

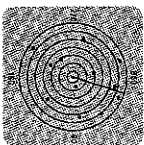
CHECKPOINT 8

ENTHUSIASM

DAY 1

The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

PROVERBS 15:19



HAZARD: APATHY

The teenage and young-adult years are some of the most exciting times of life. The youthful enthusiasm of high school and college students is contagious. It is a rare thing, however, to find focused, meaningful enthusiasm. Most of it is unbridled excitement that has little to do with anything, except maybe girls, school spirit, or just having a good time. The trouble is not that youth aren't enthusiastic, it's that the other side, apathy, shows up in the areas of life that matter most. Have you ever lost interest in something because it was too hard? Do you find it difficult to take risks? Have you ever stopped caring about a goal because, for whatever reason, you can't quite seem to reach it? Probably all of us can identify with at least one of these signs of apathy.

Apathy, a general attitude of not caring, or indifference, occurs for a number of reasons, but two consistently stand out. First, we are self-absorbed. Instead of keeping a broader perspective of the world and the other people in it, we tend to see ourselves and our circumstances at the moment. When we are slaves to the self, we grasp at whatever feels good at the moment. Because we do this consistently over time, habits are formed. Because habits are formed, anything that requires hard work or dedication to achieve something greater than the self is typically abandoned. We quit. We fail to step up and face challenges. We say such things as "I don't care" and "Whatever" a lot. We become apathetic, happy to merely exist and get whatever fleeting pleasure we can out of life. As sinful people prone to wander from the Lord, this is quite common.

Sadly, the result of this attitude is also common. A lot of us miss out on the opportunity to shape and form a strong character because we quit when things get tough or don't go our way. Instead of working hard to get a good education, many students sacrifice a better future for a few years of partying or easy answers. We only cheat ourselves in the end. An enormous potential for good is squandered due to apathy. We spend unreasonable amounts of time and energy on things that ultimately do not matter, sometimes on things that destroy us, while we display a general attitude of indifference toward the areas of life that shape us into men of God. No wonder there are so few godly men today.

The second reason apathy exists is because very few people have a clear vision of what they want out of life. Even fewer actually set goals and work at them to achieve their dream. Most are just wandering around in the dark, always dreaming but never learning to cultivate vision. Unfortunately, many teenagers and young adults have never been taught how to take a dream and make it into a realistic, achievable goal. More often than not, attempts to fulfill a dream are misguided and ultimately fall short. It is all too easy to drift into apathy after we have tried again and again to make our vision a reality, only to be met with disappointment.

Vision is the capacity to picture a desired future, but unless we narrow our focus and prayerfully consider what steps will lead us toward our dream, vision is rarely realized. A vision without a goal is just a good idea. We need men of vision, but we need men motivated enough to implement the vision and make it a reality. Reed and Hunter, seniors in high school, are great examples of men like this. They identified a need on their football team for spiritual leadership, so they decided it would be a good idea to step up and bring in area youth pastors to speak to the entire team every Thursday at 3 p.m. Instead of simply recognizing a good idea, they worked to make it happen. The guys organized the meetings and scheduled a speaker for each week. At the time we wrote this book, 60 percent of their public-school football team now goes to church. That number will probably increase, thanks to their vision.

These guys had a picture of a desired future and—armed with an accurate, achievable plan—they worked to accomplish it. Look around you and ask God to give you His vision. How can you positively impact the people around you? What are some practical steps you can take to make the vision the Lord has given you a reality? Share your ideas with a friend and take small, achievable steps toward your goal. I think you'll find that any attitudes of indifference will fade away. You only live once, so don't waste an opportunity.

FORCE MULTIPLIERS

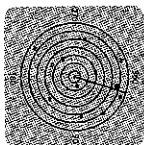
1. *Scripture Memorization*—It's tough to take in doses of God's Word every day and stay apathetic. Scripture motivates. It helps narrow your focus. It gives you insight, which turns into the foresight that, when properly implemented, changes the world around you.
2. *Evaluate*—Do you spend most of your time and effort on things that have no lasting value? Are you more interested in living for yourself than sacrificing for others? Take an honest look at your life. Do you quit easily? Are you showing signs of apathy and indifference? Recognizing and owning your apathy is the first step to living a fulfilled, enthusiastic life.
3. *Be Specific*—Most of the time, people dream much too broadly. You may have a very general picture of who you want to be, but without narrowing the vision, it will always stay a dream. Once you have a desired picture of the future, work back from that image and determine what steps need to be taken to get there. Start small with the basics and work up from there. If the initial steps you take are specific enough to be measurable, you will be encouraged as you consistently meet your goals. Before you know it, what was once a thought will be a reality.

4. *Pray with Your Friends*—You may not have any idea how your future is supposed to look. It's okay; your vision is a clean slate. Go to the Lord and ask Him what He wants for you. I promise you that if you share with your small group your desire to make an impact among your peers and then consistently pray for it, God will clarify the vision in your mind. If you pray consistently with your friends, the vision may become so clear in your mind that it will seem impossible for it not to become a reality.

DAY 2

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4



HAZARD: SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Have you ever noticed that the times we are down or experience the most frustration or anger all share one common denominator? We are focused on ourselves. We lose our joy because we dwell on a problem or issue we're experiencing at the moment. We are frustrated because someone has ruined our plans, or we are angry because we feel that life has thrown a wrench into our ambition. Maybe someone else is enjoying the success you have been working for. Regardless, we all have a serious problem: We tend to center an inordinate amount of attention on the self. Scripture calls this demonic and the source of "disorder and every evil practice" (James 3:14-16). Self-centeredness is the surest way to rob your enthusiasm.

For the most part, self-centeredness manifests itself in three different ways. Some of us are just straight-up vain. We spend a lot of time flexing in the mirror and talking trash about ourselves. The deception is in thinking that purpose and meaning can be found by feeding ourselves an almost constant diet of the self. We then become fattened with pride and struggle to find meaning anywhere. But at least the guy with a massively swollen ego is obvious. He typically clashes with other people—people the Lord may use to humble him.

A much less obvious self-centeredness is a negative obsession with self. Those of us who tend toward this have just as big an ego as the first guy, but it just happens to be a negative focus. We will complain about

almost everything. We tend to blame everyone else for our problems and spend too much time moping about. In serious cases, this type of focus on self drives us to depression. No question that by focusing on the self, we are attempting to remedy our pain; however, in doing so, we dig ourselves further into a hole. We give ourselves way too much credit. Basically, if you want to live a miserable life, focus on yourself all the time.

Finally, the most dangerous self-centeredness is the kind couched in spiritual piety. The authors of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* wrote, "As human beings we have an inherent ability to deceive ourselves. Thus equipped we are capable of transforming even the most selfishly motivated action into an act of sacrificial altruism in our own minds."¹ Selfishness is so deeply ingrained in us that it will disguise itself as "service" or "using our gifts," when in reality, the sole purpose behind our action is the vain desire to get ahead or elevate our standing in the eyes of those around us. Our actions are not necessarily wrong, but our motives could not be more evil. We should follow David's example and ask the Lord to search our hearts and convict us of any tendencies to idolize ourselves (Psalm 139:23-24). As long as we are fooling ourselves, we will never know the great enthusiasm that comes from following the Lord with a pure heart.

At the risk of sounding too dramatic, when it comes to our tendency to give the self more attention than it can handle, we really ought to kill our selfishness. There is nothing wrong with our desires; God gave them to us. However, they are meant to be ruled, not to rule over us. When controlled by our selfishness, they wreak all kinds of havoc. Nothing good ever comes from self-centeredness. On the other hand, those who learn to turn their focus away from the self and give their desires over to the lordship of Jesus Christ experience the enthusiasm of life in the fullest sense. Interesting that the very One who created us with the capacity to know great joy and fulfillment "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). It seems to make sense that we should follow the example of the Creator.

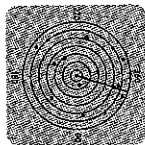
Take the focus off yourself and put it on other people. You'll find your enthusiasm for life exploding with new energy.

FORCE MULTIPLIERS

1. *Scripture Memorization*—Nothing is more lethal to selfishness than God's truth that stands directly against it. Taking in daily doses from God's Word will help you guard against taking in daily doses of the self. It keeps us sharp against overt self-centeredness and the deceitful kind as well. Scripture is the only thing able to judge "the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).
2. *Serve*—You cannot think about two things at once: Either you are thinking about yourself or something related to the self, or you are thinking about others. One of the most practical ways to train yourself to have an "others focused" perspective is to serve. Find a place at church or in the community that interests you and get involved. Check your motives to make sure they're pure, and then go spend yourself on other people. It's what Jesus did.
3. *Encourage*—Encouragement is literally speaking life into someone. Some of the most meaningful times in my life were spent in "strength rallies" encouraging other men. Nahman's dad gave this name to intentional times of encouragement. Focusing on a person's positive attributes and naming them out loud makes an immeasurable difference. Something interesting happens every time you encourage someone: It strengthens the individual and infuses enthusiasm into you. Nothing is more contagious.

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.

GALATIANS 1:10



HAZARD: INSECURITY

Have you ever been weighed down because you felt inadequate around other people? Are you more concerned with other people's opinions than about living life to the fullest? It is extremely common for young guys to be preoccupied with attempting to measure up to some undefined standard of manhood. Typically, this involves simply trying to be like the other guys in a group. What is meant to be a season of discovery and enthusiasm can end up being totally awkward. Many times our insecurities keep us from stretching our legs and enjoying life. Our development not only as men but also as Christians will be stunted as long as we are consumed with what other people think about us.

We see a lot of teenagers who go to great lengths trying not to stand out as being different. The amount of effort they put into this ends up sucking the joy out of life. It is exhausting always trying to be someone you're not. What most of these students fail to realize is that everyone is different because God created us that way. He made us each with our own fingerprint, with intricacies that should be embraced and celebrated, not altered to imitate the next guy. We should appreciate our differences and learn to laugh at our quips. While insecure people tend to make everyone around them nervous, there is something liberating about a person who just isn't worried about what other people think.

I once had to spend some time around a very insecure individual. Without saying so, he made it very clear that he wanted to be well

thought of by everyone, but by projecting his lack of confidence, he alienated the very people he cared so much to please. His life was almost totally lacking in any kind of real enthusiasm. He consistently used a negative tone and was always complaining about something, yet he very much wanted to be viewed as a leader. His insecurity was self-defeating.

I also had the privilege of growing up with a very different type of person. He was secure in who God made him, quirks and all. Instead of trying to adjust to fit in with everyone else, he celebrated his differences and blazed his own trail. He could not have cared less what other people thought about him and instead displayed an authenticity that was contagious. People were naturally drawn to him and appreciated his differences. His demeanor allowed everyone around him to relax and be themselves, cultivating an environment of growth. He has been consistently marked by enthusiasm for life, and people are better having known him.

Which guy does your life most resemble? Do you care too much about the opinions of others, or do you recognize that God created you as you are for good reason? Is it more important for you to be well respected for being someone you aren't or for you to be authentic regardless of what people think? Is your life characterized by true enthusiasm, or are you just playing games? There's only one of you, so be yourself. The Lord created you to be just the way you are.

FORCE MULTIPLIERS

1. *Scripture Memorization*—The world will tell you to conform to a standard that is always changing. Trying to fit into our society is like chasing the wind. What's in one day is out the next and vice versa. A lot of time and money is wasted by people simply trying to keep up. Scripture says that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made"

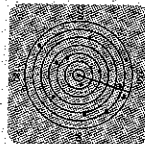
(Psalm 139:14). Hide God's Word in your heart and allow it to influence your life.

2. *Be Yourself*—Relax and be yourself. If people don't like you for who you are, it's okay; not everyone has to like you. Plenty of people will accept you for who you are, and they are the ones who matter. Use your unique personality and gifts to serve the body of Christ and further the kingdom. Enthusiasm is cultivated and matures as we live for Christ, not other people.
3. *Learn to Laugh*—Everyone has his quirks. Don't be embarrassed by the things that make you unique. Learn to laugh at them. We aren't telling you to totally disregard everyone around you and act a fool; we are encouraging you to be comfortable enough in your own skin to appreciate the things that make you a little weird. By creating each of us different, God made us all the same.

DAY 4

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

EXODUS 20:8



HAZARD: BURNOUT

Stress can be our best friend or worst enemy. Positive stress is the normal pressure that pushes us to succeed. It guards against atrophy and apathy. The right amount of stress feeds our passion and drives us to achieve great things. For all of us, especially the gifted overachiever, though, there is an underlying danger of overextending ourselves and our ability to maintain a healthy workload. When the load we carry outweighs our capacity, we are in danger of burning out. Depending on the amount of stress, our passions either consume us or destroy us.

Burnout can occur in any area of life, but it is particularly dangerous for Christians. Our desire to do great things for God is often coupled with our insecure need for approval and the false expectations we project on ourselves. The symptoms of burnout frequently go undetected because they are dressed up with great achievement for God. Because our achievement is met with self-fulfillment and applause, we continue to overextend ourselves out of a desire for more gratification and praise, working at a tempo that is not sustainable. As said by the authors of *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, "We can run at a frantic pace, driven by the expectations of others and ourselves, for only so long before we freeze up and spin dangerously out of control."²

Sometimes the symptoms of burnout come gradually, and sometimes they hit us like a load of bricks. The first sign of burnout is withdrawal. We might place our faith in Christ and initially be filled with such enthusiasm that we would readily charge the gates of hell with a water pistol. We willingly volunteer to serve the church in multiple

capacities and are entrusted with more responsibility as we prove ourselves faithful. The danger of carrying more than we can handle has already begun. If we are gifted and willing to serve, most churches will run us into the ground if we let them. Sooner or later, we start losing steam and gradually distance ourselves from the church. What once ignited a passion in our hearts now seems to weigh us down. If we fall to slow down, our attitude toward the church can become critical and bitter, making it easier to blame God for something we've brought on ourselves.

When we begin to experience the first signs of burnout, those of us who are really driven will push through it, seeing it more as an obstacle than a signal to slow down. If we continue to push it, the next mark of burnout is physical and emotional exhaustion. Our bodies can take only so much stress. If our misplaced ambition causes us to pour on more and more, our minds and bodies will eventually start to shut down. Physical health problems may start to surface; stress will make our bodies do some crazy stuff. If we continue to ignore the warnings and press on through the exhaustion, we will drive ourselves to depression and despair. At this point, we are completely burned out. In most cases of burnout, people experience a measure of doubt, questioning everything from personal competence to faith to God Himself. What was once a rock-solid foundation seems to fall apart. The same enthusiasm that drove us to achieve is the very thing that will burn us out if we're not careful.

Some of you reading this are too young to fully understand burnout. Many of you have probably experienced at least the first signs of burnout. More than likely, there are a few who are either getting close to total burnout or are already there. Regardless, pay attention. It is much better to seek help earlier than later. If you are experiencing any level of burnout, slow down and seek counsel from someone who's been there. Be careful who you talk to; some people will tell you to keep exhausting yourself, couching it in spiritual-sounding language such as "You just need to persevere" or "Just keep believing." There is a difference between persevering in faith and taking a nosedive into the ground. One of the

most spiritual things we can do is rest. Some of you are so wound up that you don't even know how to kick back and relax.

Life, especially the Christian life, is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Plenty of people have driven themselves into the ground, attempting to accomplish what they believe that God wants them to do, but no one ever made a lasting impression on the world for Christ this way. We have to get away from the emphasis we place on achieving great things for God and start emphasizing the greatness of simply knowing Him. He is infinitely more interested in what type of person you are than what types of things you do. Learning that purpose and fulfillment come only through our relationship with Christ and not our accomplishment is the first step to freeing ourselves from the need to gain approval, affirmation, and the burnout that is sure to follow.

FORCE MULTIPLIERS

1. *Scripture Memorization*—"We must realize that consistent exposure to Scripture will provide us with the most accurate self-knowledge available to us."³ The key to avoiding burnout is to have an accurate understanding of ourselves. In a world full of different voices telling us who we should be, Scripture is the only absolute voice we should trust. The more Christlike our thoughts, the quicker we will be able to recognize the warning signs of burnout and make necessary adjustments. We must continue to renew our minds daily with God's Word.

2. *Learn to Say No*—If someone is talented and driven, more and more opportunities will present themselves. If you find yourself here, you have to move beyond ambition and people pleasing and realize that sometimes the healthiest thing to do is say "no" or "not now," especially if you have already noticed signs of burnout. This can be a difficult thing to do, particularly if the opportunities are important.

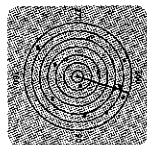
Keeping a long-term perspective will allow you to see that the kingdom of God will continue to move forward even if you are not the one out front. In fact, that may be the very thing you need to learn.

3. *Rest*—Resting does not necessarily mean taking a vacation. Sometimes vacations are so busy that we need a vacation from our vacation. Resting is intentional time set aside when everything is turned off and you are able to relax. It could include spending time with people you love or spending extended quality time with the Lord. Regardless, to maintain our enthusiasm, all of us need to learn to recharge our batteries and ultimately find that power in Christ.

D A Y 5

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

PSALM 73:26



HAZARD: DEPRESSION

Depression continues to be a difficult subject, despite the fact that it is discussed openly today. Addressing it requires people to be extremely vulnerable and honest about the deepest parts of their lives. It is not easy, but it must be dealt with because it is a very real part of life for people of all ages.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teenagers, almost always a result of depression.⁴ By age eighteen, some 20 percent of adolescents have experienced at least one episode of serious depression.⁵ That's one out of every five. Estimates show that, among teenagers, for every suicide, there are fifty to two hundred suicide attempts.⁶ There is no doubt that depression is a serious problem today. Many people have a misplaced belief, bordering on arrogance, that depression is something that happens to "weak" people. Some have failed to recognize that symptoms of depression are already present in their lives. A few don't see it at all until they slam into the wall. Nathan slammed into one such wall. This is his story:

I was coming to the end of my master's degree program at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) in the fall of 2005. To say I was busy is an understatement. I believed that because I had the capacity to juggle work, school, and multiple ministry roles, I should do so, thinking that anything less meant I was not fully utilizing the gifts God had given me for His kingdom. If pushed, I probably would have admitted that I was pursuing approval from God by doing so much; after all, I had grown up

an athlete who connected performance with pats on the back and the roar of the crowd. I was relying on *my* strength to achieve what I could for God. My theology was orthodox; my practice was not.

After ignoring clear warning signs, I began to hit the wall. I noticed that I was losing my ability to control my thoughts. My mind would fixate on something, usually something strange, and then once it latched onto a thought, no matter how hard I tried, I could not stop thinking about it. In fact, the harder I tried to fight against it, the worse it got. For someone who loved a sense of control, I felt very powerless. I was convinced I was going nuts. The irrational thoughts brought with them an enormous amount of fear and anxiety, and I started to lose sleep. My brain never turned off. My muscles were always tense and would twitch from stress. My defenses were down and I was completely vulnerable to the lies of the Enemy. Even though I could tell you what was true, I did not feel like it was. At my lowest point, I gave all my personal weapons to a friend because I was afraid I would harm myself. After I finally got to sleep that night, I woke up in a panic and, heart racing, crawled to the bathroom and threw up in the toilet. I could not sleep. I could not work. I was barely finishing my assignments. I was totally out of control.

I was very fortunate to be in an environment that did not stigmatize depression. After meeting with a counselor, he referred me to a doctor in town who started me on low doses of an antidepressant. I continued to meet with the counselor, who helped me identify some of the core issues I was dealing with. I was completely honest with my trusted friends, who provided the encouragement and support necessary for me to heal properly. I started eating right and exercising on a regular basis. Approximately six to eight weeks later, I noticed a marked difference. I was sleeping again. My thoughts were not running wild. I was no longer robbed of my joy. After three months of a focused, holistic approach to recovery, I felt completely normal. I had experienced God's grace in a whole new way.

There are three major lessons the Lord taught me through this experience. First, empathy. Before this experience, I honestly wondered

why some people couldn't just suck it up and drive on. Now, having been in those shoes, I am able to empathize with those who struggle with depression, to come alongside people and weep with them (Romans 12:15). Then, when the time is right, I gently share the steps I took to recover and encourage them to make wise decisions, whether they feel like it or not.

Which leads to the second lesson: Scripture is the only anchor in the midst of a raging storm. If something is true, it is true regardless of how you feel about it. In my darkest times, I still made it a point to get into God's Word, even though I struggled to believe it. I was consistently faced with the choice to either take God at His word or give in to fleeting emotions or powerful lies from the Enemy. Because I surrounded myself with strong believers, I was reminded on a regular basis of the truth. Over time, I came to know an intimacy in my walk with Christ I had never known. One of the greatest gifts the Lord has ever given us is His written word. It is the compass that will lead us home.

Third, I learned that we are holistic people. We are complex creatures made up of many different pieces. We are physical beings with bodies susceptible to dysfunction. We are spiritual, with an ongoing battle between the Spirit of God and our self, the part of us that will, if we allow it, naturally drag us into depression. I learned that there is not a simple fix for a complex person. Complex problems require complex solutions. If a man is to recover from depression, he must address every part of his person: mind, body, and spirit.

Some of you have dealt with depression in the past; some of you are struggling through it right now. Words like enthusiasm, joy, and peace have lost meaning. You may have identified with parts of my story or maybe the whole thing. Whatever the case, take heart: The Lord will not leave you where you are. If you allow Him to, He will bring clarity into your life and use an extremely difficult time to give you a depth you would not have known otherwise. Put the following force multipliers into practice and never lose hope. There is always hope.

FORCE MULTIPLIERS

1. *Scripture Memorization*—This is absolutely essential when dealing with depression. Once in a depressed state, all rationality can fly out the window. You are wide open to attacks from the Enemy. Knowing and choosing to believe the truth in these times is key to avoiding lasting damage. You always have a choice. There is no other way. God's Word is the only solid thing in a weak state.
2. *Exercise*—If you struggle with depression, you *have* to exercise. When you exercise, chemicals called endorphins are released in your brain. These are the body's natural response to depression. If your brain is an engine, endorphins are the oil that helps it run properly. Along with a properly balanced diet (eat fish or take a fish oil supplement), exercise is the most practical physical step you can take toward recovery.
3. *Community*—Depressed people are faced with two options: be proactive and get help, or isolate and continue to spiral out of control. You are already exposed to the Enemy's lies; isolation only makes this worse. In extreme cases, someone who remains isolated can ultimately believe the lie that there is no hope, causing him to take his life. Isolation can be lethal. Community provides the strength you need to stand. True friends will listen to you, encourage you, and walk with you in the darkness. They are an essential part of coming out of depression.
4. *Walk by Faith*—"We must live according to truth, not feelings. . . . Even in times of defeat or frustration or failure, as we walk by faith not by sight, we can know that we are valuable because of our standing with God in heaven."⁷ Faith is choosing to hope when it seems hopeless.
5. *Focus on Others*—At its heart, depression is an obsession with self. Realizing this is a key step to recovery. You must make a

concentrated effort to focus on others. Once the Lord showed me this, I kept an index card with me (this was before smartphones) and consistently asked others how I could pray for them. Then I would pray for them. It's amazing how little we think of our own issues when we are focused on other people.

6. *Seek Professional Help*—If you actively implement these four multipliers, most of you will come out of your depression. However, some of you have slipped into a deep depression that requires further attention. As I mentioned in my story, complex problems require complex solutions. If you need medication or structured counseling by a professional to start you on the road to recovery, get the help. There is nothing unspiritual about this. It can be a life-changing step of faith.

AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

The summer between Eric's junior and senior years in high school, he went to a summer camp with his church. During the course of that week, he was challenged, along with some friends, to spend his senior year using the influence God had given him to make an impact for the Lord on his school campus. He didn't know exactly what he was supposed to do or how all that was going to play out, but he just had a deep conviction that he needed to get his friends together to pray. Although they appreciated the See You at the Pole movement that encouraged students across the country to come together each year on the fourth Wednesday in September to pray for their school, they wondered why something like this happened only once a year. So they started praying at the school flagpole every day. They didn't pray long—just long enough to lift up a handful of requests and pray for God's favor on the campus. But they prayed. They prayed in the heat. They prayed in the cold. They even prayed in the rain. Initially there were only a handful of people consistently praying, but the group grew over time. Before they knew it, the group exploded in number.

The prayer group was consistent but also strategic. The Lord had called the most influential students on campus to pray: the captain of the football team, the captain of the men's basketball team, the captain of the women's basketball team, the worship leader at a local church. Because of the broad influence present, the entire campus took notice of what was going on. To support the group, a local church held an evangelistic youth rally where many students from the school placed their faith in Christ. It was unmistakable that the Spirit of God was moving on campus, all because God put it in the hearts of a couple of students to pray.

Because Eric was one of the captains of the basketball team, he sometimes spoke at school pep rallies. Before one such rally, he approached an accountability partner and told him that he felt the Lord calling him to share the gospel. His friend basically told him that if God was telling him to do something, he'd better do it. So he did. In front of about two thousand peers, he unashamedly told of sin, grace, and the saving work of Christ on the Cross. What started the prior summer as a thought in his head turned into having the entire school hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. One young man full of enthusiasm made himself available to be used by God for that time and place. In the grand scheme of things, making a difference on that campus was a small splash in a big pond, but that splash rippled out into eternity.

Enthusiasm is a combination of two Greek words that literally mean "in God." To experience enthusiasm in its truest sense, we must tap into the joy and passion that comes from walking intimately with our Creator. The world is in desperate need of young men of God who reject apathy, self-centeredness, and insecurity. We have way too many of those already. Be different. Swim against the stream. Live a life that invests in eternity. Serve others. Stand apart. Do outstanding things. God wants to use you in a powerful way. Let Him. When you experience the joy that comes from living a life firmly rooted in Christ, you will wonder why you ever thought anything else would fulfill you. How will your school be different because you were there? Be an Eric. Be a light in the darkness. The Lord will set you on fire and people will come for miles to watch you burn.⁸

Here are some questions to help facilitate discussion in your small group. Choose the questions from each day that stick out the most and discuss them as a group. This is the final week in this book, so keep being open and honest when answering and give grace and mercy to those around you, as you will need the same from them.

Day 1: Apathy

1. Do you think the "I don't care" attitude is a problem? How?
2. What harm does it do when we quit what we started? Is there ever a right time to quit?
3. What does a motivated man of vision look like?

Day 2: Self-Centeredness

1. Out of the three examples we gave (vanity, negative self-obsession, and spiritual piety), which one do you think you struggle with the most?
2. How can you humble yourself and serve someone this week? When is the last time you inconvenienced yourself to help someone else?
3. List five characteristics of a selfless person.

Day 3: Insecurity

1. How do you define the word *insecurity*?
2. Do you find it difficult to just be yourself? Either way, why? Do you think others find it difficult? Why?
3. What does the force multiplier "Learn to laugh" mean to you?

Day 4: Burnout

1. Do you have a hard time saying no to stuff? What do you think is behind your driven personality?
2. What are some warning signs of burnout? Do you see any of these in your life? If so, what steps will you take to rest and protect yourself against burnout (or even depression)?
3. How is resting in Christ different from taking a vacation? Is this something you can do every day?

Day 5: Depression

1. How common is depression among your peers? How have you been down or depressed?

2. Do you feel you have a quality group of friends you can go to at anytime?
3. What are steps you should take to recover from depression?

WRAP-UP

1. What is the most significant truth you learned during your time in this book and in God's Word?
2. How has the Spirit been at work transforming you? What changes have occurred?
3. Have you experienced specific victories by identifying hazards and utilizing the force multipliers in this book?
4. Who needs to know the checkpoints, hazards, and force multipliers you are now practicing? Part of maturing and becoming a godly man is helping others also grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16), so who will you now invite to walk through these biblical life principles?

CLOSING

As long as we have breath, there is no finish line to manhood. You don't graduate from it or win it like a championship. There's no diploma to hang or trophy to display. It is a lifelong journey of consistently disciplining yourself to conform to the standard set forth in Scripture. No one expects you to do this perfectly, least of all God, who knows you better than you know yourself. I was recently reminded of this fact on a road trip with one of my accountability partners. We caught up with each other and then shared our struggles and owned our sin, two principles emphasized in this study. The need for growth in our lives was evident to both of us, stark reminders that we have not yet arrived.

Honestly, I am sometimes frustrated by the process the Lord has chosen for maturing us. It is a messy process, marked by success and failure. As you walk this journey, you will realize it is accurate to say that some areas of your life are more Christlike and mature while other areas need more work, sometimes a lot of work. I think C. S. Lewis nailed it when he was asked, "Will you please say how you would define a practicing Christian? Are there any other varieties?" He answered,

Certainly there are a great many other varieties. It depends, of course, on what you mean by "practicing Christian." If you mean one who has practiced Christianity in every respect at every moment of his life, then there is only one on record — Christ himself. In that sense there are no practicing Christians, but only Christians who, in varying degrees, try to practice it and fail in varying degrees and then start again.¹

Though the road is marked by struggle, we must never get complacent or settle for less than the Lord's standard. Maturing is not earned; it is practiced. Discipline yourself in the basic fundamentals and you will

find an identity grounded in Christ. You will become a man of integrity who, through the power of the Holy Spirit and in authentic Christian community, learns to control the self. The courage, patience, loyalty, and enthusiasm will naturally follow.

Each individual is unique. There is no way we can cover all of the many different facets of manhood for every single person. Our task has been to lay out biblical principles and the practical steps that follow to tactically guide you through the process of maturing. This brings us to one of the most dangerous hazards of all: discipline as an end unto itself, not the means to something (or someone) greater. What I mean is that you go about implementing the force multipliers given in this book but lose sight of the actual power that makes you a man. It's like having all the parts assembled and ready to roll but no fuel in the tank. In the end, true manhood is not earned by what you do but rather gained by the transformation that comes through who you know.

A certain Jewish man who walked the hills of Palestine roughly two thousand years ago claimed some extraordinary things about Himself. It would have been easy to dismiss Him were it not for the things He did. He said He was the bread of life, and He also fed a crowd of people with one kid's lunch. He said He was the resurrection and life, right before He told a dead guy to get up—and he did. He claimed to be the Son of God but was declared so with power by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). Jesus was the perfect embodiment of manhood. He was totally secure in who He was, never once compromising His integrity, though faced with overwhelming circumstances. His life was completely authentic, and He shared it without reservation with the guys around Him. He courageously stood against the corrupt religious establishment and maintained self-control in the face of an unjust trial, beating, and execution. His loyalty to His Father allowed Him to patiently endure the Cross, where an incomprehensible paradox occurred. Both the love and wrath of God were poured out in full. The death and resurrection of Jesus bridged the gap created by our sin and made possible again a relationship with God, from whom

all the great enthusiasm of life is derived. In short, He was and is the Ultimate Man.

The great mystery and fundamental truth of Christianity is that you can know Him. As you walk closely with Him, you will begin to notice something no amount of discipline will ever bring about: an inward transformation. Anyone can practice outward religion or morality and be a "good" person, but only Jesus can change one's heart. This heart change is absolutely necessary to become the man God made you to be. If you remember only one thing from this study, remember this: Be friends with Jesus. Know Him, study Him, share your life with Him, walk with Him, and most of all, love Him. Give Him your life and He will make you a man. As you live a life of obedience to Him, you take on His life. He lives through you. Do not forget that you are only a vessel. If we are great men or accomplish great things, it is only because the greatest Man is at work in us.

Never mistake practicing the disciplines given in this book for relationship with Jesus Himself. The disciplines are the means by which we walk closely with Him; Christ is the end. We have given you practical steps to take; you must decide to take them. We have shown you Christ; you must walk with Him.