OCHORUS ORIGINALS

2

Sons of the King

Faithful: integrity, screens, temptation, sports, and following Jesus all the way

Ochorus

Sons of the King – 30 Days with God for Guys – Book 2

Faithful: integrity, screens, temptation, sports, and following Jesus all the way

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. Book 1 taught a boy who he is and what real strength looks like. Book 2 is about being faithful, taking its lead from 1 Corinthians 4:2: "Now it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." God has trusted a boy with his time, his gifts, his body and his friendships, and faithfulness is what He asks in return.

The first week is about integrity: being real all the way through, honest scales in games and tests, what God sees when no one else is watching, and Achan's treasure hidden in the tent. The second is about screens and gaming: who is the boss, numbering our days, rage quitting, staying innocent about evil, not disappearing from real life, and meeting God first. The third is about temptation, from how it worked in the garden to Esau's bowl of stew and the help Jesus gives in the moment. The fourth is about winning and losing well. The fifth follows four men who followed Jesus: Andrew the bringer, Thomas who asked, John the Son of Thunder who learned to love, and Peter, who failed and was restored.

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: George Müller, Adoniram Judson, Sundar Singh, David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor. The book encourages boys to find a trusted friend or

mentor to help them stay accountable, and to tell a parent about anything online that troubles them.

Introduction: Faithful

Imagine you have a friend who always does what he says he'll do. When he says he'll be at your game, he's there. When he says he'll keep a secret, he keeps it. When he makes a promise, you never have to wonder. You'd trust a guy like that with anything, right?

That guy is **faithful**.

Being faithful means being someone who can be trusted. It means you're the same guy whether people are watching or not. It means you keep going, even when it's hard. It means you stick with what's right, and you stick with Jesus.

> *"Now it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."*
> *— 1 Corinthians 4:2 (BSB)*

A *steward* is someone who's been trusted to take care of something that belongs to someone else. And that's what you are. Your time, your abilities, your body, your friendships and your whole life are gifts from God. He's trusted you with them. And the most important thing He asks is that you be faithful.

In Book 1, you learned **who you are**: a son of the King, strong with strength that's under control. In this book, you'll learn to be **faithful**: in the choices nobody sees, on screens, when temptation hits, on the field, and in following Jesus all the way.

What's in this book

- **Week 1 — Integrity.** Being the same guy everywhere, honest in games and tests, even when no one's watching.
- **Week 2 — Screens and Gaming.** Staying in charge of your devices instead of letting them be in charge of you.
- **Week 3 — Temptation.** How temptation works, and how to fight it with God's help and good friends.
- **Week 4 — Winning and Losing.** Sports, competition, and being a good sport.
- **Week 5 — Men Who Followed Jesus.** Andrew, Thomas, John and Peter, and what it means to follow Him.

At the end of each week, you'll meet another real man from history who stayed faithful to God. 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!

If you haven't read Book 1, that's okay! You can start right here.

For parents, grandparents and leaders

Book 2 of *Sons of the King* is about faithfulness for boys aged 9 to 12: integrity, screens and gaming, temptation, sports and competition, and following Jesus, with Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible. As in Book 1, it builds character through the men of the Bible and does not teach adult roles. Week 2 on screens and gaming makes a good family conversation. Day 15 speaks in general, age-appropriate terms about "wrong desires" and encourages boys to talk with a parent. Several days encourage boys to find a trusted friend or mentor to help them stay accountable.

Day 1 — Walking with Integrity

"The righteous man walks with integrity; blessed are his children after him."
— Proverbs 20:7 (BSB)

What's the difference between a real diamond and a fake one?

From across the room, they might look the same. Both sparkle. Both look expensive. But look closely, or test them, and you'll find out. The real one is diamond all the way through. The fake one is just glass pretending.

Integrity means being real all the way through. The word comes from the same root as *integer*, a whole number. A person with integrity is *whole*. He's not one guy at church and a different guy at school. He's not one guy when his parents are around and another when they're gone. He's not honest when it's easy and dishonest when it costs something. He's the same all the way through.

Solomon says, "The righteous man **walks** with integrity." Notice it says *walks*. Integrity isn't a one-time thing. It's how you walk through life, day after day, step after step. Every choice is a step.

And look at the promise: "blessed are his children after him." A guy who lives with integrity doesn't just bless himself. He blesses his family, and even the people who come after him. His example shapes the next generation.

Right now, you're building the kind of man you'll become. Every time you tell the truth when a lie would be easier, every time you do the right

thing when nobody's watching, every time you keep your word, you're building integrity.

And every time you cheat a little, lie a little or act one way in front of some people and another way in front of others, you're building something too. Just not something good.

The good news is that you don't have to build integrity on your own. Jesus is the one Person who was perfectly the same all the way through. When you follow Him, He helps make you whole.

This week, we're going to look at what integrity looks like in the everyday life of a guy your age.

Think about it: Are you the same guy everywhere, at home, at school, online and at church? Where is it hardest?

Try this: Pay attention today to one area where you're tempted to act differently depending on who's around. Choose to be the real you.

Dear God, I want to be real all the way through, like a real diamond, not a fake. Help me walk with integrity every day, and be the same guy wherever I am. Make me whole, like Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Day 2 — Your Built-In GPS

"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the perversity of the faithless destroys them."
— Proverbs 11:3 (BSB)

Have you ever been in a car when the GPS said, "Turn left in 500 feet"? A GPS helps you know which way to go, especially in a place you've never been before. Without it, you could end up lost.

Proverbs says integrity works like a GPS: "**The integrity of the upright guides them.**"

When you've already decided to be honest, trustworthy and faithful to God, a lot of decisions become easy. You don't have to wonder, *Should I copy this answer?* You already know the answer: no. You don't have to think, *Should I lie to get out of trouble?* Your integrity guides you: no. You don't have to agonize over whether to go along with the crowd when they're doing something wrong. Your integrity already points the way.

A guy without integrity has to figure out every situation from scratch. *What can I get away with? Who will find out? What's the easiest way out of this?* That's exhausting, and it usually leads to trouble.

Look at the second half of the verse: "the **perversity** of the faithless destroys them." *Perversity* means twisting things, bending the truth, being crooked. When a guy twists the truth or bends the rules, it eventually catches up with him. His own crookedness destroys him. His lies trap him.

His cheating ruins his reputation. His broken promises break his friendships.

So how do you build your "integrity GPS"? By deciding ahead of time. Here are some decisions you can make right now:

- *I will tell the truth, even when it gets me in trouble.*
- *I will not cheat, in games, sports or school.*
- *I will keep my promises.*
- *I will not take things that aren't mine.*
- *I will be the same guy everywhere.*

When you've already made those decisions, your integrity will guide you when the moment comes.

Think about it: What's a decision you could make ahead of time that would make future choices easier?

Try this: Write down three "integrity decisions" in your notebook, like "I will not cheat." Sign your name under them.

Dear God, let integrity guide me like a GPS. Help me decide ahead of time to be honest, trustworthy and faithful to You. Keep me from twisting the truth or bending the rules. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3 — Honest Scales

"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, but an accurate weight is His delight."
— Proverbs 11:1 (BSB)

In Bible times, people bought and sold things using scales. A merchant would put your grain on one side and a weight on the other. If the scale balanced, you got the right amount.

But some dishonest merchants cheated. They used weights that were a little too light when they sold things, so customers got less than they paid for. Or they used weights that were a little too heavy when they bought things, so they got more than they paid for. It was sneaky, and most customers never noticed.

But God noticed. "**Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD.**" An *abomination* is something God hates. He cares about honesty even in small, sneaky ways that nobody else sees.

You probably don't sell grain. But you face your own kind of "scales" every day:

- **In games:** changing the rules when you're losing, moving your piece when no one's looking, lying about whether the ball was out.
- **In video games:** using cheats in a competition, or lying about your score.

- **In school:** copying homework, looking at someone else's test, or having someone else do your project.
- **In sports:** faking a foul, or lying to the ref.
- **With money:** keeping extra change a cashier gave you by mistake.

Cheating might help you win in the moment. But it's like using dishonest scales. And it's not really winning. A victory you cheated to get isn't a real victory.

Look at the second half of the verse: "an **accurate weight** is His delight." God *delights* in honesty. When you play fair, tell the truth about your score, do your own work and give back the extra change, God is glad.

And here's something else: honest guys earn trust. Friends want to play with someone who plays fair. Teachers trust students who do their own work. Coaches want players who are honest.

Think about it: Where are you most tempted to cheat, even in small ways? Why do you think God cares so much about little bits of dishonesty?

Try this: Play a game today with total honesty, even if you lose. Notice how it feels to win or lose fairly.

Dear God, I want to be honest, even in small things nobody sees. Help me play fair, do my own work and tell the truth. Thank You that You delight in honesty. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4 — When No One's Watching

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, observing the evil and the good."
— Proverbs 15:3 (BSB)

Have you ever done your chores really well when your mom was watching, and then slacked off as soon as she left the room? Or behaved perfectly in front of the teacher, and then goofed off when she stepped out?

Most people act differently when they think no one's watching. But here's a truth that changes everything: "**The eyes of the LORD are in every place.**"

God sees everything. Every place, every moment. There's no room He can't see into, no screen He doesn't know about, no thought He doesn't understand.

At first, that might sound scary, like God is a security camera waiting to catch you doing something wrong. But that's not what this verse is about.

Notice what God sees: "the evil **and the good**." God doesn't only see the bad things you do. He sees the good things too, including the ones nobody else notices. When you clean your room without being asked, God sees it. When you're kind to a kid nobody else is kind to, God sees it. When you tell the truth even though a lie would have been easier, God sees it. When you pray in the dark before you fall asleep, God sees it.

Many of the best things you'll ever do will be things nobody else knows about. But God knows. And He's a Father who is proud of His son.

So what does integrity look like when no one's watching?

- Doing your chores just as well when your parents are out as when they're home.
- Not looking at things online you wouldn't look at if your dad were next to you.
- Being kind to your little brother even when no one would ever know if you weren't.
- Doing your homework honestly, even when you could get away with cheating.
- Keeping your promises, even ones nobody would remember.

A man of integrity is the same when the lights are off as when they're on.

Think about it: Do you act differently when you think no one's watching? How does it change things to know God sees the good too?

Try this: Do one good thing today that nobody will ever know about. Only God will see it.

Dear God, thank You that You see everything, the bad and the good. Help me be the same guy when no one's watching as when everyone is. Thank You that You notice the good things nobody else sees. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5 — Hidden in the Tent

"But if you do not do this, you will certainly sin against the LORD—and be assured that your sin will find you out."
— Numbers 32:23 (BSB)

After God's people crossed into the Promised Land, God gave them an amazing victory at the city of Jericho. The walls fell down! But God had given one important instruction: none of the treasure from Jericho was to be kept. It was set apart for God.

A soldier named **Achan** saw something he wanted. Later, he admitted what happened: "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Shinar, two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold... **I coveted them and took them.**"

Achan hid the treasure in the ground under his tent. Nobody saw him do it. He probably thought he'd gotten away with it.

But soon after, Israel lost a battle they should have easily won. Something was wrong. God revealed to Joshua that someone had disobeyed. And one by one, the tribes, then the families, then the men came forward, until Achan was found out. The treasure was dug up from under his tent, and Achan faced serious consequences. (You can read the whole story in Joshua 7.)

Earlier, Moses had told God's people: "**be assured that your sin will find you out.**"

Hidden sin has a way of coming out. Sometimes it's found quickly. Sometimes it takes a long time. But things you hide usually don't stay hidden forever. And even if no one else ever finds out, God always knows, and hidden sin weighs on your heart.

Have you ever hidden something? A broken item you didn't tell anyone about? A lie you told? Something you took? Something you looked at? The longer you hide it, the heavier it gets, and the worse it usually is when it comes out.

But here's the good news: you don't have to wait to be found out. You can bring it out yourself. You can confess to God, and He will forgive you. You can tell your parents or the person you hurt, and make it right. When you bring hidden things into the light, the weight lifts.

A faithful man doesn't hide things under his tent.

Think about it: Why do you think people try to hide what they've done wrong? What happens when they do?

Try this: If you're hiding something, don't wait to be found out. Confess it to God today, and tell the person you need to tell.

Dear God, I don't want to hide things like Achan did. Help me bring my wrongs into the light, confess them to You and make them right. Thank You that You forgive me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 6 — A Faithful Man

"A faithful man will abound with blessings, but one eager to be rich will not go unpunished."
— Proverbs 28:20 (BSB)

Proverbs compares two kinds of guys.

The first is **faithful**. He's reliable and honest. He does the right thing, day after day, even when it's slow and nobody's cheering. He doesn't cut corners.

The second is **eager to be rich**. He wants success right now, the fast and easy way. He's willing to cut corners, cheat or take shortcuts to get what he wants.

Which one ends up better off? Proverbs says, "A faithful man **will abound with blessings**." But the guy in a hurry to get rich "will not go unpunished." Shortcuts usually end in trouble.

This week, you've learned what integrity looks like: being real all the way through, letting integrity guide you like a GPS, playing fair, being the same when no one's watching and not hiding sin. All of that adds up to being a **faithful man**.

Being faithful isn't flashy. It won't always get you noticed right away. The guy who cheats on his test might get a better grade this time. The guy who lies might get out of trouble today. But over time, the faithful man is the one people trust. He's the one who has real friends. He's the one God blesses.

Faithfulness is built in small, everyday choices. It grows like a tree: slowly, quietly, one ring at a time. And one day you look up and see how strong it has become.

A true story: As a teenager in Germany, George Müller was a liar and a thief. He even stole from his own father, and he was thrown in prison at sixteen. But George met Jesus, and everything changed. He moved to England and built homes for thousands of orphans. And he made a decision: he would never ask anyone for money. He would tell only God what he needed, and trust God to provide. One morning, there was no food for breakfast. George thanked God for the meal anyway. Right then, a baker knocked on the door with fresh bread, and a milkman whose cart had broken down outside offered his milk! The boy who once stole became famous for his honesty and faith. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: Why do you think faithfulness is better than taking shortcuts, even if shortcuts seem to work sometimes?

Try this: Choose one area where you've been tempted to take a shortcut. Choose the faithful way instead today.

Dear God, I want to be a faithful man, not one who takes shortcuts. Help me be honest and reliable in small things every day. Thank You for George Müller, and for how You can change anyone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 7 — Who's the Boss?

> *"'Everything is permissible for me,' but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything."*
> *— 1 Corinthians 6:12 (BSB)*

Video games can be awesome. So can videos, shows and apps. There's nothing wrong with having fun on a screen! But screens can also be sneaky. Before you know it, you've been playing for three hours, your homework isn't done, you're grumpy when you have to stop, and all you can think about is getting back on.

Paul was writing to Christians who liked to say, "Everything is permissible for me!" In other words, *I'm free! I can do whatever I want!* And Paul said, *Okay, maybe. But not everything is good for you.*

Then he said something really important: "**I will not be mastered by anything.**"

A *master* is a boss, someone in charge of you. Paul was saying: *I'm not going to let anything boss me around, except Jesus.*

That's a great question to ask about screens: **Who's the boss?** Are you in charge of your screen, or is your screen in charge of you?

Here are some signs a screen might be starting to master you:

- You get really angry or upset when you have to stop.
- You sneak extra time when you're not supposed to.

- You think about it all the time, even when you're doing other things.
- You'd rather play than spend time with family or friends.
- Your homework, chores or sleep are suffering.
- You feel kind of bad or empty after playing for a long time.

If any of those sound familiar, don't feel guilty. Screens and games are designed to be hard to put down! But it might be time to take back control.

Here are some ideas:

- **Set time limits** with your parents, and stick to them.
- **Stop when it's time,** without arguing. That's what being the boss looks like.
- **Keep screens out of your bedroom** at night.
- **Take screen breaks,** like a day or a weekend without them.
- **Do other things you enjoy:** sports, building, reading, being outside.

You're a son of the King. Jesus is your boss, not a screen.

Think about it: Are you the boss of your screens, or are they starting to boss you? What makes you think so?

Try this: Stop playing or watching today the first time you're asked, without arguing. Show your screen who's the boss.

Dear God, I don't want to be mastered by anything but You. Help me enjoy screens and games without letting them control me. Help me stop when it's time, and remember that You are my Master. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 8 — Count Your Days

"So teach us to number our days, that we may present a heart of wisdom."
— Psalm 90:12 (BSB)

How many days do you think you've been alive? If you're ten years old, that's about 3,650 days. If you're twelve, it's around 4,380.

That's a lot of days! But every one of them is a gift from God, and each one only comes once.

Moses wrote Psalm 90. He had lived a long life, and he had seen how short life really is. So he prayed: "Teach us to **number our days**."

To number your days means to realize that your time is limited and valuable, and to use it wisely. Moses asked God to help him understand that, so that he would have "a heart of wisdom."

Screens can make time disappear. You pick up a game "for five minutes," and an hour later you're still playing. You watch one video, then another, then another. Days can slip by without you really doing anything that matters.

Now, rest and fun aren't wasted time. God made you to enjoy life! But if most of your free time disappears into a screen, you might be missing out on a lot of other good things: friendships, sports, reading, building things, learning new skills, spending time with your family, and spending time with God.

Here's a challenge. Imagine you're an old man looking back on your life. What do you think you'll be glad you spent time on? Probably not the number of hours you spent gaming. More likely the friends you made, the adventures you had, the things you learned, the people you helped and your relationship with God.

Numbering your days doesn't mean you can never play video games. It means you choose on purpose how to spend your time, instead of letting it slip away.

Think about it: If you added up the hours you spend on screens each week, what do you think the number would be? What else could you do with some of that time?

Try this: Keep track of how much time you spend on screens today. Then ask God to help you use your time wisely.

Dear God, teach me to number my days. Help me understand how valuable my time is, and help me use it wisely. Show me what's really worth spending my days on. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 9 — Rage Quit

"...for man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires."
— James 1:20 (BSB)

You're one move away from winning. And then someone snipes you. Or the game glitches. Or your little brother bumps the controller. You lose.

What happens next?

For a lot of guys, it's an explosion. Yelling at the screen. Throwing the controller. Slamming a door. Typing something nasty in the chat. **Rage quitting.**

Gaming can bring out a lot of anger. And online, it's easy to say things you'd never say to someone's face, because you can't see them, and you might never meet them.

James says, "man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires." In other words, blowing up doesn't make anything better. It doesn't help you win. It doesn't make you a better player. It doesn't honor God. It usually just makes things worse: broken controllers, hurt feelings, trouble with your parents and a bad reputation.

Remember what you learned in Book 1? "He who is slow to anger is better than a warrior." That applies to games too.

Here are some ways to handle gaming anger:

- **Notice when you're getting heated.** Your heart speeds up, your jaw tightens and your hands grip harder.
- **Take a break before you explode.** Put the controller down. Walk away for a few minutes. Get a drink of water.
- **Remember it's a game.** Losing a match isn't the end of the world.
- **Don't type angry.** If you're mad, don't write in the chat. You can't take words back.
- **Be kind to other players,** even when they're not kind to you.
- **Know when to stop.** If a game makes you angry most of the time, it might be time to play something else, or take a longer break.

And if someone online is cruel to you, threatens you or makes you feel uncomfortable, stop playing, and tell a parent.

Think about it: Do you ever get really angry while gaming? What usually happens? What could you do differently?

Try this: The next time a game makes you angry, put the controller down and walk away for five minutes before you react.

Dear God, help me control my anger, even when I'm gaming. Help me not to rage quit, throw things or say mean things to other players. Remind me that my anger doesn't make things better. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 10 — Be Wise, Stay Innocent

> *"Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil."*
> *— Romans 16:19 (BSB)*

Some guys think it's cool to know about everything, including bad stuff. They want to watch the movies they're not old enough for, play the games that are really violent, and know about all the things adults don't want them to see. It can feel grown-up, like you're in on something.

But Paul says something surprising: "I want you to be **wise about what is good** and **innocent about what is evil**."

In other words: become an expert in good things. Learn everything you can about what's true, right, helpful and beautiful. But when it comes to evil, it's okay, even good, to stay a beginner. You don't need to know everything about bad things.

Think about a doctor. A good doctor studies diseases so he can fight them. But he doesn't go around infecting himself with diseases so he can "experience" them! He knows enough to recognize danger, and then he stays away.

Screens give us access to almost anything, including a lot of things that aren't good for anyone, especially kids: extreme violence, cruelty, crude jokes, and things that treat people as objects. Once those images and ideas get into your mind, it's really hard to get them out.

Being "innocent about evil" means:

- **Not seeking out** things you know you shouldn't see.
- **Turning it off or looking away** if something bad comes on.
- **Following your parents' rules** about what's okay to watch and play. They're trying to protect your mind.
- **Not being ashamed** to say, "I'm not allowed to watch that," or "I don't play that."
- **Telling a parent** if you see something online that bothers you, confuses you or makes you uncomfortable.

And being "wise about good" means filling your mind with good things: great stories, God's Word, real adventures, learning and creativity.

You don't have to know about everything bad to be grown-up. The wisest men know what to stay away from.

Think about it: Why do you think Paul wants us to stay "innocent about evil"? Is there something you've been watching or playing that you should stay away from?

Try this: Replace one screen activity this week with something that makes you "wise about good," like a great book, learning a skill or reading the Bible.

Dear God, help me be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil. Help me stay away from things I shouldn't see, and fill my mind with good things instead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 11 — Don't Disappear

"He who isolates himself pursues selfish desires; he rebels against all sound judgment."
— Proverbs 18:1 (BSB)

Screens can be a great way to connect with friends. You can play games together, even if you live far apart. You can message your grandparents. You can video-chat with cousins.

But screens can also do the opposite. They can make you **disappear**.

Have you ever been in the same room with your family, but everybody is staring at a different screen? Or skipped playing outside because you'd rather stay in and game? Or hidden in your room for hours instead of hanging out with people?

Proverbs warns about this: "**He who isolates himself** pursues selfish desires." To *isolate* means to cut yourself off from others. When you spend too much time alone, just doing what you want, you can become selfish. Everything starts to be about you and what you want.

And the verse says the isolated guy "rebels against all sound judgment." In other words, when you pull away from people, you lose the good advice, the correction and the wisdom that come from them.

God didn't make you to live alone in a room with a screen. He made you for people: family, friends, church and teammates. Real life happens face to face: laughing at dinner, playing ball in the yard, building something with your dad, talking with a friend on a walk, sitting with your grandma.

Online friends can be fine, but they're not the same as real-life friends who can see your face, notice when something's wrong, and be there for you.

Here are some ways not to disappear:

- **Put devices away at meals.** Talk with your family.
- **Play outside** or do something active with friends.
- **Say yes** when your family invites you to do something.
- **Invite a friend over** to do something that isn't on a screen.
- **Notice when you're hiding.** If you're spending a lot of time alone because you feel sad or lonely, tell a parent or a trusted adult.

Think about it: Do screens help you connect with people, or help you disappear from them? How do you know?

Try this: Spend time face to face with someone today, with no screens involved.

Dear God, thank You for the people You've put in my life. Help me not to disappear into screens and isolate myself. Help me be present with my family and friends, and enjoy real life with them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 12 — Offline with God

"Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went out to a solitary place to pray."
— Mark 1:35 (BSB)

The day before, Jesus had been incredibly busy. He had taught in the synagogue. He had healed Peter's mother-in-law. And when evening came, the whole town crowded around the door of the house. Jesus healed many sick people and set many free from evil spirits. It must have been exhausting.

So what did Jesus do the next morning?

"Early in the morning, **while it was still dark**, Jesus got up and went out to a **solitary place to pray**."

Jesus was the Son of God. But He still needed time alone with His Father. Before the crowds found Him, before the busyness started again, He got away to a quiet place to pray.

Today, most of us wake up and grab a screen. We check messages, scroll or turn on a game before we've even gotten out of bed. The first voice we hear in the morning isn't God's. It's a notification.

What if you did what Jesus did? What if, before you got online, you spent some time "offline" with God?

It doesn't have to be long. It doesn't have to be dark outside! But you could try:

- **Leave your device** in another room overnight.
- **Before you turn on a screen,** spend a few minutes reading your Bible.
- **Pray first.** Talk to God about your day before you talk to anyone else.
- **Find a "solitary place,"** like your bedroom, a corner of the house or a spot outside, where you can be quiet with God.

This week, you've learned about taking charge of your screens: making sure Jesus is the boss, not a screen, numbering your days, controlling your anger, staying innocent about evil and not disappearing from real life. The best way to keep screens in their place is to make sure God has the first place.

A true story: Adoniram Judson sailed from America to Burma in 1812 to tell people about Jesus. He spent years translating the Bible into the Burmese language, starting with the New Testament, page after page. Then war broke out, and Adoniram was thrown into a terrible prison for nearly two years. His biggest worry was that his precious Bible translation would be found and destroyed. So his wife, Ann, sewed the pages inside a hard, lumpy pillow and brought it to him in prison. The guards didn't want such an ugly pillow, so they left it alone. Night after night, Adoniram slept on God's Word, and it was saved. He treasured the Bible so much that he guarded it with his life. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: What's the first thing you usually do when you wake up? What would it look like to give God the first part of your day?

Try this: Tomorrow morning, before you touch any screen, spend five minutes with God: read a psalm and pray.

Dear Jesus, even You needed time alone with Your Father. Help me put down my screens and spend time with You. Help me give You the first part of

my day. In Your name, Amen.

Day 13 — How Temptation Works

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom, she took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it."
— Genesis 3:6 (BSB)

To win a game, it helps to know how your opponent plays. Coaches study the other team. Players watch game film. If you know their moves, you can stop them.

The Bible shows us exactly how temptation plays, starting with the very first temptation in the garden of Eden.

God had given Adam and Eve one rule: don't eat from one special tree. Then the serpent, the devil, showed up. Look at how temptation worked, step by step:

1. It started with a question. The serpent asked, "Did God really say...?" He made them doubt that God's rule was good.

2. Then came a lie. He said, "You will not surely die." He told them God was keeping something good from them.

3. Then Eve looked. "She saw that the tree was good for food and **pleasing to the eyes**." The longer she looked, the more she wanted it.

4. She wanted it. It seemed "desirable." Her feelings grew stronger than her trust in God.

5. She took it. And Adam, who was right there with her, took it too.

Temptation still works the same way today:

- **It makes you doubt.** *Is this really wrong? Does God really care?*
- **It lies.** *Nobody will know. It's not a big deal. It'll make you happy.*
- **It gets you looking.** The longer you look at something, the more you want it.
- **It grows into wanting.** And then you act.

Here's the good news: you can stop temptation at any step. The earlier, the easier. When you notice the doubt or the lie, answer it with God's truth. When you notice you're looking, look away. When you feel the wanting, turn to God for help.

Notice something else: Adam was "with her." He could have spoken up. He could have said, *No, let's obey God.* But he didn't. Sometimes the bravest thing a guy can do is speak up when someone else is about to make a bad choice, and not go along with it.

Think about it: Which step of temptation is it easiest for you to stop? Which is hardest?

Try this: The next time you're tempted, try to notice which step you're on. Then stop it right there.

Dear God, thank You for showing me how temptation works. Help me recognize the doubts and lies, look away when I need to, and turn to You for help. Give me courage to speak up when others are being tempted too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 14 — Watch and Pray

"Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak."
— Matthew 26:41 (BSB)

It was the night before Jesus died. He took Peter, James and John into a garden called Gethsemane, and He asked them to stay awake and pray while He went a little farther to pray alone. Jesus was in great sorrow, knowing what was about to happen.

But when Jesus came back, He found His disciples **asleep**.

He said to Peter, "**Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation.** For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Jesus knew that a very hard night was coming for His disciples. Soon soldiers would arrive to arrest Him, and the disciples would be tempted to run away and deny Him. Jesus wanted them to be ready. And the way to be ready was to **watch** and **pray**.

Then Jesus said something very honest about all of us: "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." In other words, *You want to do the right thing. Your heart is in the right place. But you're weaker than you think.*

That was true for Peter. He really did want to stay faithful to Jesus. He'd even promised he would never deny Him. But he didn't watch and pray. He slept. And when the moment of temptation came, he wasn't ready. He ran away, and later denied even knowing Jesus.

Here's the lesson: **don't wait until temptation shows up to get ready for it.** Watching and praying is how you prepare.

Watching means paying attention. Noticing situations where you're likely to be tempted. Knowing your weak spots. If you know you get tempted when you're alone on a device late at night, don't put yourself in that situation.

Praying means asking God for strength before you need it. Asking Him to help you, protect you and give you courage. Jesus Himself taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

You want to do the right thing. That's great! But don't count on willpower alone. Watch and pray.

Think about it: What are some situations where you're most likely to be tempted? How could you "watch" for them?

Try this: Each morning this week, pray, "God, lead me not into temptation, and deliver me from the evil one."

Dear Jesus, I want to do the right thing, but I know I'm weaker than I think. Help me watch for temptation and pray for strength before I need it. Lead me not into temptation, and deliver me from the evil one. In Your name, Amen.

Day 15 — Run and Chase

> *"Flee from youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, together with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*
> *— 2 Timothy 2:22 (BSB)*

Paul wrote this to his young friend Timothy. And he gave him two commands: one about running *away* and one about running *toward*.

"Flee from youthful passions." To *flee* means to run away, fast. *Youthful passions* are strong wrong desires that young people often struggle with. For guys your age, that might be things like:

- Wanting to show off and be the best at everything.
- Losing your temper.
- Wanting stuff you can't have, and getting jealous of guys who have it.
- Wanting to fit in so badly that you'll do things you know are wrong.
- Being curious about things you shouldn't look at.

As you grow up, you'll feel some new and strong feelings. That's normal. God designed you to grow and change. But some of those desires can pull you toward wrong things. And when they do, Paul says, don't try to stand there and fight. **Run.** Get out of the situation. Close the screen. Walk away from the group. Change what you're doing. (And if you have

questions about the new feelings that come with growing up, talk to your dad, mom or another trusted adult. They want to help.)

But Paul doesn't only say what to run from. He also says what to run toward: "**pursue** righteousness, faith, love, and peace." To *pursue* means to chase after something with energy, like chasing a ball down the field.

It's not enough to just run away from bad things. You need to chase after good things: doing what's right, trusting God, loving people and making peace. When your life is full of chasing good things, there's less room for bad ones.

And notice the last part: "**together with** those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." You don't have to do this alone! Find other guys who love God, and chase good things together.

Think about it: What's something you need to run *from*? What's something good you could chase *after* instead?

Try this: Name one situation you need to "flee" from. Then name one good thing you'll "pursue" in its place. Tell a friend or your dad about your plan.

Dear God, help me run away from wrong desires and run toward righteousness, faith, love and peace. Give me friends who love You, so we can chase after good things together. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 16 — Better Together

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. For if one falls down, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to help him up!"
— Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (BSB)

Picture a guy rock climbing alone. He slips, falls and lands on a ledge with a hurt ankle. There's no one to help him. No one to call for help. He's stuck.

Now picture two guys climbing together, roped to each other. When one slips, the other holds the rope. When one gets hurt, the other helps him down.

Solomon says, "**Two are better than one.**" "If one falls down, his companion can lift him up."

This is especially true when it comes to temptation. Fighting temptation alone is really hard. It's much easier with a friend.

That's called **accountability**. It means having someone who knows what you're struggling with, who checks in on you, who encourages you and who helps you get back up when you fall.

An accountability friend might:

- Ask you, "How are you doing with that thing we talked about?"
- Pray for you and with you.
- Tell you honestly when you're heading the wrong way.
- Help you avoid situations where you'd be tempted.

- Celebrate with you when you do the right thing.
- Remind you that God forgives, when you fall.

Who could be that person for you? It could be your dad or another trusted adult: a grandpa, an uncle, a youth leader or a pastor. It could also be a Christian friend your age. For the hardest struggles, it's especially good to have a trusted grown-up in your corner.

Having accountability takes humility. You have to be honest about your struggles. Many guys don't want to admit they're struggling. They want to look like they've got it all together. But the guys who get help are the ones who grow stronger.

A few verses later, Solomon says, "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Two friends who both rely on God are like a rope with three strands: you, your friend and God. That's hard to break.

Think about it: Who is someone who could be an accountability partner for you? What would make it hard to be honest with him?

Try this: Talk to your dad, a trusted adult or a Christian friend about one thing you want to grow in. Ask him to check in with you about it.

Dear God, thank You that two are better than one. Please give me a friend or a trusted adult who can help me fight temptation and grow. Help me be humble and honest. And help me be that kind of friend for someone else. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 17 — The Bowl of Stew

"'Look,' said Esau, 'I am about to die, so what good is a birthright to me?' So Esau swore to Jacob and sold him the birthright. Then Jacob gave some bread and lentil stew to Esau, who ate and drank and then got up and went away. Thus Esau despised his birthright."
— Genesis 25:32–34 (BSB)

Esau was a hunter, a big, strong outdoorsman. One day he came home from the field completely **starving**. His twin brother Jacob was cooking a pot of red lentil stew, and it smelled amazing.

"Let me eat some of that red stew!" Esau said.

Jacob saw his chance. "First sell me your birthright."

The **birthright** was a huge deal. As the older son, Esau had the right to a double share of everything his father owned, and to become the leader of the family. It was his future. It was worth far more than any meal.

But Esau was hungry *right now*. And he said, "Look, I am about to die, so what good is a birthright to me?" He wasn't really about to die. He was just really, really hungry. But in that moment, the stew seemed more important than anything.

So Esau traded his whole future for one bowl of soup. He ate, drank, got up and walked away. And the Bible sums it up: "Thus Esau **despised** his birthright." He treated something precious like it was worthless.

Later, Esau regretted it deeply. But he couldn't take it back. Many years later, the book of Hebrews still used Esau as a warning: he sold his

birthright for a single meal.

Esau's story shows one of temptation's biggest tricks: it makes **right now** feel more important than **forever**.

I want to play right now, even if my homework doesn't get done. I want to win right now, even if I have to cheat. I want to fit in right now, even if I have to do something wrong. I want to look at this right now, even though I know it will hurt me.

Temptation always offers a bowl of stew. It looks and smells great for a moment. But it costs you something far more valuable: your integrity, your friendships, your peace or your relationship with God.

When temptation offers you stew, remember what you're really trading. You're a son of the King, with an inheritance that lasts forever. Don't trade it for a bowl of soup.

Think about it: What's a "bowl of stew" that's tempting to you, something you want right now that could cost you something more important?

Try this: The next time you're tempted, ask yourself, "Is this worth what I'd be trading for it?"

Dear God, help me not to be like Esau, trading something precious for something that only lasts a moment. When temptation offers me a "bowl of stew," help me remember what I'd be giving up. Thank You for the forever inheritance I have in Jesus. In His name, Amen.

Day 18 — Help in the Moment

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."
— Hebrews 4:15–16 (BSB)

Have you ever tried to explain a problem to someone who just didn't get it? Maybe you told a grown-up how hard something was, and they said, "Just stop worrying about it," or "That's easy!" It makes you feel alone.

Here's great news: when it comes to temptation, **Jesus gets it**.

"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Jesus isn't far away, unable to understand what you're going through. He was "tempted in every way that we are." He was a boy, a teenager and a young man. He knows what it's like to be hungry, tired, lonely, frustrated, pressured and tempted.

But there's one big difference: He was "**without sin**." He faced every kind of temptation, and He never gave in, not even once.

That means two amazing things for you.

First, He understands. When you're struggling, you're not talking to someone who will look down on you. You're talking to someone who knows exactly how it feels.

Second, He can help. Because He won every battle, He has the power to help you win yours.

So what should you do when you're tempted? "Let us then approach the throne of grace **with confidence**." Don't run away from God. Don't hide. Come to Him boldly! His throne is called "the throne of grace," a place where you'll find kindness, not condemnation.

And look at what you'll find there: "mercy and... grace to help us **in our time of need**." Right in the moment, when you're tempted, when you're struggling, even right after you've messed up, you can run to God and find help.

You can pray a simple prayer right in the middle of temptation: *Jesus, help me!* He hears. He understands. And He helps.

This week, you learned how temptation works, how to watch and pray, how to run from wrong desires and chase good things, how two are better than one, and how not to trade forever for a bowl of stew. And today, you learned that when you're tempted, you can run straight to Jesus.

A true story: Sundar Singh grew up in India in a Sikh family, searching for God but never finding peace. He grew so angry that he even burned a Bible. Then, early one morning, he prayed one last desperate prayer, and he saw Jesus, alive and full of love. From that moment on, Sundar belonged to Jesus. His family turned him out of their home, and he believed they even tried to poison him. But nothing could make him give Jesus up. He became a wandering preacher, walking barefoot across India and up into the icy mountains of Tibet to tell people about Jesus. People called him "the apostle with the bleeding feet." You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: How does it help to know that Jesus was tempted too, and understands?

Try this: The next time you're tempted, pray right away: "Jesus, help me!"

Dear Jesus, thank You that You understand what it's like to be tempted, and that You never gave in. When I'm struggling, help me come to You with confidence. Give me mercy and grace in my time of need. In Your name, Amen.

Day 19 — Run to Win

> *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way as to take the prize. Everyone who competes in the games trains with strict discipline. They do it for a crown that is perishable, but we do it for a crown that is imperishable."*
> *— 1 Corinthians 9:24–25 (BSB)*

Paul liked sports. In his day, the Greek world held huge athletic competitions, a lot like the Olympics. The city of Corinth, where the people Paul was writing to lived, hosted one of the biggest.

So Paul used sports to teach a lesson. "In a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize. **Run in such a way as to take the prize.**"

Paul isn't saying competing is bad. He's saying, *Give it everything you've got!* Don't jog lazily. Run to win.

Then he points out how hard athletes work. "Everyone who competes in the games trains with strict discipline." Think about what great athletes do: early-morning practices, eating right, sleeping enough, running drills over and over, and pushing through when they're tired.

And what did the winners in Paul's day get? A **crown** made of leaves, a wreath of pine or celery that would wilt and fall apart within days! They trained for months for a prize that didn't last.

That's Paul's big point: "They do it for a crown that is **perishable**, but we do it for a crown that is **imperishable**." Athletes work incredibly hard

for prizes that don't last: trophies that get dusty, medals that go in a drawer, records that someone else eventually breaks. How much more should we give our best for things that last forever: loving God, growing in faith and helping others know Jesus?

This doesn't mean sports don't matter. It's great to work hard, compete and try to win! God made your body, and using it well honors Him. But it does mean keeping sports in the right place. Winning a championship is fun. Knowing God is forever.

So play hard. Practice with discipline. Try to win. And give your faith the same kind of effort, because that's the race that really counts.

Think about it: What do you work hardest at? How could you give that same effort to growing in your faith?

Try this: Next time you practice or play, give it your full effort. Then give the same effort to one thing that helps you grow in faith, like reading your Bible or praying.

Dear God, help me run the race You've given me with everything I've got. Help me work hard in sports and school, and even harder in following You. Thank You for the crown that lasts forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 20 — Train Yourself

"But reject irreverent, silly myths. Instead, train yourself for godliness. For physical exercise is of limited value, but godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for the present life and for the one to come."
— 1 Timothy 4:7–8 (BSB)

If you want to get better at a sport, what do you do? You **train**. You practice shooting free throws. You run sprints. You lift weights (if you're old enough). You practice the same moves again and again until they become automatic.

Paul told Timothy to train too, but not just his body. "**Train yourself for godliness.**" *Godliness* means becoming more like God: loving what He loves, doing what He'd do, and living in a way that honors Him.

Paul says, "physical exercise is of limited value." He's not saying exercise is bad! Exercise is good. It's valuable for this life. But godliness is "valuable in **every** way," both for "the present life and for the one to come." Your muscles won't come with you to heaven. But the man you become will.

So how do you train for godliness? A lot like training for sports:

Practice every day. Athletes don't get better by practicing once a month. Spiritual training works best a little every day: reading the Bible, praying and obeying.

Build good habits. An athlete trains his muscles until the right moves are automatic. When you practice good choices, like telling the truth, being

kind and controlling your temper, they become who you are.

Push through when it's hard. Every athlete has days when he doesn't feel like training. Faith is the same. Some days you won't feel like praying or reading the Bible. Do it anyway.

Get a coach. Athletes have coaches to help them improve. Spiritual "coaches" are parents, pastors, youth leaders and mentors who help you grow.

Train with a team. Being part of a church and having Christian friends helps you grow stronger.

Many guys spend hours training for sports and only a few minutes a week training for godliness. What would happen if you trained your spirit as hard as you train your body?

Think about it: How much time do you spend training for sports or other activities? How much time do you spend training for godliness?

Try this: Create a simple "spiritual training plan" for this week: when you'll read your Bible, when you'll pray, and one good habit you'll practice.

Dear God, help me train myself for godliness, not just my body. Help me practice following You every day, even when I don't feel like it. Make me the kind of man who is like You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 21 — No Gloating

"Do not gloat when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart rejoice when he stumbles."
— Proverbs 24:17 (BSB)

Your team just crushed the other team. The final buzzer sounds. What's the first thing you want to do?

Maybe run over and rub it in. Maybe point at the other team and laugh. Maybe trash-talk the kid who's been annoying you all game. Maybe post something about how bad they are.

That's called **gloating**, and Proverbs says don't do it. "Do not gloat when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart rejoice when he stumbles."

Gloating means being happy about someone else's failure, and showing it off. It's rubbing someone's face in their loss.

It's fine to celebrate winning! It feels great, and you worked hard. But there's a big difference between celebrating your win and celebrating someone else's loss.

Think about how the other team feels. They worked hard too. They wanted to win just as much as you did. Now they're disappointed, maybe even embarrassed. Gloating makes a hard moment worse.

Being a **good sport** means:

- **Shaking hands** with the other team, and meaning it: "Good game."

- **Complimenting good plays,** even by the other team.
- **Not trash-talking,** before, during or after the game.
- **Helping someone up** when they fall.
- **Celebrating with your team** without mocking the other team.
- **Winning with humility,** remembering that next time, it could be you on the losing side.

Some of the greatest athletes are known not just for how they won, but for how they treated their opponents. People respect a champion who is gracious.

And here's the deeper reason: Jesus loves the kids on the other team just as much as He loves you. When you treat them with respect, even after beating them, you're showing them what Jesus is like.

Think about it: Have you ever gloated after winning? Have you ever been gloated at? How did it feel?

Try this: After your next game or competition, win or lose, say "Good game" and mean it. Compliment someone on the other side.

Dear God, help me be a good sport. When I win, help me celebrate without gloating or putting others down. Help me treat my opponents with respect, because You love them too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 22 — Press On

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus."
— Philippians 3:13–14 (BSB)

You missed the winning shot. You struck out with the bases loaded. You didn't make the team. You came in last. You played your worst game ever.

Losing hurts. And for a lot of guys, it's hard to let go. You replay the mistake over and over in your head. You get mad at yourself. You feel embarrassed. You might even want to quit.

Paul knew a thing or two about setbacks. He was beaten, shipwrecked, thrown in prison and chased out of city after city. He had also made big mistakes in his past: before he met Jesus, he had hurt Christians. If anyone had reasons to be stuck in the past, it was Paul.

But look at what he said: "**One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on.**"

Forgetting what is behind doesn't mean you pretend it didn't happen. It means you don't let it hold you back. You learn from it, and then you let it go.

Straining toward what is ahead is a racing picture. Imagine a runner leaning forward at the finish line, stretching every muscle to cross first. He's not looking backward at the runners behind him. His eyes are forward.

I press on means keep going. Don't quit.
Here's how to press on after a loss:

- **Feel it, but don't live in it.** It's okay to be disappointed for a while.
- **Learn from it.** What could you do differently next time?
- **Don't beat yourself up.** Everyone loses. Even the greatest athletes miss most of the time.
- **Don't blame others.** Take responsibility for your part.
- **Get back to practice.** The next game is a new chance.
- **Remember what really matters.** Your worth isn't your score.

And the biggest "prize" isn't a trophy. Paul was pressing on toward "the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus." Whatever happens in sports, that's the race you can always keep running.

Think about it: Is there a loss or mistake you've been having trouble letting go of? What would it look like to "forget what is behind" and press on?

Try this: Think of a recent loss or mistake. Write down one thing you learned from it. Then write, "I press on."

Dear God, when I lose or mess up, help me not to get stuck in the past. Help me learn from my mistakes, forget what is behind and press on toward what's ahead. Thank You that my worth isn't my score. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 23 — Let Someone Else Say It

"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth—a stranger, and not your own lips."
— Proverbs 27:2 (BSB)

"I'm the best player on the team." "I scored four goals today." "I beat everybody." "I'm way better than him." "I got the highest score in the class."

Bragging is really common among guys. We like people to know how good we are. So we tell them, over and over.

But Proverbs gives some simple advice: "**Let another praise you, and not your own mouth.**"

In other words, if you're really good at something, you don't need to tell everybody. Let other people notice. Let them say it.

Why is bragging a problem?

It pushes people away. Nobody likes hanging out with a guy who's always talking about how great he is.

It makes others feel small. When you brag about beating someone, it can make them feel bad about themselves.

It's usually pride. Bragging comes from wanting people to think you're important. And the Bible says a lot about how pride leads to a fall.

It forgets where your gifts come from. Every ability you have is a gift from God. You didn't make yourself fast, strong or smart.

What should you do instead?

- **Let your actions speak.** Play well, work hard and let people see it for themselves.
- **Give credit to others.** "Great pass!" "We won as a team."
- **Thank God** for your abilities, instead of taking all the credit.
- **When someone compliments you,** just say "Thanks!" instead of adding more about how great you are.
- **Praise others** instead of praising yourself.

Being humble doesn't mean pretending you're bad at things or refusing to accept compliments. It means not needing to be the center of attention. It means knowing that your gifts come from God, and using them to lift others up.

Think about it: Do you brag? What do you usually brag about? Why do you think you do it?

Try this: Go a whole day without bragging. Instead, praise at least three other people for something they did well.

Dear God, forgive me for bragging. Help me remember that every gift I have comes from You. Help me let others do the praising, and help me praise others instead of myself. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 24 — In Jesus' Name

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
— Colossians 3:17 (BSB)

What would it look like to play a basketball game "in the name of the Lord Jesus"?

It doesn't mean shouting "Jesus!" every time you shoot. It means playing the way Jesus would want you to play, representing Him in everything you do.

Paul says, "**Whatever you do**, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Whatever you do! Not just church stuff. Sports, games, school, chores, everything.

To do something "in someone's name" means you're representing them. It's like wearing your team's jersey. When you wear it, everything you do reflects on the team. If you play dirty, people think badly of your team. If you play with character, people respect your team.

When you belong to Jesus, you're wearing His jersey everywhere you go, including on the field and in the game.

So what does it look like to compete in Jesus' name?

- **Giving your full effort,** because your abilities are a gift from Him.
- **Playing fair,** even when the ref isn't looking.
- **Controlling your temper** when things don't go your way.

- **Being a good sport,** whether you win or lose.
- **Encouraging teammates,** especially the weaker players.
- **Respecting coaches and refs,** even when you disagree.
- **Giving thanks,** because every game is a gift.

Notice the last part of the verse: "giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Whether you win or lose, you can thank God for your body, your teammates, your coach and the chance to play.

This week, you've learned to run to win, train for godliness, avoid gloating, press on after losing and let others do the praising. All of it comes down to this: whatever you do, do it for Jesus.

A true story: David Livingstone grew up poor in Scotland and went to work in a cotton mill when he was only ten. He propped a book open on the spinning machine and read while he worked, until he had taught himself enough to become a doctor. Then he went to Africa and walked thousands of miles across it, farther than almost any traveler before him, telling people about Jesus. Everywhere he went, he saw slave traders stealing people from their homes, and he spent his life working to end the slave trade. He was often sick and alone, but he kept going. When he died, his African friends carried his body more than a thousand miles to the coast out of love for him. He ran his race to the very end. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: If people watched you play a sport or a game, would they be able to tell you belong to Jesus?

Try this: Before your next game or practice, pray, "Jesus, I'm playing in Your name today." Then play like it.

Dear Jesus, whatever I do, I want to do it in Your name. Help me represent You well, in sports, games, school and everything else. Help me play with character, and help me give thanks win or lose. In Your name, Amen.

Day 25 — Andrew, the Bringer

"Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested of him, 'Sir, we want to see Jesus.' Philip relayed this appeal to Andrew, and both of them went and told Jesus."
— John 12:20–22 (BSB)

Andrew isn't one of the most famous disciples. His brother, Peter, got a lot more attention. Peter preached big sermons, walked on water and became a leader of the church. Andrew didn't do many of the flashy things.

But every time Andrew shows up in the Gospel of John, he's doing the same thing: **bringing people to Jesus.**

He brought his brother. When Andrew first met Jesus, the very first thing he did was run and find his brother Simon Peter. "We have found the Messiah!" And he brought Peter to Jesus. (Remember Day 1 of Book 1?)

He brought a boy. When five thousand hungry people were gathered on a hillside, Andrew was the one who found a boy with five loaves and two fish, and brought him to Jesus. And Jesus fed the whole crowd.

He brought strangers. In today's verses, some Greeks, people who weren't even Jewish, came wanting to see Jesus. They asked Philip, and Philip went to Andrew. And "both of them went and told Jesus."

Andrew might not have been the most famous disciple. But he was a **bringer**. He brought his family, he brought a kid, and he brought outsiders, all to Jesus.

You might not be the loudest, the most popular or the most talented guy. That's fine! You can still be a bringer, like Andrew:

- **Bring a friend** to church or youth group.
- **Bring your questions** to Jesus in prayer.
- **Bring people who are hurting** to Jesus by praying for them.
- **Bring the new kid** into your group.
- **Bring up Jesus** in normal conversation.

Being a bringer doesn't take special talent. It just takes caring about people and knowing that Jesus is the best Person you could ever introduce them to.

This week, we'll meet four men who followed Jesus: Andrew, Thomas, John and Peter. Each one teaches us something about following Him.

Think about it: Who is someone you could "bring" to Jesus, by inviting them, praying for them or telling them about Him?

Try this: Invite a friend to church, youth group or a Christian event this week. Be a bringer.

Dear Jesus, thank You for Andrew, who kept bringing people to You. Help me be a bringer too. Show me who I could bring to You, and give me the courage to invite them. In Your name, Amen.

Day 26 — Thomas Asks

"'Lord,' said Thomas, 'we do not know where You are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"
— John 14:5–6 (BSB)

Thomas is famous for one thing: doubting. People still call him "Doubting Thomas." But there's a lot more to him than that.

Thomas was **brave**. Once, when Jesus decided to go back to an area where people had tried to kill Him, the other disciples were scared. But Thomas said, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). He was ready to follow Jesus even into danger.

And Thomas was **honest**. He wasn't afraid to ask questions.

On the night before Jesus died, Jesus was telling His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them. Then He said, "You know the way to the place where I am going."

Everybody else just nodded. But Thomas spoke up: "Lord, **we do not know** where You are going, so how can we know the way?"

Thomas didn't pretend to understand. He was honest enough to say, *I don't get it.*

And because Thomas asked, Jesus gave one of the most important answers in the whole Bible: "**I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Think about that. We have that amazing verse, one that has helped millions of people understand who Jesus is, because one guy was brave enough to ask a question.

Many guys don't like to admit when they don't understand something. They'd rather nod along and pretend. But Thomas shows that asking honest questions is a good thing. Jesus wasn't annoyed by Thomas's question. He answered it.

You can ask Jesus your questions too. Big questions about God, about the Bible and about life. You can ask your parents, pastors and leaders. Real faith isn't afraid of questions. Questions are how you learn and grow.

And the answer Jesus gave Thomas is the answer to the biggest question of all. How do we get to God? Through Jesus. He is the Way.

Think about it: Is there a question about God or faith that you've been afraid to ask? Why?

Try this: Ask one honest question about God or the Bible this week, to God in prayer and to a trusted adult.

Dear Jesus, thank You that I can ask You honest questions, just like Thomas did. Thank You that You are the way, the truth and the life. Help me follow You, the only Way to the Father. In Your name, Amen.

Day 27 — "My Lord and My God!"

"Then Jesus said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!'"
— John 20:27–28 (BSB)

On the Sunday that Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples in a locked room. They were overjoyed!

But Thomas wasn't there.

When the others told him, "We have seen the Lord!" Thomas didn't believe them. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails have been, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe."

That's where the nickname "Doubting Thomas" comes from. And to be fair, Thomas's friends were telling him something that had never happened before in history! A man who had been dead for three days was alive again? It's no wonder he had a hard time believing.

For eight days, Thomas waited, doubting.

Then Jesus came again. The doors were locked, but suddenly Jesus was standing among them. And He went straight to Thomas.

Jesus didn't scold him. He didn't say, "How dare you doubt Me?" Instead, He gave Thomas exactly what he had asked for. "Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. **Stop doubting and believe.**"

And Thomas, who had doubted for a week, said the greatest statement of faith by any of the disciples: "**My Lord and my God!**"

Thomas didn't just say, "Okay, You're alive." He recognized who Jesus really is: not just a teacher, not just a friend, but **Lord** and **God**.

Here's what Thomas's story teaches us. Doubts aren't the end of faith. Many followers of Jesus go through times of doubt, wondering if it's all really true. That's okay. Jesus is patient with doubters. He meets them where they are.

The important thing is what you do with your doubts. Thomas didn't walk away. He stayed with the other disciples. And when Jesus showed up, Thomas believed with his whole heart.

Then Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). That's you! You haven't seen Jesus with your eyes, but you can still believe.

Think about it: Have you ever had doubts about God or the Bible? What helped you?

Try this: Say Thomas's words as a prayer today: "My Lord and my God!" Think about what it means for Jesus to be both.

Jesus, You are my Lord and my God! Thank You that You are patient with people who doubt. When I have doubts, help me stay close to You and to Your people, and help me believe. In Your name, Amen.

Day 28 — John, Son of Thunder

"Little children, let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth."
— 1 John 3:18 (BSB)

When Jesus first called John and his brother James, He gave them a nickname: **Boanerges**, which means "**Sons of Thunder**" (Mark 3:17). That tells you something about them! They were loud, bold and fiery. They had big tempers.

Once, when a village refused to welcome Jesus, James and John were furious. They asked Jesus, "Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" (Luke 9:54). They wanted to wipe out a whole village! But Jesus turned and rebuked them. That's not how He wanted His followers to act.

But something happened to John as he followed Jesus. He was with Jesus for years. He saw how Jesus loved people. He saw Jesus wash his feet. He stood at the cross and watched Jesus die. He ran to the empty tomb. John started calling himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

And slowly, the "Son of Thunder" became one of the most loving men in the Bible.

Many years later, when John was an old man, he wrote letters to Christians. And they're full of love. "Beloved, let us love one another." "God is love." And today's verse: "**Let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth.**"

The same guy who once wanted to call down fire on a village became the apostle of love. What changed him? Spending time with Jesus.

John's story is great news for guys with big tempers, strong personalities and a lot of fire. Jesus doesn't want to put your fire out. He wants to point it in the right direction. John stayed bold. He preached fearlessly and was even sent to prison for his faith. But his boldness was now full of love.

And notice what John says about love. Real love isn't just "word and speech," just saying "I love you" or "I care." Real love shows up in **action**: helping, serving, giving, forgiving and being there.

If Jesus could change a Son of Thunder into the apostle of love, He can change you too.

Think about it: Are you a bit of a "Son of Thunder"? How could Jesus point your energy and boldness in a good direction?

Try this: Show love in action today, not just words. Do something for someone that proves you care.

Dear Jesus, thank You for changing John from a Son of Thunder into a man full of love. Change me too. Point my energy and boldness in the right direction, and help me love in action and truth, not just in words. In Your name, Amen.

Day 29 — "Do You Love Me?"

"Jesus asked a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was deeply hurt that Jesus had asked him a third time, 'Do you love Me?' 'Lord, You know all things,' he replied. 'You know I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'"
— John 21:17 (BSB)

Peter had failed badly.

On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter had promised, "I will never deny You!" But a few hours later, standing by a fire in a courtyard, three different people asked if he was one of Jesus' followers. And three times, Peter denied it. "I do not know Him," he said. Then the rooster crowed, and Peter ran away weeping.

Even after Jesus rose from the dead, Peter must have felt terrible. How could he face Jesus after what he'd done?

Then one morning, after a night of fishing, Peter and some of the other disciples saw Jesus on the shore. He had made a fire and was cooking breakfast for them. After they ate, Jesus turned to Peter.

"Simon son of John, **do you love Me?**"

"Yes, Lord," Peter said. "You know I love You."

Jesus asked again. "Do you love Me?"

"Yes, Lord. You know I love You."

And then a **third** time. "Do you love Me?"

Peter was hurt. Why did Jesus keep asking? But maybe Peter realized: *Three times I denied Him. Now three times He's letting me say that I love Him.*

"Lord, You know all things. You know I love You."

And each time, Jesus gave Peter a job: "Feed My lambs." "Shepherd My sheep." "**Feed My sheep.**" Jesus was telling Peter, *You're not finished. I still have work for you. I want you to take care of My people.*

Jesus didn't just forgive Peter. He **restored** him. He gave him a fresh start and trusted him with an important job. And Peter became one of the greatest leaders of the church.

Have you ever let Jesus down? Maybe you did something you promised you'd never do. Maybe you were embarrassed to be known as a Christian. Maybe you've failed the same way over and over.

Jesus is asking you the same question He asked Peter: *Do you love Me?* And He's offering you the same thing: forgiveness, a fresh start and a purpose. Your failure isn't the end of your story.

Think about it: Why do you think Jesus asked Peter three times? What does this tell you about how Jesus treats people who fail?

Try this: If you've let Jesus down, answer His question today in prayer: "Lord, You know I love You." Then ask Him how you can serve Him.

Lord Jesus, You know all things. You know I love You. Thank You that when I fail, You don't give up on me. Thank You for forgiving me and giving me a fresh start. Show me how I can serve You. In Your name, Amen.

Day 30 — "You Follow Me!"

> *"When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you? You follow Me!'"*
> *— John 21:21–22 (BSB)*

Right after Jesus restored Peter and told him to feed His sheep, Jesus told Peter something about his future. He said that when Peter was old, he would suffer for following Jesus.

Peter looked over at John, who was walking behind them. And Peter asked, "**Lord, what about him?**"

In other words, *What's going to happen to John? Is his life going to be hard too? Is it fair?*

Have you ever done that? Compared your life to someone else's? *Why does he get to do that and I don't? Why is it easier for him? Why does he have more stuff, more talent or more friends?*

Jesus gave Peter a simple answer: "What is that to you? **You follow Me!**"

In other words, *Don't worry about John's story. That's between Me and him. You focus on following Me.*

Jesus has a different path for every one of His followers. Peter's path was different from John's. Your path will be different from your friends'. Some guys will be pastors, and some will be plumbers. Some will be famous, and

most won't. Some will have easy lives, and some will have hard ones. But every one of us has the same job: **follow Jesus.**

That's where this book ends. You've learned to be faithful:

- in **integrity**, being real all the way through, playing fair, doing right when no one's watching and not hiding sin;
- with **screens**, keeping Jesus as the boss, numbering your days, controlling your anger, staying innocent about evil, not disappearing and meeting with God first;
- against **temptation**, knowing how it works, watching and praying, running from wrong and chasing right, getting help from friends, not trading forever for a bowl of stew, and running to Jesus;
- in **winning and losing**, running to win, training for godliness, not gloating, pressing on, not bragging and doing it all in Jesus' name;
- and in **following Jesus**, like Andrew the bringer, Thomas the honest questioner, John the Son of Thunder who learned to love, and Peter, who failed and was restored.

Don't worry about anyone else's path. Jesus is saying to you, right now, what He said to Peter: **"You follow Me!"**

A true story: Hudson Taylor was a young man from England who wanted to tell the people of China about Jesus. When he got there, he noticed that the missionaries dressed and lived like Englishmen, so the Chinese people saw them as strangers. So Hudson did something shocking. He put away his English clothes, dressed like the Chinese people and even grew his hair in a braid the way Chinese men did. Some of his friends laughed at him. But he didn't care what others did. He followed Jesus in the way he believed God was calling him. He started a mission that sent

hundreds of workers deep into China, trusting God alone to provide. You can read his whole story in *Brave for God*.

Think about it: Do you ever compare your life to someone else's? What would it look like to focus on just following Jesus?

Try this: Every time you catch yourself comparing today, remind yourself of Jesus' words: "You follow Me!"

Dear Jesus, I don't want to worry about anyone else's path. I just want to follow You. Help me be faithful in integrity, with screens, against temptation, in winning and losing, and in following You every day of my life. In Your name, Amen.

Conclusion: Found Faithful

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

Remember the verse at the very beginning of this book? "Now it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."

God has trusted you with so much: your time, your talents, your body, your friends, your family and your whole life. And more than anything else, He wants you to be **faithful**.

Not perfect. Nobody is perfect, not even Peter. But faithful: someone who keeps coming back to Jesus, who does the right thing day after day, who can be trusted.

In this book, you learned what faithfulness looks like. In **integrity**, being the same guy everywhere, honest in games and tests, even when no one's watching. With **screens**, making sure Jesus is the boss and meeting with God first. Against **temptation**, watching and praying, running from wrong and toward right, and running to Jesus for help. In **winning and losing**, playing hard, being a good sport, pressing on and doing it all in Jesus' name. And in **following Jesus**, like Andrew, Thomas, John and Peter.

You also met five more real men who stayed faithful to God: George Müller, Adoniram Judson, Sundar Singh, David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor. Not one of them was perfect. But each one kept following Jesus.

If you haven't trusted Jesus yet

Being faithful to Jesus starts with trusting Him. He died on the cross to take the punishment for your sins, and He rose again, just as Thomas saw with his own eyes. He offers you forgiveness and a place in God's family forever. You can pray something like this:

Dear Jesus, like Thomas, I say: You are my Lord and my 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, tell someone: your dad or mom, a pastor, a leader or a Christian friend!

What's next

In **Book 3 of Sons of the King**, you'll learn about **growing up**: handling your emotions, how God designed your body and the changes that come as you grow, taking on responsibility, discovering what God might be calling you to do, and finding men who can help you become the man God designed you to be.

Until then, keep following Jesus. Be faithful.

"Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will do it."
— Psalm 37:5 (BSB)

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