Stand Firm

LEADER'S GUIDE

A men's Bible study by Randy Breland

Sixteen lessons

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Stand Firm — Leader's Guide

A men's Bible study by Randy Breland

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This guide is the same document whether you downloaded it free or it came bound in the back of the book. Nothing has been held back from either one.

PART ONE — BEFORE THE FIRST NIGHT

You are not disqualified

Let me get this out of the way on the first page, the same way I did in the study itself.

You do not have to be a preacher to lead this. You do not need a Bible college degree, a call to ministry, or a clean record. I am not a preacher and I wrote it.

Here is the whole job description: **you read it out loud, you ask the questions, and then you are quiet long enough for a man to answer.** That's it. You are not the expert in the room. You are the man who was willing to start the thing.

If you are sitting there thinking *I'm not the right man for this* — good. That instinct will keep you humble and it will keep you from preaching at people. Men can smell a man who has it all figured out, and they close up. Men open up around a man who admits he doesn't.

What this study is

Sixteen lessons. One man's story, and the Book underneath it.

It is written for men who are somewhere in the middle of it — men who believe but have got it wrong a few times, men who quit going to church and are not sure how to walk back in, men who are carrying something they have never said out loud.

It is not a doctrine course. The lessons come out of a Oneness Pentecostal and Baptist upbringing and they deliberately do not fight about it. Lesson 3 is specifically about not making the name on the church door your standard. If your group runs across denominational lines, that is a feature.

What it is not

It is not therapy, and you are not a counselor. More on that below, and I mean for you to read it.

It is not a place to fix men. Lesson 13 spends a good while on the difference between a **mender** and a **fixer**, and you should read that lesson before your first meeting even though it's the thirteenth. It describes the job you just took.

How to set it up

Size. Four to eight men. Under four and a quiet night has nowhere to go. Over eight and the quiet men stop talking — and the quiet men are usually the ones who most need to.

Time. Sixteen weeks, one lesson a week, sixty to ninety minutes. You can run it every other week over eight months; it survives that fine. Do not run two lessons in a night.

Where. A living room, a shop, a break room, a booth at a diner before shift. It does not need to be a church building, and for a lot of men it works better if it isn't.

What men bring. Nothing. Some will bring a Bible. Most won't the first few weeks. Don't remark on it.

Two ways to run it — pick one

Track A — Cold Start *(start here)*

Assume nobody read anything. This is realistic and it is not a criticism of your men.

0:00	Coffee. Catch up. Let it be loose. **10 min**
0:10	Read the lesson aloud, passing it around the room a section at a time. **20 min**
0:30	Work the questions in this guide. **20 min**
0:50	"Your move" — each man names his one step out loud. **5 min**
0:55	Pray. Use the prayer at the end of the lesson or your own. **5 min**

Nobody gets shamed for walking in cold. The lesson gets read in a man's own voice, which suits how it's written. A man can miss two weeks and come back without being behind.

Track B — Read Ahead

Once the group has settled — usually around week four or five — you can move to this.

0:00	Coffee. Catch up. **10 min**
0:10	"What hit you this week?" Open floor. **15 min**
0:25	Work the questions. **25 min**
0:50	Report on last week's "Your move." This is the accountability. **5 min**
0:55	Pray. **5 min**

Deeper, but it only works if men actually read. If half the room didn't, go back to Track A for that night without making a speech about it. Every lesson in this guide works either way.

The "Your move" rhythm

Every lesson ends with numbered steps. They are the point of the whole thing. Nearly every one of them ends up in the same two places: **tell one man**, and **get on your knees.**

Do not let the night end without each man saying out loud which step he is taking. Out loud matters. A step named in front of five men gets done; a step a man nods at in his head does not.

And the following week, ask. Gently, and without making a court out of it. "You said you were going to call your brother. Did you?" If he didn't, that's fine — ask again next week. Men are not

changed by being caught. They are changed by being expected of.

WHAT STAYS IN THE ROOM — read this before week one

This study asks men to say true things about pornography, adultery, drinking, anger, money, and their fathers. Some of them will. You have to decide what you're promising **before** somebody confesses something, not after.

Say this out loud on the first night, before anybody has told you anything:

> What gets said here stays here. I'm not going to repeat it to my wife, to the pastor, or to anybody else. There are three things I can't keep quiet about, and I'd rather tell you now than surprise you later: if somebody's getting hurt, if a child's getting hurt, or if you tell me you're planning to end your life. Anything short of that stays in this room.

That is the whole speech. Don't dress it up. Saying it in week one does two things: it makes the room genuinely safe, and it means you have not lied to anybody if the hard thing ever happens.

Never promise absolute secrecy. A man who has hurt somebody, or is being hurt, needs more than your silence. And a promise you have to break later costs you everything he gave you.

What confidentiality looks like in practice:

- What a man says in the room does not go home with you as gossip, including to your wife. "Pray for Dale, he's going through it" is the most you say.
- Don't bring up a man's confession the next week in front of the group. Ask him privately.
- If you need counsel about how to help a man, you can seek it **without naming him.**

WHEN IT IS BIGGER THAN THIS ROOM

You are a man leading a Bible study. You are not a counselor, a therapist, a doctor, or a caseworker, and the most dangerous thing you can do is forget that because a man trusted you.

Stop and get help outside the group if a man tells you, or you come to believe, that:

- **He is thinking about ending his life**, or he says things like there being no point, or his family being better off without him. This is not a Lesson 15 conversation. Do not leave him alone with it and do not promise to keep it quiet. In the US, **988** reaches the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by call or text, any hour. Stay with him while he makes contact if he'll let you, or make it with him.
- **Somebody is being hurt at home** — his wife, his kids, or him. Anger in Lesson 2 can surface this. A man who describes putting hands on his wife needs far more than accountability from five guys, and she may need help he isn't going to arrange.

- **A child is being harmed**, currently or in the past by someone with access to children now. Many states require certain people to report this, and depending on your role you may be one of them. Find out what your state and your church require **before** you start the study, not the night it comes up.
- **He is in active addiction** and it is running his life — drinking, pills, gambling, anything. Your group can walk beside a man in recovery. It cannot be his recovery.
- **He is in a mental health crisis** — not sad, not discouraged, but not tracking with reality, or unable to function.

How to refer a man without shaming him. The wrong way is to look alarmed and hand him a phone number. The right way sounds like a man who's staying:

> "I'm glad you told me. That's bigger than what I know how to do, and you deserve somebody who actually knows how to help with it. Let me help you find that person — and I'm not going anywhere either way. You still come Thursday."

Say the last part and mean it. The thing a man fears when he tells you something is that he has just lost his place in the room. Make sure he hasn't.

Also worth knowing: a lot of what comes up will not be a crisis. A man who is grieving, or ashamed, or stuck, mostly needs somebody to sit with him and not flinch. Don't escalate everything. Just know the difference, and when you're not sure, ask somebody wiser than you — without using his name.

About the author's story

Randy put a lot in this study. An affair. Years of pornography. Drugs. A divorce. A father he cleaned up at the end of his life.

Some man in your group is going to read that and quietly conclude that the price of admission is telling the room his own worst thing. **It is not, and you should say so.**

Say it around Lesson 4, before you get anywhere near Lesson 14:

> Randy told his story because he decided to. Nobody owes this room their worst thing. If you want to say it, this is a good place. If you don't, that's fine too, and nobody's going to pry.

Some men will confess something anyway, and when they do, the temptation is to fill the silence. Don't. Let it sit a second. Then: "Thank you for saying that." Not "it's okay" — it may not be okay, and he knows it. Not advice. Just thanks, and then ask the group to pray for him before anybody moves on.

And guard yourself. Leading a study about a man's failures will put you in front of your own. That's good. But do not use the group as your own confession booth every week — you'll shift the weight of the room onto men who came for help. Have one man outside the group you tell the truth to. Lesson 8 is about exactly that, and it applies to you first.

Six problems you will actually have

One man does all the talking. He is usually nervous, not arrogant. Don't correct him in front of everyone. Say privately: "You're the one who'll answer when it's quiet, and I need that. Can you hold back on the first question each night and let me draw the quiet guys out?" Making him a partner works better than shutting him down.

Nobody talks at all. Ask, then count to ten in your head. Out loud, silence feels twice as long as it is. If it's still quiet, answer it yourself first — briefly and honestly — and ask again. Men follow a man who goes first.

Somebody tries to fix everybody. Common with the best-intentioned man in the room. Lesson 13 does this work for you; lean on it. "Paul says mend, not fix. Let's sit with what Dale said instead of solving it."

The theology argument. Somebody will want to fight about denomination, baptism, end times, politics. Lesson 3 is your tool. "That's a real question and it's not tonight's. Let's you and me get coffee this week." Then actually go.

A man stops coming after he opens up. This is the most common one and it will bother you most. He is embarrassed. Do not send a group text. Call him — a call, not a text — and don't mention what he said. "Missed you Thursday. Coming this week?" Most men come back if one man calls.

You are in over your head. You will be, at some point. That is not failure. Go back up to the section above and use it.

PART TWO — THE SIXTEEN LESSONS

Each lesson already ends with Go deeper cross-references and one group question. Those are in the study itself and are not repeated here. What follows is additional.

Lesson 1 — Stand Firm

Anchor: 1 Corinthians 16:13–14

What this one is really about. Setting the table. Randy lays out five commands from one verse and admits up front he's got a poor record at all five. The real subject is that standing firm and being hard are not the same thing.

Open with: Go around the room — name, and one sentence on why you came. Don't skip this. It's week one and men need to hear their own voice in the room once before anything else happens.

Talk about it:

1. Paul stacks five commands: be on the alert, stand firm, be men of courage, be strong, do everything in love. Which of those five is easiest for you? Which one do you skip?
2. Randy says "do everything in love" is the one most of us need to hear. Do you know a man who stands firm and is mean about it? What's that cost him?
3. What are you actually standing on right now — the Word, or a church's name, or the way you were raised? How would you tell the difference?
4. Where are you not standing, and you know it?

Make sure this gets said: Standing firm is not the same as being right, loud, or unmovable. Paul put "do everything in love" in the same breath, and he saw no contradiction.

Watch for: Week one runs shallow and that's fine. Do not push for confession tonight. Your only job this week is that every man leaves willing to come back.

> **GOING DEEPER**
>
> In verse 13 the Greek behind "be men of courage" is *andrizesthe* — literally "act like men." It's the word a father might use with a son. It is not a call to be harsh; in the Greek Old Testament it's the same word God gives Joshua. Pair with Joshua 1:6–9 and note that "be strong and courageous" comes attached to *meditating on the book*, not to fighting.

Close: Each man names one step. Read the prayer at the end of the lesson aloud, or pray it in your own words.

Lesson 2 — Quick to Anger, Slow to Listen

Anchor: James 1:19–20

What this one is really about. Randy's temper, and the order of repair: heart first, then reactions. His line — a man who only manages his reactions "is a mad man holding his breath."

Open with: When did you last lose your temper, and what was it actually about? (Usually not what it looked like.)

Talk about it:

1. James puts them in order: listen, speak, anger. Randy says most of us run it backwards. Where do you start?
2. Paul says be angry and don't sin. So anger isn't always sin. Where's the line for you — and be specific, not theoretical.
3. "My anger does not build what God is building. Not sometimes. Ever." Can you think of one time your temper made a situation better?
4. Who catches your anger that doesn't deserve it? Usually it's whoever is closest and safest.

Make sure this gets said: Going after the reactions without the heart is just a man holding his breath. It works right up until it doesn't.

Watch for — and this one is serious. Anger is the lesson most likely to surface violence at home. If a man describes putting hands on his wife or his kids — even once, even "just a push," even years ago and "it's fine now" — do not treat that as a discussion point and do not let the room process it. Stay calm, keep going, and talk to him alone afterward. Then go back and read "When it is bigger than this room." He needs more than this group, and so may she.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> BSB renders Proverbs 29:11 "A fool vents all his anger, but a wise man holds it back." The Hebrew behind "holds it back" is used of stilling or quieting — it isn't suppression, it's a man governing himself. Pair with Proverbs 16:32.

Close: Steps, then prayer. Note that step 3 is "tell one man" — the first time the study asks it. It will keep asking.

Lesson 3 — The Name on the Door

Anchor: 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Acts 17:11

What this one is really about. Denominational loyalty versus loyalty to Scripture. Randy came up between Pentecostal and Baptist and refuses to referee. The Bereans checked Paul himself.

Open with: What church did you grow up in, and what do you believe now that they didn't teach you?

Talk about it:

1. The Bereans checked Paul — an apostle — against the Scriptures, and Luke calls it noble. When did you last check something you were taught?
2. Paul says Scripture is good for instruction, conviction, correction, and training. Two of those sting. When did a passage last correct you rather than comfort you?
3. Randy says a Bible that only pats you on the back isn't being used right. Is yours?
4. Where are you loyal to a tradition instead of to Him? (Hard question. Let it sit.)

Make sure this gets said: Being a Berean is not being a cynic. They received the message *with great eagerness* and then checked it. Eagerness first, checking second — both.

Watch for: This is the lesson men use to start a doctrine fight. Let one disagreement breathe, then move. "Both of you are checking the Book, which is the point of the lesson. Let's keep going."

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> *Theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16 — "God-breathed" — appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Note also that "the man of God may be complete" uses *artios*, from the same root family as *katartiz*■ in Galatians 6:1, which Lesson 13 builds on. Scripture equips a man the same way a mended net is made fit for use.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 4 — What You Look At

Anchor: Job 31:1, 1 Corinthians 10:13

What this one is really about. Pornography. Randy's own years of it, and the lie he told himself: *it's just me, it doesn't hurt anybody.*

Open with: Nothing personal. Start here: Job made a covenant with his eyes *before* the moment. Why does deciding in advance work better than deciding in the moment?

Talk about it:

1. Randy says "it's just me" was a lie the whole time. Who does it actually touch?
2. God promises a way out — an escape. Randy says it's usually boring and physical, not spiritual, and men miss it waiting for it to feel like something. What's the boring escape in your life?
3. Jesus goes underneath the behavior to the heart. Why does He put it there instead of on the act?
4. What would "deciding ahead of time" actually look like this week — specifically, with your hands and your phone?

Make sure this gets said: You do not win this in the moment. You win it before the moment. And the way out is generally a door, not a feeling.

Watch for: This is where you say the thing about nobody owing the room their worst thing — say it at the top, before you read. Some men will confess. Others will go very quiet, and quiet here usually means *this is me* rather than *this isn't.* Do not call on anyone by name tonight.

If a man describes something involving minors, that is not a pornography struggle and it is not a discussion item. Go to "When it is bigger than this room" and act.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> BSB has Job asking "How then could I gaze with desire at a virgin?" — a rhetorical question rather than NIV's flat statement. Job isn't only resisting; he's treating it as unthinkable given the covenant he already made. Pair with Matthew 5:28–29 and 2 Samuel 11:1, where David is on a roof at the season "when kings go off to war."

Close: Step 1 is "tell one man." This is the week to pair men up if you haven't. Let each man pick his one, outside the meeting.

Lesson 5 — The Prayer You Make When You're Scared

Anchor: Psalm 50:14–15, Ecclesiastes 5:4–5

What this one is really about. Foxhole prayers, and what a man does after God answers one. Randy tells about a night he was in real trouble and prayed, and what he did with it afterward.

Open with: Everybody's made one. What's a prayer you prayed when you were scared?

Talk about it:

1. Psalm 50 has the whole shape: trouble, a call, an answer, and then a man keeping his word. Which part do men skip?
2. Ecclesiastes says it's better not to vow than to vow and not fulfill it. Does that scare you? Should it?
3. Randy says God has never had to worry about him doing that particular thing again. Is there anything you've kept that clean since?
4. Is there a promise you made God that you've quietly let go of?

Make sure this gets said: God is not embarrassed by a scared man's prayer — He invites it. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." The issue is never the fear. It's the forgetting afterward.

Watch for: Some men carry real shame about a broken vow and will hear this as condemnation. Make sure the room lands on Psalm 50's invitation, not just Ecclesiastes' warning.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Psalm 50 is a covenant lawsuit — God prosecuting His own people — and verses 14–15 sit inside it as the thing He actually wants instead of sacrifice. Pair with Judges 11 for a vow that should never have been made, and Genesis 28:20–22 for one that was kept.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 6 — Coming Back

Anchor: Luke 15:17–20

What this one is really about. Walking back into church after being gone. The prodigal, read slowly — and the real story of a girl named Tami and her parents who held a door open and never made anything of it.

Open with: Have you ever been out of church for a stretch? What finally got you back, or what's keeping you out?

Talk about it:

1. The son rehearses a speech on the road — *make me like one of your hired servants.* He never gets to finish it. Why not?
2. Randy says the father is already hollering for a robe before the boy can negotiate himself down. What does that say about how God takes a man back?
3. Joel says rend your heart and not your garments. What's the difference, practically?
4. Who held a door open for you? Have you told them?

Make sure this gets said: The boy came home ready to settle for less and his daddy would not hear it. Nobody comes back as a hired hand.

Watch for: Men who've been gone a long time often believe there's a cleanup required before returning. The lesson's step 1 is deliberately "go this Sunday" — not once you've got yourself straightened out. Let that be uncomfortable.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Read Luke 15:19 against 15:21 in any translation and watch what drops out. In verse 19 the son plans to say *make me like one of your hired servants.* In verse 21 he says everything except that line — the father cuts in at verse 22 calling for the robe. He is not allowed to finish demoting himself. Note too that Luke 15 holds three parables and the third is the only one with a brother who won't come in.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 7 — The Year I Went to New Mexico

Anchor: 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, Galatians 6:2

What this one is really about. Randy went to New Mexico to help his daughter through a divorce while he was wrecked himself. The lie he names: *you have to have your own house in order before you're any good to anybody.*

Open with: Who's the person you've drifted from that you keep meaning to call?

Talk about it:

1. Paul says we comfort others with the comfort we ourselves received. What have you been given that you're supposed to be handing on?
2. Randy calls "get yourself right first" a convenient lie, because it lets a man sit still and call it wisdom. Have you used it?
3. Paul was writing about comfort from the bottom of the well — he says he despaired even of life. Does that change how you read him?
4. *Carry* the burden — not advise, not diagnose, not explain what she should have done. What's the difference in practice?

Make sure this gets said: You do not have to be healed to be useful. Randy went out there wrecked and it still counted.

Watch for: This lesson names Randy's son-in-law Joe warmly, during a divorce from his daughter. If the room starts taking sides about somebody's in-laws, redirect — the lesson is deliberately not doing that.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> *Paraklsis* — comfort — appears ten times in 2 Corinthians 1:3–7. It's the noun form of the word behind "Counselor" for the Spirit in John 14. Not soothing; coming alongside. Pair with Galatians 6:2 against 6:5 and sit with the tension: carry each other's burdens, and each will carry his own load.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 8 — Iron on Iron

Anchor: Proverbs 27:17

What this one is really about. The men and women who held Randy up when he couldn't stand, named one by one. The argument: a man alone does not make it.

Open with: Count them honestly. Who would actually show up for you at two in the morning?

Talk about it:

1. Ecclesiastes describes a man with no end to his toil and nobody to toil for, and calls it a miserable task. Do you know that man? Are you him?
2. "Two are better than one" is famous. The verse right before it is about a man with nobody. Does reading them together change it?
3. Hebrews says *consider* how to spur one another on. That's a word for planning. What would it look like on your calendar?
4. Randy says iron sharpening iron means two pieces of the same material, and both come away changed. Who sharpens you — and do you let them?

Make sure this gets said: Every lesson in this study has pushed a man toward another person. That was not filler. A man by himself does not make it.

Watch for: This is the natural week to formalize accountability pairs if you haven't. Also the week men realize how short their list is — which lands hard on the ones living alone or newly divorced. Don't let that pass without acknowledging it.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Note the escalation in Ecclesiastes 4: one man alone (v8), two are better (v9–10), two keep warm (v11), and a cord of three strands (v12). The passage is arguing its way up from isolation. Pair with 1 Samuel 23:16, where Jonathan finds David in the wilderness and "strengthened his hand in God."

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 9 — Go to Him Yourself

Anchor: Matthew 18:15

What this one is really about. Gossip, and the discipline of going to a man directly. Randy tells about a soldier he served with — unnamed, at the man's wish — a moment he refused to cover for him, and what that man became.

Open with: Who have you been talking *about* instead of *to*? Don't say the name. Just know it.

Talk about it:

1. Jesus says go, just the two of you. Why does He put "just between the two of you" first?
2. Randy says a man who told six people first can't get the friendship back even if he's right. Have you watched that happen?
3. Proverbs 25 says don't bring hastily to court what you've seen. Did you see it, or did you hear it? Does that change what you're allowed to do?
4. Flip it: is anybody holding something against *you* that you haven't gone to fix?

Make sure this gets said: The sentence sitting immediately in front of "go to him" is about a Father not willing that one should perish. The confrontation is a rescue, not a prosecution.

Watch for: Men will bring real grievances. Keep it about the man in the chair and his next step, not about litigating who was right. And note that BSB reads "if your brother sins **against you**" — if somebody catches that and asks whether this only covers personal offenses, it's a fair question and worth ten minutes.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Matthew 18:15 sits between the parable of the lost sheep (18:12–14) and Peter's question about forgiving seventy-seven times (18:21–22), which is followed by the unforgiving servant. The confrontation passage is surrounded on both sides by mercy. That is not an accident.

Close: Steps, then prayer. Step 1 asks a man to go this week. Ask next week whether he did.

Lesson 10 — Work Like It's for Him

Anchor: Colossians 3:23–24

What this one is really about. Work as worship, and the two ditches: work as identity, and work as nothing but a paycheck. Randy's career, and a foxhole observation about what actually matters about the man next to you.

Open with: What do you do, and does anybody at your job know you're a Christian without you having told them?

Talk about it:

1. "Work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men." Who are you actually working for on a Tuesday?
2. Randy points out that the verse everybody puts on a plaque was written to slaves. Does that change it?
3. Which ditch are you in — is the work your identity, or is it just the paycheck?
4. Name one thing you do sloppy when nobody's checking.

Make sure this gets said: Paul brackets the passage with "there is no Greek or Jew, slave or free" on one side and "God shows no favoritism" on the other. The man running you into the ground is on the same books you are.

Watch for: Men out of work, underemployed, or retired can hear this as a lesson that isn't for them. Make room early: "Some of us aren't working right now and this one still lands — hang with me."

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> *Ek psych■s* — "from the soul" — is what BSB renders "with your whole being." Note Colossians 3:11 twelve verses earlier and 3:25 immediately after; Paul frames the work instruction with equality on both sides. Pair with Proverbs 22:29 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 11 — Provide

Anchor: 1 Timothy 5:8

What this one is really about. Providing, in the full sense — money, yes, but the lesson turns to Randy's mother in a nursing home and his father at the end, and what it cost and what it was worth. He says plainly he was tearing up writing it.

Open with: What did your father provide, and what didn't he?

Talk about it:

1. Randy says he'd heard 1 Timothy 5:8 a hundred times before he read the paragraph it lives in — and it's about widows and grandchildren, not just a paycheck. Does the context change it?
2. Paul is hard on the man who won't work and silent about the man who can't. Why does that distinction matter so much?
3. Randy calls cleaning his father an honor. Does that word surprise you?
4. If your parents are getting up in years, have you had the conversation? Health, money, what they want? Why not?

Make sure this gets said: Say the rail out loud. This verse is aimed at the man who *won't*, not the man who *can't*. Do not let a man out of work read shame into a verse God did not put there.

Watch for: This is the lesson most likely to make grown men cry, and that's fine — let it happen and don't rush to the next question. It also lands hardest on men who didn't show up for a parent and can't fix it now. If that comes up, stay with him. "You can't go back. What's in front of you?"

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Read 1 Timothy 5:3–16 whole and notice Paul is regulating a church benevolence list — family obligation comes first so the church can care for those with nobody. Pair with Mark 7:9–13, where Jesus condemns men who dedicated money to God to avoid supporting their parents.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 12 — Mercy Has a Face

Anchor: Micah 6:8

What this one is really about. Mercy as a person, not a concept. It is largely about Randy's cousin Karen — a nurse practitioner who drove an hour after full shifts, hundreds of times, to sit with his parents — and about her mother, his Aunt Judy. Randy wrote it the same week Judy died.

Open with: Who showed you mercy when you hadn't earned it?

Talk about it:

1. Micah's man is trying to find the price — calves, rams, rivers of oil, even his firstborn. God won't take the money. Why do men prefer a price?
2. "Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly." Which of the three is hardest for you?
3. Jesus attaches loving your enemies to *God being kind to the ungrateful and wicked.* Does that land differently than "be nice"?
4. Name the one you've been withholding mercy from. Now — what's one concrete thing you could do? Not feel. Do.

Make sure this gets said: James says mercy triumphs over judgment. But Micah bolts mercy to *act justly* in the same breath. Mercy is not softness and it is not letting things slide.

Watch for: Men will want to discuss mercy in the abstract. Push for names and actions — the lesson does, and so should you.

> **GOING DEEPER**
>
> "Love mercy" is *hesed* — covenant loyalty, steadfast love, the word used of God's own commitment to His people. It's not a feeling of pity; it's a loyalty you owe. Pair with Hosea 6:6 and Matthew 9:13.

Close: Steps, then prayer.

Lesson 13 — Restore Him Gently

Anchor: Galatians 6:1–2

What this one is really about. How to go after a brother who has fallen — and the difference between mending and fixing. This is the lesson that describes your job as a leader. Randy also names his late brother Gary and says he wishes he'd said more.

Open with: Has anybody ever come after you when you were in the wrong? How did they do it, and did it work?

Talk about it:

1. "Caught in a trespass" — caught, like an animal in a trap. How does that change how you walk up to a man?
2. Paul says *you who are spiritual* should go. Is there such a thing as the wrong man for this job? Are you it right now?
3. The word for "restore" is the same one used for mending nets. What's the difference between mending a man and fixing him?
4. Paul warns the rescuer he might get caught too. Why put that warning right in the middle of the rescue instructions?

Make sure this gets said: A torn net isn't thrown out, and it isn't fixed with a speech. A man sits down with it, finds the break, and works it back together a knot at a time — and it takes as long as it takes.

Watch for: Somebody will want to go confront a man this week out of enthusiasm. Slow him down. Step 3 in the lesson exists for this: tell one man what you're doing and ask him to check on you afterward.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> *Katartiz*■ is the spine of this lesson. In Matthew 4:21 and Mark 1:19 James and John are *mending* their nets when Jesus calls them — same word. In Galatians 6:1 it's what you do for a fallen brother. And in 1 Peter 5:10 it's what God does for you: "will Himself restore you." The thing you're asked to do for another man is the thing God is doing to you. Add Jude 22–23 for the reminder that there is no single approach, because there's no single kind of man.

Close: This lesson has four steps, not three. Don't skip the fourth.

Lesson 14 — The One I Can't Take Back

Anchor: Malachi 2:14–15, Psalm 51

What this one is really about. Adultery. Randy's own, told plainly. Nathan and David. And the two things most preaching separates: God forgave him completely, and the consequences still came.

Open with: Don't open personal. Open here: "God calls Himself the witness to a marriage. What does it do to you to think of Him as being in the room?"

Talk about it:

1. Malachi says "the wife of your youth" in the middle of an indictment. Why does God describe her that way right then?
2. Nathan says four words and David doesn't argue. Why do you think he folded so fast?
3. Forgiven completely — and the sword never departed from his house. Is that a contradiction?
4. David asks for a clean heart and for the *joy* back. Why is the joy a separate request?

Make sure this gets said: Both halves. God took away David's sin, full stop. And the consequences still came, full stop. A man who only hears one of those is set up to be blindsided.

Watch for — the heaviest night of the study.

- Say the "nobody owes this room their worst thing" line again at the top.
- If a man discloses an ongoing affair, do not let the room counsel him. Stay steady, finish the night, talk to him alone. He needs a pastor or counselor, not five opinions.
- The lesson is careful that whether and how a man tells his wife is **not a group decision**, and you must be just as careful. Do not let anybody in the room tell another man to go home and confess tonight. That advice has wrecked people. Point him to somebody trained.
- Watch the man who's been carrying this thirty years and can't put it down. The lesson speaks to him at the end. Make sure he hears it.

> **GOING DEEPER**
>
> Read 2 Samuel 12:13–14 and notice the order: forgiveness announced immediately, consequences announced in the same breath. Then read Psalm 51 whole and note verse 4 — "against You, You only, have I sinned" — which is not David minimizing what he did to Bathsheba and Uriah, but naming the deepest wound.

Close: Four steps. Pray longer tonight than usual.

Lesson 15 — The Divorced Man in the Third Pew

Anchor: Joel 2:25, Isaiah 43:18–19

What this one is really about. A divorced man's place in church. Randy's counsel is blunt: go more, not less. And Joel's promise that God repays the *years*, not just the crop.

Open with: If you're divorced, how did church treat you? If you're not, be honest — how do you treat the men who are?

Talk about it:

1. God says He'll repay the years the locusts ate. Not erase them. Not pretend they didn't come. *Repay.* What's the difference?
2. Randy says every instinct after a divorce is to go less, and he'd fight you on it. Why is going more so hard?
3. Isaiah says forget the former things — and two verses later God says He blots out transgressions *for His own sake.* Why for His own sake and not yours?
4. Most men in this position disqualify themselves from serving before anybody else does. Have you?

Make sure this gets said: Divorce is a real grief and a real tearing — the lesson doesn't soften that. And it is not a permanent demotion in the kingdom.

Watch for: Men still in the raw part of a divorce may not be able to talk. That's fine. Also watch for the married men getting theoretical about somebody else's marriage; keep it on the chair they're sitting in.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Joel 2:25 sits inside a restoration passage that follows the locust judgment of chapters 1–2 — the same chapter as "rend your hearts" in Lesson 6. The repayment is God's response to a people who returned. Pair with Isaiah 61:1–3 and the exchange offered there.

Close: Five steps this time. Step 2 is the one to press on.

Lesson 16 — Sometimes You Just Have to Wait

Anchor: Luke 18:1–8

What this one is really about. The persistent widow, and prayer that outlasts your patience. Randy ends with his own answered prayer — and then deliberately refuses to promise the same to anybody else.

Open with: What did you quit praying about?

Talk about it:

1. Luke tells you the meaning up front: pray always and don't lose heart. Why does he give away the point before the story?
2. The widow has no leverage — no money, no standing, no husband. She wins on persistence alone. What does that say about what God responds to?
3. Jesus ends with "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" The risk was never that God would quit. What was it?
4. Randy says ask for the *kind*, not just the thing — not "send me somebody" but something more specific. What would that change about your prayer?

Make sure this gets said: Read the "part I will not skip" section out loud even if you read nothing else aloud tonight. Randy got a yes, and he flatly refuses to teach that praying hard enough produces a wife, a job, or a healing. Men have been hurt badly by that. Do not let your group end sixteen weeks on a prosperity note.

Watch for: Some man in your room has been praying twenty years for something he hasn't gotten. This lesson is for him, and it can cut the wrong way if the room celebrates Randy's yes without sitting with the men who are still waiting. Ask directly: "Who's still waiting on one?" Then pray for those men by name.

> **GOING DEEPER**
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> Psalm 40:1–3 is quoted at the end of the lesson from the World English Bible, British Edition, because it carries the phrase "a firm place to stand" — where the study's title comes from. Note where it sits in the verse: *after* the waiting. Pair with Psalm 27:14 and note that "be strong and courageous" is attached there not to fighting but to waiting.

Close: This is the last night. Before you pray, go around once more and ask each man what changed in sixteen weeks. Let it take as long as it takes. Then pray, and then talk about what the group does next — because the worst outcome of this study is sixteen good weeks and then everybody goes back to being alone.

PART THREE — AFTER THE SIXTEENTH WEEK

Don't let it just stop.

Men will have told each other true things for four months and then drift, and within six weeks most of them are back where they started. Decide in week fourteen what happens in week seventeen.

Some options that work:

- **Keep meeting, drop the curriculum.** Same night, same room. Open the Bible somewhere and talk. The habit is worth more than the material.
- **Run it again with new men.** Every man in your group could lead a table of four. That's how this spreads, and the second time through a man gets far more out of it than the first.
- **Keep the pairs.** Even if the group stops, the accountability pairs from Lesson 8 don't have to. Ask each man to commit to his one for another six months.
- **Go serve something together.** Lesson 12 is about mercy having a face. Give it one.

And tell Randy how it went. The study is free at thehiddenword.org and he'd rather hear that four men in a shop in Tennessee worked through it than sell a thousand copies.

Think twice. Pray about it. Talk to someone.