do other things instead:

- **Blame someone else.** "He started it!"
- **Make excuses.** "I only did it because..."
- **Deny it.** "It wasn't me."
- **Hide it** and hope nobody finds out.
- **Get angry** at whoever caught them.

King David knew all about this. He once did something terribly wrong and tried to cover it up for a long time. In Psalm 32, he describes how it felt: "When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long" (Psalm 32:3). Hiding his sin made him miserable, inside and out.

But then David did the brave thing: "I acknowledged my sin to You and did not hide my iniquity." He stopped hiding. He told God the truth. And

look what happened: "**You forgave the guilt of my sin.**"

Relief! Freedom! The weight lifted.

The same thing happened to Peter. After he denied Jesus three times, he "broke down and wept" (Mark 14:72). But he didn't run away from Jesus. And Jesus forgave him and restored him.

Admitting you're wrong takes more courage than covering it up. Anyone can blame someone else. A strong guy owns his mistakes.

Here's how to do it:

- **Tell God the truth.** Confess what you did, honestly.
- **Tell the person you hurt.** "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?"
- **Don't make excuses.** Just own it.
- **Make it right if you can.** Fix what you broke. Pay back what you owe.

And remember: God isn't waiting to crush you when you confess. He's waiting to forgive you.

Think about it: Why do you think it's so hard to admit when you're wrong? What's the difference between how David felt before and after he confessed?

Try this: If there's something you've been hiding or blaming on someone else, have the courage to confess it today, to God and to the person involved.

Dear God, it's hard for me to admit when I'm wrong. Give me the courage to stop hiding, stop blaming and stop making excuses. Thank You that when I confess, You forgive me. Help me own my mistakes like a real man of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 23 — Stephen Stands Firm

"While they were stoning him, Stephen appealed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Falling on his knees, he cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."
— Acts 7:59–60 (BSB)

Stephen was one of the early leaders in the church. The Bible says he was "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," and he did amazing things among the people.

But some religious leaders hated what Stephen was teaching about Jesus. They brought false witnesses to lie about him, and they dragged him before the council, the same group that had condemned Jesus.

Stephen could have kept quiet to save his life. Instead, he stood up and boldly told them the truth about God and about Jesus. And the leaders were furious.

Then Stephen looked up to heaven and said, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

The angry crowd rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began throwing stones at him.

And look at what Stephen did. He prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell to his knees and cried out, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**"

Stephen forgave the very people who were killing him, just like Jesus had done on the cross. Then he "fell asleep," which is the Bible's gentle way of saying he died and went to be with Jesus.

Stephen shows us two kinds of courage.

The courage to speak the truth, even when it's dangerous. Stephen didn't water down the message about Jesus to make people like him.

The courage to forgive. This might be the harder one. It takes huge strength to forgive someone who is hurting you.

And there's something else. Standing in that crowd, holding the coats of the men throwing stones, was a young man named **Saul**. He approved of what they were doing. But later, Saul met Jesus, became a Christian, and changed his name to **Paul**. He became the greatest missionary in history. Many people believe Stephen's brave death and forgiving prayer stuck with Saul.

You probably won't face what Stephen faced. But you might face kids who laugh at your faith or leaders who don't like what you believe. You can stand firm and forgive, like Stephen.

Think about it: Which is harder for you: speaking up for what's right, or forgiving people who treat you badly?

Try this: Is there someone who has made fun of your faith or treated you badly? Pray for him today, like Stephen did.

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for Stephen's courage. Help me stand firm and speak the truth about You, even when it's hard. And help me forgive people who hurt me, like Stephen did and like You did. In Your name, Amen.

Day 24 — The Boy King

"Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left."
— 2 Kings 22:1–2 (BSB)

Imagine becoming king of an entire country when you're **eight years old**!

That's what happened to **Josiah**. His father, King Amon, had been a wicked king, and so had his grandfather, King Manasseh, for most of his life. They had led the people to worship idols. They had filled the land with evil. And then Josiah's father was killed, and the little boy became king.

With a family history like that, you might expect Josiah to turn out badly too. But he didn't. The Bible says: "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD... **he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.**"

When Josiah was sixteen, he began to seek God with his whole heart. As a young man, he started cleaning up the country, tearing down idols and false altars everywhere.

Then, while workers were repairing God's temple, the high priest found something amazing: the **Book of the Law**, God's Word, which had been lost and forgotten for years! When they read it to Josiah, he was heartbroken to see how far his people had drifted from God. He tore his clothes as a sign of sorrow.

Then Josiah gathered all the people together, read God's Word out loud to them, and made a promise to follow the LORD with all his heart and soul. And he led the whole nation back to God.

Josiah teaches us two important things.

Your family's past doesn't decide your future. Josiah's father and grandfather were wicked. But Josiah chose a different path. Maybe your family has hard stuff in its story. You can still choose to follow God. You can be the one who starts something new.

You're never too young to make a difference. Josiah was a boy when he became king, and a teenager when he began to seek God. Kids can choose to follow God with their whole hearts, and God can use them to change things.

Josiah "did not turn aside to the right or to the left." He stayed on God's path.

A true story: Eric Liddell was the fastest runner in Scotland. In 1924, he was chosen to run for his country in the Olympic Games, and everyone expected him to win the 100-meter race. But when the schedule came out, his race was on a Sunday. Eric believed Sunday was set apart for God, so he refused to run, even for an Olympic gold medal. People called him foolish. Instead, he trained for the 400 meters, which wasn't his best race. He won the gold medal and set a world record. Later, he gave up his fame to serve God as a missionary in China. He didn't turn aside to the right or to the left. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: How does Josiah's story encourage you if your family or friends aren't following God?

Try this: Decide today to "not turn aside" in one specific area. Write it down: "With God's help, I will..."

Dear God, thank You for Josiah, who followed You even though his family hadn't. Help me not to turn aside from Your way. Help me seek You with my

whole heart, even though I'm young. Use me to make a difference. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 25 — Learn from the Ant

> *"Walk in the manner of the ant, O slacker; observe its ways and become wise. Without a commander, without an overseer or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food at harvest."*
> *— Proverbs 6:6–8 (BSB)*

Have you ever watched ants? Go outside and find an anthill sometime. You'll see ants marching back and forth, carrying crumbs, leaves and bits of food many times bigger than they are. They never seem to stop. They're always busy.

Solomon, the wisest king who ever lived, said, *Want to be wise? Go watch an ant.*

"Walk in the manner of the ant, **O slacker**." A *slacker* is someone who's lazy, someone who avoids work and puts off what needs to be done.

What's so special about ants?

Nobody has to make them work. "Without a commander, without an overseer or ruler." There's no ant boss standing over them yelling, "Get to work!" They just do what needs to be done.

They plan ahead. "It prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food at harvest." Ants gather food when it's available, so they'll have enough for the winter. They don't wait until the last minute.

Some guys struggle with this. They'll play video games for hours, but when it's time for homework or chores, suddenly they're "too tired." They

wait until someone yells at them to clean their room. They leave the school project for the night before it's due.

Being lazy might feel good for a little while. But Proverbs warns that laziness leads to trouble. Work doesn't disappear if you ignore it. It just piles up.

Here's what it looks like to be like the ant:

- **Do your work without being told.** Don't wait for your parents to nag you.
- **Work first, then play.** Get the homework and chores done, and then enjoy your free time.
- **Plan ahead.** Start big projects early.
- **Finish what you start.**
- **Do your best,** not just the bare minimum.

God made you to work. Before sin ever entered the world, God gave Adam a job in the garden. Work isn't a punishment. It's part of how God made us. And doing it well is a way of honoring Him.

Think about it: In what area of your life are you most like the "slacker"? What would it look like to be more like the ant?

Try this: Do one job today without anyone telling you to. Clean your room, do your homework early or help with a chore before being asked.

Dear God, help me not to be lazy. Help me be like the ant: working without being told, planning ahead and finishing what I start. Help me see that work is a gift from You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 26 — A Man of His Word

"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' Anything more comes from the evil one."
— Matthew 5:37 (BSB)

"I promise!" "I swear!" "Pinky promise!" "Cross my heart!"

Why do people say things like that? Usually, it's because they want someone to believe them. But have you noticed that the people who swear and promise the most are often the ones you trust the least?

In Jesus' day, people had all kinds of rules about promises. If you swore by one thing, you had to keep your promise. But if you swore by something else, some people thought you could get out of it! People used tricky wording so they could break their word and still claim they weren't lying.

Jesus said, *Stop all that.* "Simply let your '**Yes**' be '**Yes**,' and your '**No**,' '**No**.'" In other words, be a man of your word. Mean what you say. Do what you say you'll do. You shouldn't need to swear or make big promises for people to trust you. Your simple "yes" should be enough.

A man of his word:

- **Keeps his promises,** even when something better comes along.
- **Shows up when he says he will.**
- **Tells the truth,** even when it's embarrassing.
- **Doesn't exaggerate** to make himself look better.

- **Says no when he means no,** instead of saying yes and then not following through.
- **Admits it** when he can't keep a promise, instead of making excuses.

Why does this matter so much? Because trust is hard to build and easy to break. If you tell your friend you'll be at his game and then don't show up, or tell your mom you'll clean your room and then don't, people start to learn that your word doesn't mean much.

But if you're a guy whose "yes" means yes, people will trust you. Your parents will give you more freedom. Your friends will count on you. And you'll reflect God, who has never once broken His word.

Think before you say yes. Don't make promises you can't keep. And when you say yes, follow through.

Think about it: Is your "yes" always "yes"? Is there a promise you've made recently that you haven't kept?

Try this: If there's a promise you haven't kept, go and keep it today. Or apologize and make it right.

Dear God, You always keep Your word. Help me be a man of my word too. Help my "yes" mean yes and my "no" mean no. Help me keep my promises and tell the truth, so people can trust me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 27 — Turn My Eyes Away

"Turn my eyes away from worthless things; revive me with Your word."
— Psalm 119:37 (BSB)

Your eyes are like doors into your mind and heart. Whatever you look at goes inside you. It shapes what you think about, what you want and who you become.

That's why the writer of Psalm 119 prayed, "**Turn my eyes away from worthless things.**"

Worthless things are things with no real value, or things that pull you away from God. For guys today, a lot of those come through screens: videos, games, shows and websites.

Some of what's on screens is great. But some of it is violent, cruel, crude or just a huge waste of time. And some of it shows people, especially girls and women, in ways that don't treat them with the respect God wants, as if they're just bodies to look at instead of people made in His image.

The Bible has a lot to say about guarding what you look at. Job, a man who loved God, once said he had made a promise with his eyes, a decision ahead of time about what he wouldn't look at (Job 31:1). That's wise! It's much easier to decide before you're in a situation than in the middle of it.

Here's how to guard your eyes:

- **Decide ahead of time** what you won't watch or look at.

- **Turn it off or look away right away** if something comes on that you know isn't good. Don't wait to see what happens next.
- **Ask your parents to help** you set up good boundaries on your devices. That's not babyish. It's smart. Even adults use them.
- **Fill your eyes with good things:** God's Word, good books, real friends, sports and the outdoors.
- **Don't keep secrets.** If you ever see something online that makes you uncomfortable, confused or curious in a way you know isn't right, **tell a parent or trusted adult.** You won't be in trouble for telling. They want to help.

Notice the second half of the verse: "revive me with Your word." It's not just about turning away from bad things. It's about turning *toward* God. When you fill your mind with His Word, the worthless things lose their pull.

Think about it: What are some "worthless things" guys your age are tempted to look at? What could you replace them with?

Try this: Talk with a parent this week about your screens. Together, decide on some boundaries that will help you guard your eyes.

Dear God, turn my eyes away from worthless things. Help me decide ahead of time what I won't look at, and help me look away quickly when I need to. Fill my mind with Your Word instead. And help me be honest with my parents if I ever see something I shouldn't. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 28 — Listen to Your Father

"Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old."
— Proverbs 23:22 (BSB)

As guys get older, there's often a time when they start to think their parents don't know much. *Dad just doesn't get it. Mom's so embarrassing. They're too old-fashioned. I know better.*

Maybe you've felt that way sometimes. It's part of growing up to start thinking for yourself, and that's good! But Proverbs gives a warning: "Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not **despise** your mother when she is old."

To *despise* means to look down on someone or treat them as if they don't matter.

Your parents have lived a lot longer than you. They've made mistakes and learned from them. They've seen things you haven't seen yet. They love you, and they want what's best for you, even when their rules feel annoying.

Here's what honoring your parents can look like for a guy your age:

- **Listen** when they talk to you. Put down the device and look at them.
- **Obey** without arguing or rolling your eyes.
- **Help** without being asked. Carry groceries, mow the lawn or take out the trash.
- **Thank them** for what they do.

- **Talk to them.** Tell them about your day. Ask for their advice.
- **Respect them in front of your friends.** Don't make fun of them to look cool.

Some guys have a great relationship with their dad. Some guys' dads are far away, gone or hard to get along with. Some guys live with their mom, a grandparent or another family member. Whoever is raising you, God has put them in your life, and He wants you to honor them.

And if a parent has really hurt you, God doesn't ask you to pretend. You can be honest with Him about it. And if anyone at home is hurting you or making you feel unsafe, tell a trusted adult right away.

Here's a secret: the way you treat your parents now is training for the kind of man you'll become. A guy who honors his parents is learning to honor God, and to be a good husband and father someday.

Think about it: When is it hardest for you to listen to your parents? What is one thing you could do to honor them better?

Try this: Ask your dad, mom or whoever is raising you, "What's one thing you've learned that you wish you'd known at my age?" Listen closely to the answer.

Dear God, thank You for the people who are raising me. Help me listen to them, respect them and honor them, even when I don't agree. Help me learn from their wisdom. And bless my family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 29 — Samuel Grew

"And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with man."
— 1 Samuel 2:26 (BSB)

Samuel was just a little boy when his mother, Hannah, brought him to live at the house of God and serve with Eli the priest. She had prayed for years for a son, and she promised that her son would serve God his whole life.

So Samuel grew up in God's house. And the Bible says he "continued to **grow** in stature and in favor with the LORD and with man."

That's interesting, because Samuel was growing up in a tough spot. Eli's own sons were priests too, but they were wicked men. They stole from the offerings people brought to God and did other terrible things. They didn't care about God at all.

Samuel could have followed their example. But he didn't. While Eli's sons were going the wrong way, Samuel just kept quietly growing, serving God faithfully, day after day. Later, God spoke to Samuel directly, and he became one of the greatest prophets and leaders in Israel's history.

Look at the two kinds of growth the verse mentions:

"In stature." Samuel was growing up physically. He got taller and stronger, just like you are.

"In favor with the LORD and with man." He was also growing on the inside: in his friendship with God and in how people saw him. He was

becoming someone God was pleased with, and someone people respected and trusted.

Does that sound familiar? Luke says almost the exact same thing about Jesus when He was a boy: He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Growing up isn't just about getting bigger. It's about becoming the kind of man God designed you to be. Your body will grow on its own. But growing in character, wisdom and faith takes choices, every day.

Samuel grew in a hard place, surrounded by bad examples, but he kept growing in the right direction. You can too, no matter what's around you.

A true story: William Carey was a poor shoemaker in England. He had left school early to work, but while he mended shoes, he taught himself languages from books propped up on his workbench. He hung a hand-drawn map of the world on his wall and prayed for all the people who had never heard of Jesus. He said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." Then he sailed to India and stayed there for forty years, helping translate the Bible into dozens of languages. He kept growing and working, one word at a time. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: Besides growing taller, how are you growing? Are you growing in favor with God and with people?

Try this: Write down one way you want to grow in each area: your body, your friendship with God and how you treat people.

Dear God, I want to grow like Samuel did, not just in size, but in favor with You and with people. Even when there are bad examples around me, help me keep growing in the right direction. Make me into the man You designed me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 30 — Be Men of Courage

"Be on the alert. Stand firm in the faith. Be men of courage. Be strong. Do everything in love."
— 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 (BSB)

We've made it to the last day! And Paul gives us a perfect summary of everything we've learned. It's like a coach's final speech before the big game.

"Be on the alert." Pay attention. Stay awake. Don't be careless like Samson. Watch out for sin crouching at the door, for bad company, for worthless things and for anything that would pull you away from God.

"Stand firm in the faith." Don't waver like the people at Mount Carmel. Don't turn aside to the right or to the left, like Josiah. Keep trusting God and following Jesus, no matter what.

"Be men of courage." Like Caleb, who trusted God when everyone else was afraid. Like Jonathan, who climbed the cliff. Like Stephen, who spoke the truth and forgave. Like David, who owned his mistakes. Courage isn't feeling no fear. It's doing what's right even when you're afraid.

"Be strong." Not in your own strength, but in God's. Remember: "It is God who arms me with strength." Strong enough to control your temper. Strong enough to walk away from revenge. Strong enough to stand up for the kid nobody likes, and to protect and respect girls. Strong enough to cry, to confess and to keep your word.

And then Paul adds one more thing, and it might be the most important of all: "**Do everything in love.**"

That's what keeps strength from turning into something ugly. Strength without love becomes bullying. Courage without love becomes showing off. Standing firm without love becomes being stubborn and mean.

But strength *with* love? That looks like Jesus. The strongest man who ever lived was also the most loving. He used His strength to serve, protect and save.

That's the kind of man God is growing you to be. Not someday, but starting now.

You're a son of the King. Be on the alert. Stand firm in the faith. Be a man of courage. Be strong. And do everything in love.

Think about it: Which of Paul's five commands do you most need to work on? Which one are you already growing in?

Try this: Write 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 on a card and put it somewhere you'll see it every day. Memorize it this week.

Dear God, help me be alert, stand firm in the faith, be a man of courage, be strong and do everything in love. Thank You for making me Your son. Grow me into the man You want me to be, strong and loving, like Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Conclusion: Strong

You made it through 30 days! Well done, son of the King.

Let's go back to where we started. On the very first page, you read God's promise: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

That's who you are. Not your scores, your stats or your level in a game. Not how tough you look, how fast you run or how many people think you're cool. Not the names people call you, or the mistakes you've made. You are a **son of the King**.

Over these 30 days, you've learned that Jesus gives new names, like He did for Peter, and that your worth isn't your score. You learned that you're a son and heir, loved by a compassionate Father who gives you His strength, and who can use even a scared guy like Gideon.

You learned that real strength is strength under control. Samson had strength without self-control, but a guy who controls his temper is greater than a warrior. You learned to master sin at the door, to leave revenge to God, to be gentle like Jesus and to know that real men cry.

You learned about friends and brothers: iron sharpening iron, encouraging like Barnabas, finding a mentor like Timothy did, choosing your crew wisely, treating girls with respect, like sisters, and standing up for the kid nobody likes.

You met men of courage: Caleb, Jonathan, Elijah and Stephen, and a boy king named Josiah. And you learned that it takes courage to admit

when you're wrong.

And you learned about work, honor and faith: working like the ant, keeping your word, guarding your eyes, honoring your parents, growing like Samuel, and standing firm in everything you do, with love.

You also met real men who trusted God in amazing ways: Samuel Crowther, Festo Kivengere, C.T. Studd, Eric Liddell and William Carey. They weren't perfect. But they knew whose they were.

So do you.

If you haven't trusted Jesus yet

You become a son of the King by trusting Jesus. He died on the cross to take the punishment for your sins, and He rose again. He offers you forgiveness and a place in God's family forever, as a free gift. You can pray something like this:

Dear Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. I believe You died on the cross for my sins and rose again. I'm sorry for the wrong things I've done. I trust You as my Savior, and I want to follow You. Thank You for making me a son of the King. Amen.

If you prayed that, please tell someone: your dad or mom, a pastor, a leader or a Christian friend. They'll want to celebrate with you!

What's next

In **Book 2 of Sons of the King**, you'll learn to be **faithful**: living with integrity when no one's watching, being wise about screens and gaming, handling temptation, winning and losing well in sports, and following Jesus like the disciples who gave up everything to follow Him.

Until then, remember whose you are. Be strong, and do everything in love.

"I ask that out of the riches of His glory He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being."
— Ephesians 3:16 (BSB)

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