

# GARDENER AND WARRIOR

*A 12-Week Program for the Christian Man*  
**Embodied Theology. Masculine Faith.**

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*"But as for the seed that landed on good soil, these are the ones who, after hearing the word, cling to it with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with steadfast endurance."*

**LUKE 8:15**

Ronald D. Potts

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## A Word Before We Begin

At 46 years old I couldn't run a quarter mile without pain.

Nine months later — at 47 — I ran a backyard ultra. That's 42 miles of 4.167-mile loops, run every hour on the hour, with no finish line. You just keep going until you physically cannot. I kept going.

I'm not telling you that to set a physical standard. You may never run a backyard ultra. That's not the point.

I'm telling you because the man who ran 42 miles at 47 was not a gifted athlete. He was not a man who had it all together. He was a man who had spent years trying to change his life from the outside in — harder challenges, better programs, more willpower — and failing every time. He was a man who knew what it felt like to start strong and fade. To quit. To wonder if he was past the point where real change was possible.

Maybe you know that feeling too. Maybe that's exactly why you're holding this program.

Here is what I learned on the way to those 42 miles:

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**External effort without internal transformation doesn't stick. It never has. It never will.**

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You can white-knuckle your way through a hard challenge. You can read every book, follow every program, wake up early for a month. And then life gets hard and the motivation fades and you're right back where you started — wondering what's wrong with you.

Nothing is wrong with you. You've just been trying to change the outside before you've prepared the soil.

That's what this program is about. Not harder effort. Prepared soil.

The parable of the sower in Luke 8 is the organizing framework for everything in these pages. Jesus describes four types of soil — four responses to the Word of God. Three of them fail. Only one produces fruit: the man who hears the Word, holds it with an honest heart, and bears fruit with steadfast endurance.

That is the man this program is building. Not in a single dramatic moment. Not at the finish line of a race. In the daily, unglamorous, sacred work of showing up — to the Journal, to the Morning Ritual, to the workout, to the community, to the Lord — one day at a time, until the life you were called to is the life you are actually living.

I built this program as a Bible study series for the men at the church I attend. It has been through five iterations. It has been tested on real men — including me. The man who built it went from a quarter mile in pain to 42 miles. Not because the program is magic. Because the work is real and the foundation is solid.

I have no paper credentials. What I have is a Marine's conviction that showing up matters, a carpenter's knowledge that good things are built slowly and with the right foundation, a Bible teacher's eight years of studying the Word with men, and a coach's proof that transformation is possible for any man willing to do the internal work first.

You are not too old. You are not too far gone. You are not past the point where change is possible.

I was 46, injured, and couldn't run a quarter mile.

Now let's talk about what's possible for you.

— *Ronald D. Potts*

## Who This Program Is For

This program is for the man who is done starting over.

It is for the man who has done hard things — and still finds himself stuck. The man who knows what he should do and can't seem to make it stick. The man who is tired of the gap between who he is and who he knows he's called to be.

It is specifically designed for the Christian man, or the man who is at least willing to allow for faith. Every tool, every practice, every challenge in this program is built on the foundation of Scripture and anchored in the person of Jesus Christ. If you're not there yet, come anyway. But come honestly.

This program is not for the man who wants a quick fix. It is not another 75-day challenge you white-knuckle through and forget. It is not a checklist. The goal is not to complete the program — it is to become a different man through it.

This program will ask you to be ruthlessly honest with yourself. It will ask you to do internal work before external work. It will ask you to show up when you don't feel like it, and to keep going when you fail.

It will also ask you to do it with other men. This program is designed to be done in community — a small group of men who check in, push each other, and refuse to let each other quit. You will get out of it what you are willing to put in. And you will go further together than you ever would alone.

If you're ready to stop starting over — this is for you.

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## How the Program Works

Gardener and Warrior is a 12-week program built around one organizing truth, drawn from the parable of the sower in Luke 8:

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### **The condition of the soil determines what grows.**

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Jesus describes four types of soil — four responses to the Word of God. Three of them fail. Only one produces fruit: the good soil. The man who hears the Word, holds it with an honest heart, and bears fruit with steadfast endurance. That is the man this program is building.

### **The Three Stages**

**Stage One — Dig Deep, Plant Seeds (Weeks 1–4):** Before anything grows, the soil has to be prepared. Stage One is internal work. You will dig into the patterns of thought, belief, and habit that have kept you stuck. You will begin planting the Word of God as the foundation of everything that follows.

**Stage Two — Show Up, Do the Work (Weeks 5–8):** The soil is prepared. The seeds are planted. Now you show up — every day, like a workman — and do what needs doing. Stage Two builds the daily disciplines of an embodied faith: physical, spiritual, and habitual.

**Stage Three — Cultivate (Weeks 9–12):** Stage Three is about sustaining what has been built, living outward from overflow, and discovering the mission God planted in you before you were born. This is where the gardener becomes the warrior.

### **Each Week Includes**

Four core goals that remain the same throughout all 12 weeks: Journal daily, 8,000 steps, Workout x5, Stick to your nutrition plan.

One weekly challenge — a specific, targeted action tied to that week's content.

One virtue — each stage has a single virtue practiced for four full weeks.

Community check-in — once per week with your group. This is not optional.

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## Why These Two: The Name Explained

Most men have had the breakthrough.

The moment the armor came down and something true surfaced. The hard training block, the honest conversation, the retreat, the crisis that stripped everything down to what was actually true. For a moment you saw yourself clearly and knew exactly what needed to change.

And then ordinary life came back. And within a week — maybe two — it faded.

That's not a character failure. That's a formation problem. And this program is built around the answer.

The Gardener and the Warrior are not two separate modes you rotate between. They are two angles on the same truth about how transformation actually works. Together they name what neither captures alone.

### **The Gardener: Posture**

The Gardener names the posture of formation — patient, receptive, present, trusting. You don't rush the soil. You don't pull the seed up to check if it's growing. Real formation — the kind that produces a man who is actually different, not just temporarily moved — has its own timeline. You create the conditions, tend them faithfully, and receive what comes when it's ready. You hold the outcome with an open hand. You trust the process even when you can't see the growth.

This is the corrective to the workhorse tendency. The man who applies the full force of his being to every problem. Who built a house by sheer effort and wonders why the same approach isn't working on the interior life. You can build a house that way. You cannot grow a soul that way. The Gardener knows the difference.

### **The Warrior: Commitment**

The Warrior names the commitment of formation — disciplined, consistent, present especially when nothing dramatic is happening. The training that makes the difference for the race isn't the single heroic session. It's the accumulated presence over time. The man who showed up every day — especially on the days when nothing dramatic happened, when he didn't feel it, when the breakthrough seemed distant. That man becomes something the summit-chaser never does.

This is the corrective to the peak-experience trap. The man who lives for the breakthrough and cannot sustain the descent. The Warrior doesn't need the moment to be dramatic to show up for it. He has made the commitment and the commitment holds.

### **Together: Faithful Presence in a Process You Don't Control**

The Gardener's patience without the Warrior's commitment produces a man who trusts the process but doesn't show up for it. The Warrior's commitment without the Gardener's posture produces a man who grinds but doesn't receive. Both together produce the man who is faithful

to a process he cannot control — who shows up every day and holds the outcome with an open hand.

*Patient and committed. Present and faithful. Receiving and showing up. That's how the breakthrough sticks. That's how what was found at the summit gets carried back into ordinary life and becomes a way of being rather than a memory.*

This is the program name made theologically explicit. It was always the answer to the question the program asks: how do you carry what you found at the summit back into ordinary life? You become the Gardener and the Warrior. Patient and committed. Present and faithful. Receiving and showing up.

The implicit is now explicit.

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## The Community Element

You were not designed to do this alone.

Gardener and Warrior is designed to be done with a small group of men — ideally four to eight — who are committed to the same 12 weeks together.

### Setup Sunday

At the start of each week, you plan. What are your goals? What does your training look like? What family or work obligations do you need to account for? You share your plan with your group. Saying it out loud makes it real.

### Follow-Up Friday

At the end of each week, you report. How did your plan go? Where did you succeed? Where did you fail? What will you adjust? Honesty in Follow-Up Friday is what makes Setup Sunday worth doing.

If you don't have a group yet, find one before you start. Don't begin alone.

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## What You'll Need

A journal or the Gardener and Warrior journal workbook.

A devotional with enough days for 90 days.

A workout plan.

A nutrition plan.

A group of men to do this with.

Willingness to be honest — the hardest and most important requirement.

# The Virtue Guide

The Christian character is not built by following rules. God does not want automatons. He wants men of mature character — men who have internalized what is right, true, and good so deeply that it shapes their instincts and decisions without having to think about it.

The primary moral ethic of the Bible is virtue — the formation of the whole person toward wisdom, discernment, and the character that can respond rightly to whatever the situation requires. The deontological rules — the commandments, the prohibitions — are real and important. But they are guardrails for the man in formation, not the destination. The destination is the man whose soul is sufficiently oriented toward God and toward others that his discernment can be trusted — because it has been formed by the Spirit, through the practices, toward the image of Christ.

Paul says it in Galatians 5 about the fruit of the Spirit. Against love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control — there is no law. Not because the law is irrelevant. Because the man whose character expresses these is not a man who has finally succeeded at rule-following. He is a man whose soul has been formed, by the Spirit and by faithful practice, toward the image of the one who perfectly embodied them all.

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## The act of doing is the act of becoming.

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A runner is not someone who meets a measurable standard. A runner is someone who runs. Can a person say they are a runner and never run? The doing and the becoming are not sequential — first you become, then you do. They are simultaneous. The man who runs is a runner in the act of running, and more fully a runner with every mile. The man who practices honesty is becoming an honest man in the act of practicing it. Not pretending to be something he isn't. Becoming what he is practicing — in real time, from the first rep.

This captures the truth behind a common phrase — fake it until you make it. But the act of doing is the act of becoming tells you that you are not faking it. Because you aren't. Every act of doing the thing is doing the thing. There is nothing fake about that. It's real.

This program assigns one virtue per stage — three virtues over twelve weeks. You will practice the same virtue for four full weeks. This is intentional. A week is not enough time to practice anything into your character.

### Virtue One: Honesty (Stage One — Weeks 1–4)

What it is: Honesty is the commitment to see and speak reality as it actually is — starting with yourself. It is not harshness. It is not self-condemnation. It is the refusal to lie to yourself about where you are, what you're doing, and why.

What it looks like daily: Honesty shows up in your Journal — writing what is actually true rather than what you wish were true. It shows up when you track your goals and mark the X instead of pretending the day didn't happen. Honest men are not perfect men. They are men who stop pretending.

*"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

**PSALM 139:23-24**

Daily practice: At the end of your Journal entry each day, write one honest sentence: "The thing I've been avoiding is..." It doesn't have to be resolved. It just has to be named.

## **Virtue Two: Discipline (Stage Two — Weeks 5–8)**

What it is: Discipline is the capacity to do what needs doing regardless of how you feel. It is not punishment. It is the trained response of a man who has decided in advance what kind of man he will be — and then acts accordingly, even when his feelings disagree.

What it looks like daily: Discipline looks like doing your Journal when you don't feel like it. Getting your steps when it's raining. Sticking to your nutrition plan when everything in you wants the easy option. Discipline is not dramatic. It is quiet. It is Tuesday morning.

*"I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*

**1 CORINTHIANS 9:26-27**

Daily practice: Each morning, before you begin your Journal, identify the one thing you are most likely to avoid or negotiate your way out of today. Write it down. Do it first.

## **Virtue Three: Love (Stage Three — Weeks 9–12)**

What it is: Love is not a feeling. It is a decision, repeated daily, to act for the good of another regardless of what you receive in return. Honesty without love is cruelty. Discipline without love is pride. But love makes everything it touches better and more enduring.

What it looks like daily: Love looks like serving your family without keeping score. Doing your work as unto the Lord rather than for recognition. Forgiving someone who hasn't apologized. It also looks like filling your own cup first — abiding in the vine — so that what you pour out comes from overflow rather than emptiness.

*"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

**JOHN 15:12-13**

Daily practice: Each day, identify one person in your life and do one specific, intentional act of love for them. Write it in your Journal. Do it without mentioning it to anyone.

# **Stage One: Dig Deep, Plant Seeds**

**WEEKS 1–4 • VIRTUE: HONESTY**

A man who cannot first be honest with himself cannot be honest with others. He cannot be an honest man.

That is not a moral observation. It is a structural one. The honesty you are capable of giving to others is bounded by the honesty you are willing to receive about yourself. The perception of others runs through the filter of the self you haven't honestly examined. Which means the work of this stage — the honest look at what is actually in your own soil — is not merely personal development. It is the prerequisite to everything that follows. In the program. In your relationships. In your capacity to love and lead well.

Honesty is the first virtue of the Gardener and the Warrior because without it, nothing that follows is real. You cannot tend what you cannot see. You cannot pull what you haven't identified. You cannot carry what you have not honestly picked up.

Before anything grows, the soil has to be prepared. Stage One is internal work. You will dig into the patterns of thought, belief, and habit that have kept you stuck. You will begin planting the Word of God as the foundation of everything that follows.

Before we begin, one foundational principle that will run through this entire program:

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**Challenges reveal you. They don't change you. What happens from there depends entirely on what you do with what they show you.**

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This matters because most men enter a program, a retreat, a hard training block, or a summit experience expecting to come out the other side changed. Transformed by the experience itself. When the emotional intensity fades and ordinary life reasserts itself, they conclude the experience didn't work.

It worked exactly as designed. It revealed something. The challenge — physical, relational, spiritual — creates the specific conditions in which what is already in you surfaces. The armor drops. What was buried, managed, or suppressed can no longer be held down. What surfaces is not random. It is what was already there. The change — the actual transformation — comes from what you do with what was revealed. That is Stage 2. Stage 1 is the revealing. And the revealing is enough work for four weeks.

| *"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin..."*  
**ZECHARIAH 4:10**

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## **Week 1 — The Keystone: The Journal**

*STAGE ONE: DIG DEEP, PLANT SEEDS • VIRTUE: HONESTY*

### **This Week's Goals**

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Wake up 45 minutes early — every day
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## Before You Read This Week

Find a journal. A blank notebook, a legal pad, the Gardener and Warrior workbook — it doesn't matter what it looks like. What matters is that it's yours, it's dedicated to this program, and it's somewhere you can write honestly without an audience. If you don't have one yet, stop reading and go get one.

## The Keystone

In architecture, the keystone is the wedge-shaped stone at the top of an arch. Remove it, and the whole arch collapses. The Journal is the keystone of this program. Not because journaling is a magic habit. Because the Journal is the primary tool of self-knowledge — and self-knowledge is what Stage One is entirely about.

If you do the Journal, this program will work. If you don't, it won't.

## One Rule

Be honest. You don't have to show this to anyone. Which means there is no reason — none — to be anything other than completely honest. Write what is actually true. Not what sounds good. What is true.

## The Journal Structure

The Journal is structured in a specific order, and the order matters. We begin with the most important thing first and work outward.

① Meditative Prayer or Prayer Walk (5–10 minutes) — Before you write a single word, be still. Pray. Take a short walk and talk to God.

*"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."*

**MARK 1:35**

② Gratitude (3 things) — List three specific things you are grateful for today. Not generic — specific.

③ Devotional Reading and Reflection — Read your devotional. Write two or three sentences about what stood out.

④ Prayer Journal — Write your prayer. Pray for three people: someone close to you, a friend, and someone facing a significant need.

⑤ General Journal and Reflection — This is the open section. Write whatever needs to come out. This is where you practice Honesty.

⑥ Mission Statement for the Day — A short, prioritized list of what needs to get done today. Three to five items.

⑦ Workout for the Day — Write out your workout before you do it.

⑧ Nutrition Plan for the Day — What are you eating today? Write it out.

## The Morning Ritual

This week's challenge is to wake up 45 minutes earlier than you currently do. Every day. The Morning Ritual must come from somewhere — it must be protected. As the leader of your home, you should be the first one up. You are setting the temperature of the house. A thermostat sets the environment. A thermometer just reads it. Be a thermostat.

Suggested Morning Ritual: Wake up early. Water and electrolytes. 15-minute walk. 10 minutes of breath prayer or meditative prayer. Coffee. 20 minutes of Journal. Lead your wife or partner in prayer, or pray specifically for someone in your life.

## **HONESTY — WEEK ONE: Getting Low**

Every man runs a defense system. Most of it is unconscious. You manage how much of your interior life surfaces — what you let other people see, what you let yourself feel, what you allow to come close. There is a version of you that you present to the world, a version you maintain in your own head, and then there is something deeper — the real interior, the part that carries what you haven't named yet, the weight of what you haven't become.

In ordinary life, that deeper place stays down. Not because it's gone — because the armor holds. You have the energy to keep it managed.

The Gardener's first work is not to tear the armor off. It is to get low enough to see that it's there. To recognize what you're managing, how long you've been managing it, and what it has cost you to keep it in place.

I ran a defense system for years while considering myself a man of genuine faith — strong in the faith, well studied, committed to the life. And addicted nonetheless to a habit that, once I could see it clearly, I could not honestly separate from the self-suppression underneath it. The armor was thick enough that the contradiction could coexist with the conviction for a long time. Getting low enough to see it was the beginning of everything that changed.

It was my willingness to take on and face physical challenges that created the conditions for the armor to drop. This is why you will be asked to take on physical challenges throughout this program, and why setting a specific, clearly defined physical challenge goal — with a date on the calendar — is one of the first things Stage Two will ask of you.

The Gardener does not condemn the soil for what he finds in it. He assesses it honestly. What's here? How long has it been here? What has it been doing to what's around it? That is the posture of this week. Not verdict. Vision.

One more thing worth naming: the mind and body keep score. You may have managed the presentation to others successfully. But the soul knows. The body knows. The gap between who you are presenting yourself to be and who you actually are is being registered — whether you are consciously aware of it or not. The honest look you're being asked to take this week is not the first accounting. It is the first time you choose to look at the accounting that has already been running.

## **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: HONESTY**

At the end of your Journal entry each day, write one honest sentence: "The thing I've been avoiding is..." Don't edit it. Don't explain it. Just name it. One sentence. Every day.

## **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share your plan for the week. What does your morning ritual look like? When are you getting up?

Follow-Up Friday: How many mornings did you do the Journal? What did the Honesty practice surface?

This week's community prompt: Introduce yourself. Tell the group one thing you've tried before that didn't stick — and one honest reason why.

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*What is the version of yourself you present most consistently — to others, and to yourself? Where does it differ from what you sense is underneath?*

*What has it cost you to maintain the armor you're carrying? What has it protected you from — and what has it prevented?*

*The mind and body keep score. Where have you sensed the gap between the presented self and the actual self — even when no one else could see it?*

*What does my current morning look like — and what does that say about my priorities?*

*What would it look like to be completely honest in this Journal?*

## Next Week

*The war is real — and it's being fought in your mind.*

Weekly challenge: Morning prayer walk, 15 minutes daily

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# Week 2 — The Battlefield of the Mind

STAGE ONE: DIG DEEP, PLANT SEEDS • VIRTUE: HONESTY — WEEK 2

## This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Morning prayer walk — 15 minutes daily
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## The War Is Real

*"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

**EPHESIANS 6:12**

Jesus has already won the war. The Enemy is defeated — and he knows it. But a defeated enemy who refuses to surrender is still dangerous. He still fights. And the primary theater of that fight is not your circumstances, your finances, or your relationships. It is your mind.

The first thing the Enemy attacks is your identity in Christ. He cannot take your salvation. What he can do — and does relentlessly — is whisper. He plants doubt, discouragement, accusation, and distraction. He doesn't need to win. He just needs to keep you confused long enough that you never become the man God called you to be.

*"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*

**2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5**

## **Not Every Thought Is Yours**

Not every thought that occurs to you is actually your own. Some arise from the old nature. Some, Scripture is clear, come from demonic sources. The ancient Christian tradition has a word for these: Logismoi — assaultive thoughts. These are not thoughts we are required to take ownership of. What matters is what we do with them.

## **The Five Stages of Thought**

Assault — The thought arrives. Uninvited. You didn't choose it. At this stage you have done nothing wrong.

Interaction — You begin to engage with the thought. You turn it over. This is where the danger begins.

Consent — You agree with the thought. You accept it as true. At this stage the thought has become yours.

Defeat — The thought has taken hold. You find it increasingly difficult to resist.

Passion or Obsession — The thought has become an entrenched reality — a stronghold.

## **The Eight Patterns of Destructive Thought**

Gluttony, Fornication, Avarice, Sorrow, Discouragement, Anger, Vainglory, Pride. Which pattern shows up most in your thought life? Name it. Write it in your Journal. You cannot fight what you refuse to acknowledge.

## **Set the Right Target**

*"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."*

**PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

What you set your mind on, you will pursue. This is not positive thinking. This is Scripture. The Morning Prayer Walk this week is designed for exactly this. Walk. No phone. No podcast. No music. Just you, the Lord, and whatever your mind brings up. Notice the thoughts. Examine them. Redirect your gaze to Christ.

## **HONESTY — WEEK TWO: Pulling Weeds**

Last week you got low enough to see what's in the soil. This week the Gardener's work gets more demanding: learning to tell the difference between what belongs and what doesn't — and having the honesty and the courage to pull what needs to come out.

Every garden has weeds. They don't announce themselves. They grow alongside the good seed, sometimes indistinguishable from it early on, drawing from the same nutrients, competing for the same light. Some of them have been there so long they feel like part of the garden's identity.

Weeds in a man's interior life take specific forms. The contingent identity — the job title, the performance record, the capacity that props up the sense of self — can be a weed when it has grown into the space where the identity in Christ needs to be the ground. Fear of becoming is a weed. The self-condemnation that poses as accountability is a weed. The thought patterns you identified this week — some of them are weeds with deep roots.

The Gardener pulls weeds differently than the warrior makes war. The warfare posture tears everything out — scorched earth, domination. The Gardener is discerning. He knows what he planted. He knows what doesn't belong. And he removes it carefully, at the root, so it doesn't grow back from a fragment left in the ground.

And here is what the Gardener knows about what he finds when he pulls: it is not a verdict on the soil. It is information about what the soil needs.

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**When you revert to the old pattern — when you find something in the soil you didn't want to find — the diagnosis is not weak character. It is undertrained capacity meeting a demand that exceeded it. The response is not shame. It is: what needs more practice? Where does the capacity still need to be built?**

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A question worth carrying into your own honest assessment this week: is this failure — or is this new information about where the root is, and how deep the pulling needs to go?

And one more thing about the weeds: we do not get away with anything. The successful deception — the thing gotten away with in the external accounting — is never actually gotten away with. The soul has been turned. The body knows. The score is kept. Every act of self-suppression, every successful concealment, forms the man in the direction of the thing he is doing. Which is why the honest look — however costly — is always less costly than the management.

| *"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

**JOHN 15:2**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: HONESTY**

Each day write two sentences: "The thought pattern I keep returning to is..." and "The stage I am typically at when I notice it is..." Then identify one weed — one pattern, identity, or habit competing with what actually needs to grow. Name it in your Journal. Where is the root?

Recommended reading: The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share which of the eight thought patterns you identified as most active in your life.

Follow-Up Friday: How did the morning prayer walks go? What came up when you walked without your phone?

This week's community prompt: Share one thought pattern or stronghold you've been carrying — and one Scripture you're going to use to fight it.

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*What lies about my life have I believed — and how long have I believed them?*

*What contingent identity have you been standing on that can be taken? What gives way when the thing it depends on disappears?*

*What failure have you been treating as a character verdict? What changes when you reframe it as undertrained capacity — information rather than indictment?*

*Which of the five stages is where I most often lose the fight?*

*Where have you been telling yourself you got away with something? What has the score actually been recording?*

## Next Week

*What you give your attention to, you worship.*

Weekly challenge: Phone fast — 2 intentional hours daily

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# Week 3 — Intention, Attention, and Worship

STAGE ONE: DIG DEEP, PLANT SEEDS • VIRTUE: HONESTY — WEEK 3

## This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Phone fast — 2 intentional hours daily
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## What Do You Worship?

Here is a definition of worship that will stay with you: Worship is whatever you give your uttermost attention to. Not what you say you value. Not what you post about. What you give your uttermost attention to — that is what you worship.

We live in a world engineered to capture your attention. Your phone is not a neutral tool. It is a product designed to be as addictive as possible. Every notification is a small interruption. Every interruption is a small act of worship redirected. If you do not set intention toward something, you will not attend to it.

## The Distraction Problem

*"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

**1 PETER 5:8**

The Enemy's most effective tactic is simply distraction. A distracted man is a manageable man. He never builds anything dangerous to the kingdom of darkness because he never builds anything at all. The phone fast this week is not a punishment. It is a diagnostic.

## Creating Space

The antidote to distraction is not willpower. It is space. Here is how to build it: Wake up early — the one reliable way to create time that belongs to you before the demands start. Buffer zones — a small space between environments, as little as 30 seconds of breathing or prayer, to reset before the next context. Fasting — from food or phone or social media — to create space for what matters. Exercise — increases your capacity to handle stress; compounds back into your life as energy and clarity. Rest — not zoning out, but intentional ceasing from labor and recovery of the whole person.

## The Buffer Zone in Practice

Every time you change environments today — home to car, car to office, office to gym, gym to home — pause. Take three slow breaths or pray one sentence. Then enter. The man who walks through his front door having chosen to be present is a different man than the one still dragging the weight of the day behind him.

## Schedule a Sabbath

*"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

**MARK 2:27**

God built rest into the rhythm of creation. Schedule it. Protect it with hard boundaries. One day away from your labors will not destroy your progress. It will preserve it. Sabbath practices: Worship. Hospitality. Genuine rest from labor. Play.

## HONESTY — WEEK THREE: Tending the Soil — Everything Is Training

The weed has been named. The root has been identified. Now the Gardener's work shifts to what remains — and to the daily, faithful tending that makes the difference between a seed that sprouts and a plant that produces.

The Gardener knows something the workhorse resists: small, consistent, faithful tending produces the growth that the single heroic effort never could. You don't rush the soil. You don't demand that the seed grow faster by pushing harder. It grows according to its nature, in response to faithful conditions maintained over time.

Remember the principle from the stage introduction: challenges reveal you, they don't change you. What changes you is what you do with what was revealed. This week names the specific practice of that doing — and it's simpler and more demanding than most men expect.

Everything you do is training you. Not just the designated sessions, not just the hard conversations, not just the moments that feel significant. Everything.

The way you respond when stress arrives before you're ready — that's a training rep. The way you handle the minor annoyance that precedes the major event — that's a training rep. The five minutes of stillness you chose or skipped — that's a training rep. The moment you felt the pull to fix or flee and you stayed instead — that's a training rep.

Nothing is too small to matter because the soul learns from repetition at whatever intensity the repetition occurs. The small honest look in a low-stakes moment builds the capacity for the honest look when the stakes are high.

In strength training, the principle is called progressive overload. You begin where you are, add demand incrementally, allow adaptation to occur, and build toward the weight that will be required. You don't train at competition weight from day one. The soul adapts the same way. Start small. Win big.

Learning this through Tuesday's ordinary moments and every training session reframes what you thought was just a hard job or an unchosen situation. You begin to hear yourself say — I trained for this. Or simply: this is training.

When my work asks me to carry a bucket of gravel one hundred feet, crawl under a house, and fill a thirty-foot ditch one bucket at a time — after digging that trench by hand first — I am not miserable. I didn't choose it. But I chose to do it gladly. Because that is exactly what it is: training. The physical load, the repetitive demand, the unglamorous Tuesday of the body — all of it depositing capacity I didn't know I needed until the unchosen situation arrived and I found it was already there.

You rarely rise to the occasion. You fall to the level of your training. The man who handles the genuine crisis with honesty and presence is the man who has been practicing honesty and presence in the ordinary moments that preceded it.

And here is where the foundational phrase of this coaching philosophy earns its full weight:

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### **The act of doing is the act of becoming.**

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A runner is not someone who meets a measurable standard. A runner is someone who runs. Can a person say they are a runner and never run? The doing and the becoming are not sequential — first you become, then you do. They are simultaneous. The man who runs is a runner in the act of running, and more fully a runner with every mile. The man who practices honesty is becoming an honest man in the act of practicing it. Not pretending to be something he isn't. Becoming what he is practicing — in real time, from the first rep.

This captures the truth behind a common phrase — fake it until you make it. But the act of doing is the act of becoming tells you that you are not faking it. Because you aren't. Every act of doing the thing is doing the thing. There is nothing fake about that. It's real.

This resolves something most men feel but can't name: the imposter sense that arrives when you begin a new practice. You practice presence and still feel the pull to fix. You practice honesty and still feel the pull to manage. The feeling is not evidence that the practice isn't working. The mind and body keep score — and they register the gap between the declared identity and the actual practice. But they also register the reps. The practice is forming you whether you feel formed yet or not.

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

**GALATIANS 6:9**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: HONESTY**

Each day: "Where my attention actually went today — and where I wanted it to go — was..."  
Choose one small, daily practice of honest tending — something that takes less than ten minutes and can be done consistently. Do it every day this week without exception. The point is not the insight it produces. The point is the rep. The act of doing is the act of becoming. Start small. Win big.

Read back through all three weeks of Honesty practice before Sunday. What do you see?

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Tell your group what your two-hours-per-day phone fast is going to look like. When? What will you do with that time?

Follow-Up Friday: How did the phone fast go? What did you notice when the noise stopped?

This week's community prompt: Share one area where distraction has consistently won — and one specific way you are going to fight it.

### **Weekly Reflection Questions**

*What has my attention — and is that what I actually want to worship?*

*What do I think about first in the morning? What does that reveal?*

*Where in your ordinary daily life are you getting training reps you haven't been counting?  
What small moments are forming you — in the direction you want, or away from it?*

*Where have you been waiting to feel like the person you want to become before you start doing what that person does? What changes when you understand that the doing is the becoming?*

*Where do I most need a buffer zone?*

### **Next Week**

*You've dug deep. Now: what did you find?*

Weekly challenge: Evening journaling begins

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## **Week 4 — Reflection: What Did You Find?**

*STAGE ONE: DIG DEEP, PLANT SEEDS • VIRTUE: HONESTY — WEEK 4, THE DEEPENING*

### **This Week's Goals**

- Journal daily
- 8,000 steps

- Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Evening journal — every night
- 

## Why Reflection?

*"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."*

**PROVERBS 4:7**

Information is not wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge that has been lived through, reflected upon, and integrated into who you actually are. It only comes one way — by slowing down long enough to let what you've learned become part of who you are.

The reflection weeks are not rest weeks. They are integration weeks. This week you sit with what you found — and you begin to let it become wisdom rather than just information.

### Question One: What Did I Discover About Myself?

What thought patterns did you identify in Week 2 that you had never named before? What came up during the morning prayer walks when the noise stopped? What did the phone fast reveal? What sentences did you write in the Honesty practice that surprised you? Write for at least ten uninterrupted minutes on this question. Then read what you wrote. Underline the sentence that feels most true.

### Question Two: What Seed Took Root?

Something in Stage One connected. Something landed differently than things have landed before. What was it? Be specific — not "I feel more spiritual" but what specifically changed? What do you do differently now, even in a small way?

### Question Three: What Is Still Hard Soil?

Not every seed took root. Not every practice landed. Where are you still stuck? Name it. Then take it to your morning prayer time, share it with your group, or simply hold it before the Lord with open hands this week.

## The Evening Journal

This week introduces the Evening Journal — a short, focused reflection of no more than 15 minutes that closes out the day honestly and sets up tomorrow intentionally.

Day review — How did today go? What worked in your plan? What didn't? Mission Statement review — What got done? Whatever didn't carries forward to tomorrow. Proactive planning for tomorrow — Write tomorrow's Mission Statement tonight. One closing prayer sentence — Give the day back to the Lord. Then close the Journal and let it go.

## The Evening Ritual

Set out your clothes for tomorrow, including workout clothes. Set a hard bedtime — and keep it. No screens at least one hour before bed. Take two minutes to visualize your morning. Write your Evening Journal. Pray briefly, honestly, then release the day.

## **HONESTY — WEEK FOUR: The Harvest of Seeing**

Four weeks ago you began to get low enough to see what was actually in the soil. You named the armor. You identified the weeds and began to understand their roots. You confronted the score the mind and body have been keeping. You started tending faithfully in the small daily moments, building the capacity that compounds over time.

The harvest of the Honesty stage is not a changed man. Not yet. The harvest of Honesty is a seen man. A man who has looked clearly at what is actually there — without the management, without the armor, without the verdict — and can hold what he found with the Gardener's steady, uncondemning, honest gaze.

There is one more thing the Honesty stage reveals that needs to be named before we close it. A man who cannot see himself clearly cannot see others clearly — not only because his perception is distorted, but because he cannot afford to. He needs others to be what supports his managed image.

The wife who is supposed to be supportive — when she is struggling or frustrated or human in ways that don't serve the image, he cannot receive it. Not because he is cruel. Because her struggle threatens the story he has been telling about himself. So he fixes her rather than witnesses her — not to help her, but to restore the conditions the managed image requires. In every case the other person is being perceived through the filter of what the managed image needs them to be.

This is why acceptance without allowance — the first fruit of this stage — applies inward before it can be practiced outward. The self-acceptance and the acceptance of others are not two separate virtues. They are one movement of the same restored soul.

This week names the full shape of what Honesty produces in a man who has worked it faithfully:

### **Acceptance without allowance.**

The seen man accepts what is actually there — the wound, the weed, the pattern, the fear — without pretending it isn't there or that it doesn't matter. But acceptance is not allowance. He accepts it as the current condition of the soil — and commits to the faithful work that will change what can be changed and root out what doesn't belong.

### **Honesty without harshness.**

The seen man tells himself the truth — the actual truth about what is there, what it has cost, what root it grew from. But honesty without harshness means the truth is told with the Gardener's voice, not the judge's. The soil is not condemned for what grows in it. The honest account is offered in service of the tending, not the verdict.

| *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*  
**PSALM 51:10**

## **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: HONESTY — THE AUDIT**

This week, instead of a daily sentence, do a full honest audit in your Journal. Am I actually doing the Journal daily? Am I doing the workouts honestly? What is the gap between the man I said I

wanted to be and the man I've been this week? What do I need to confess before moving into Stage Two?

Also write one paragraph: What kind of man do I want to be by the end of Stage Two? You will return to this paragraph at the end of Week 8.

Reflection week practice: Write a letter to yourself — not to who you wish you were, not to who you're afraid you are, but to who you actually are, as honestly as you can see it after these four weeks. Name what you found in the soil. Name the weeds you identified and the roots you located. Name what has been faithfully tended. And name what you are carrying into Stage Two — not as burden, but as honest inventory.

## Community This Week

Setup Sunday: Share one thing you discovered about yourself in Stage One that you didn't know — or weren't willing to admit — before this program.

Follow-Up Friday: Report on the Evening Journal. What did it surface? How did planning tomorrow tonight change your morning?

This week's community prompt: Share your answer: What is still hard soil for me — and what do I need from this group as I move into Stage Two?

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*What did you find in the soil of your life during this stage that surprised you? What was harder to see than you expected?*

*Where have you been requiring others to support your managed image? What becomes possible in those relationships when you no longer need them to perform that role?*

*What does honesty without harshness feel like from the inside?*

*What has Stage One cost me — and was it worth it?*

*What are you carrying into Stage Two? What does the Warrior need to know about the soil he's been given to work with?*

*"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."*

**2 CORINTHIANS 1:20**

## Next Week

*The soil is prepared. Now show up and do the work.*

Weekly challenge: Intermittent fasting — all week. Stage Two begins.

# Stage Two: Show Up, Do the Work

## WEEKS 5–8 • VIRTUE: DISCIPLINE

The summit was real. The honest look produced something genuine. Something surfaced that needed to surface, was named that needed naming, was seen that had been hidden.

Now the valley comes.

This is not a warning. It is a preparation. The valley always follows the summit — in the spiritual life, in athletic training, in any genuine formation process. The runner who crosses the finish line of the race he trained for months to complete often finds, within days, that the bottom falls out. The structure that organized his life is gone. The emotional high has given way to an emotional low that feels like personal failure. It is not failure. It is the predictable, natural cycle that follows every genuine peak experience — and almost no one tells you it's coming before the race.

You have just come from a summit. Stage One was the ascent — the honest look, the armor partially down, the weeds identified, something true surfacing. Stage Two is the descent. And the descent requires as much intentionality as the ascent — because the man who was not told the valley was coming is the man who falls off the cliff while still looking up at the summit he just left.

The specific failure mode: still looking up. Still trying to recreate the conditions of the breakthrough. Still waiting for the emotional intensity of the honest look to return before doing the daily practice. It won't. The valley is not the absence of God's presence. It is where the Warrior's work happens — daily, faithful, unglamorous, and absolutely essential.

Psalm 23 does not say the valley of the shadow of death is where God is absent. It says: you are with me. The rod and the staff — they comfort me. In the valley. The shepherd's presence is most specifically promised precisely where the terrain is hardest and least dramatic. The Warrior who descends with clear eyes, aware of that presence, prepared for the test the valley brings — that man is not surprised by the low. He is equipped for it.

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**The act of doing is the act of becoming. The Warrior shows up for the valley the same way he showed up for the summit — because he has made the commitment and the commitment holds whether the territory is dramatic or not.**

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The soil has been prepared. The seeds have been planted. Now you show up. Stage Two is built on a simple, workman principle: you show up every day and do the work that needs doing. Not because you feel like it. Not because you're motivated. Because it is Tuesday, and Tuesday is a day you work.

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

**GALATIANS 6:9**

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## Week 5 — Embodied Faith

*STAGE TWO: SHOW UP, DO THE WORK • VIRTUE: DISCIPLINE — WEEK 1 OF 4*

### This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
- 8,000 steps

- Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Intermittent fasting — all week
- 

## Your Body Is Not the Enemy

There is a lie that has been present in Christianity since the earliest days of the church: the body is bad, the spirit is good. This is not Christianity. It is an ancient heresy called Gnosticism — and it has caused more damage to the faith and practice of Christian men than most people realize.

*"God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."*

**GENESIS 1:27, 31**

## The Incarnate Christ

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*

**JOHN 1:14**

When God chose to redeem humanity, He did not send an idea. He sent His Son — in a body. Fully human. Flesh and blood. The early church theologian Gregory of Nazianzus said: "What is not assumed is not redeemed." Jesus came to redeem the whole person — mind, body, and soul. Your body is not excluded from that redemption. It is included in it.

## The Body as Temple

*"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."*

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20**

*"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship."*

**ROMANS 12:1**

Your workout is worship. Your nutrition choices are stewardship. Your sleep is care for something that belongs to God. The man who trains his body as an act of worship — not vanity, not performance, not fear — is doing something genuinely sacred.

## Set Your Physical Challenge

This week you are going to set a specific, tangible physical goal — something real, with a date on the calendar. Make it specific. Make it a stretch. Count the cost. Put it on the calendar. Sign up. Pay the registration fee. Tell your group.

*"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?"*

**LUKE 14:28**

## Intermittent Fasting

Not eating for 16+ hours each day. The purposes in this program: Discipline — every time you feel hungry and choose not to eat, you are practicing the virtue of this stage. Awareness — most men eat habitually rather than hungrily. Space — you will be surprised how much mental energy goes into thinking about food. Physical benefit — meaningful evidence supports improved metabolic health and mental clarity.

## Nutrition Principles

Calories are foundational — weight management comes down to energy in versus energy out. Protein is the priority macro — roughly one gram per pound of bodyweight. No snacking — eat your meals, then stop. Plan your food — write your nutrition plan in your Journal every morning.

## DISCIPLINE — WEEK ONE: The Commitment That Holds

The Warrior's defining quality is not strength. It is commitment. The man who shows up — not only when the session is dramatic, not only when the feeling is present, not only when the conditions are favorable — but every day, because he said he would and the commitment holds.

Remember what the Honesty stage revealed: challenges reveal you, they don't change you. What you found in Stage One is the raw material. What you do with it in Stage Two is the formation. The challenge showed you what was there. The Warrior decides what to do about it — and then does it, every day, whether or not it feels significant.

This is the descent made concrete. The breakthrough happened. The clarity was genuine. And now the work is Tuesday. Now the work is showing up for the daily practice when nothing dramatic is happening, when the summit seems distant, when the only evidence that anything is changing is the accumulated presence of a man who keeps showing up anyway.

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. The Spirit who initiated the conviction in Stage One is still pressing toward completion. Your daily showing up is your participation in that completion — not earning it, not manufacturing it, but cooperating with it at the depth the Spirit is pressing toward.

| *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."*

**COLOSSIANS 3:23**

## VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: DISCIPLINE

Each morning, before you begin your Journal: identify the one thing you are most likely to avoid today. Write it down. Do it first. Identify the one daily practice that most directly addresses what the Honesty stage revealed. Not three practices — one. The most important one. Commit to it every day this week, at a specific time, without exception. Write it down. Tell your coach or your group.

## Community This Week

Setup Sunday: Share your physical challenge goal. Name the event. Name the date. Name the cost.

Follow-Up Friday: Report on the intermittent fasting. What was hard? What did it reveal about your relationship with food?

This week's community prompt: Share one way you have treated your body as an obstacle to your faith — and one way you are going to treat it differently.

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*Where has the valley already arrived — the emotional flatness after the Stage One honesty work? What does it feel like from the inside?*

*What does the descent look like for you specifically? What does carrying what you found at the summit back into ordinary life actually require in daily terms?*

*Have I been treating my body as a temple or as an inconvenience?*

*What will training for my physical challenge cost me — and am I actually willing to pay that cost?*

## Next Week

*You don't rise to your goals. You fall to your habits.*

Weekly challenge: 30 minutes of Bible reading daily

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# Week 6 — The Habitual Life

STAGE TWO: SHOW UP, DO THE WORK • VIRTUE: DISCIPLINE — WEEK 2 OF 4

## This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: 30 minutes Bible reading — daily
- 

## The Ritual of Life

It is estimated the average person makes around 35,000 decisions every day. The vast majority are made beneath the surface — by your habits, your patterns, your automatic responses. If you want to change your life, you have to change your habits — because your habits are running your life whether you are paying attention or not.

## Remember to Remember

*"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."*

**REVELATION 2:4-5**

Take time this week to recall your own testimony. How did you come to faith? What were you like before? What changed? Refresh the memory. In your Journal this week, write your testimony. Not for anyone else. For you.

## The Five Basic Christian Habits

There are five habits every Christian naturally practices when they first believe — and that almost every Christian who drifts away quietly stops practicing.

**Prayer:** Pray for three people — someone close to you, a friend, and someone facing a significant need. And pray for yourself.

| *"Pray continually."*  
**1 THESSALONIANS 5:17**

**Bible Reading and Study:**

| *"The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires."*  
**HEBREWS 4:12**

This week's challenge is 30 minutes of Bible reading daily. Simply reading — continuously, letting the Word move through you. If you don't know where to start, read the Gospel of John. Then Romans. Then the Psalms.

**Fellowship:** The Christian life was never designed to be lived alone. Go to church. Show up. Serve. Stay.

**Service:**

| *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*  
**MARK 10:45**

**Charity:**

| *"Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. God loves a cheerful giver."*  
**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7**

## How Habits Are Built

**Habit Stacking:** Attach a new habit to an existing one. You already have a Morning Ritual — that ritual is a chain of habit-stacked behaviors. Build the five Christian habits the same way. Start small. One habit at a time.

**Habit Swapping:** You do not quit a bad habit by removing it. You replace it. Keep the cue. Change the routine. Aim for the same reward — or a better one. What habit are you going to swap this week?

**The Compounding Effect:** Small, consistent deposits in the right direction compound over time into a life that looks completely different from the one you started with. Keep depositing. Don't withdraw. The harvest is coming if you do not give up.

## DISCIPLINE — WEEK TWO: Progressive Overload

The Warrior trains for the race he hasn't yet run. He doesn't wait until the hard moment arrives to build the capacity he'll need for it. He builds it now, in the daily practice, in the controlled conditions, incrementally — so that when the hard moment comes, the capacity is already there.

In strength training, the principle is called progressive overload. You don't train at competition weight from day one. You begin where you are, add demand incrementally, allow adaptation to occur, and increase again. Each session deposits a small increment of capacity. The soul adapts the same way.

Start small. Win big. The daily five minutes of stillness builds the capacity for the hour of honest conversation. The practiced presence in the low-stakes relational moment builds the capacity for genuine presence in the crisis. The small commitment kept when you didn't feel like it builds the capacity for the large commitment held when everything in you wants to abandon it.

Three attempts at quitting preceded the one that held. The willpower attempt — which failed quickly — was not wasted. It trained my awareness of how deep the root went. The fitness identity attempt deposited real traction even though the identity proved contingent. Each attempt built something the next one stood on. The Spirit was pressing toward completion through each one, deepening the cooperation level by level until the instrument finally matched the depth of the work.

Remember: the act of doing is the act of becoming. This applies to the failed attempt as much as the successful one. The man who tries and falls short, assesses honestly, and tries again at greater depth is becoming the man who eventually succeeds — through the accumulated reps of the trying itself.

*"Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."*

**1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8**

### VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: DISCIPLINE

Continue the morning practice — name what you will avoid, do it first. Add: each evening in your Journal: "The thing I avoided today — or didn't — was \_\_\_\_\_, and here is what I learned from it."

Take the practice you committed to in Week One and add one degree of difficulty — not dramatically, incrementally. Add five minutes. Add a second daily moment. One degree. The Warrior adds load incrementally, allows adaptation, and builds ahead of the need.

### Community This Week

Setup Sunday: Share which of the five Christian habits you are weakest in — the one actually most absent from your life.

Follow-Up Friday: Report on the Bible reading. How did 30 minutes a day feel? What did the Lord surface?

This week's community prompt: Share your testimony with your group — not a polished version, but the real one.

### Weekly Reflection Questions

*Where are you training at too low a level for the demands you'll actually face? What needs more load?*

*What have your past failed attempts actually been building, even when they felt like pure failure?*

*Which of the five Christian habits am I most lacking — and what is the honest reason why?*

*What does the compounding effect of my current habits look like in five years if nothing changes?*

### **Next Week**

*Maintenance is progress. Never post a zero.*

Weekly challenge: ZAP — Zeros Aren't Permissible. Hit every habit and goal, every day.

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## **Week 7 — Setting the Baseline**

*STAGE TWO: SHOW UP, DO THE WORK • VIRTUE: DISCIPLINE — WEEK 3 OF 4*

### **This Week's Goals**

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: ZAP — hit every habit and goal, every day
- 

### **The Baseline**

Here is a truth that will carry you through every hard season: You are rarely at 100%. But you can almost always run at 50%. The Baseline is the daily minimum — the floor of non-negotiable action that keeps you moving forward regardless of what the day throws at you. What was the single worst thing for your school grade? Not a 60%. A zero. A zero devastated your grade. The same is true in your habits, your training, your spiritual life. Zeros Aren't Permissible. ZAP.

### **Establish Your Baseline**

This week, define your personal Baseline in three areas:

**Spiritual Baseline:** Five minutes of prayer — morning. Ten minutes of Bible reading. One Journal entry, even if brief.

**Physical Baseline:** A twenty-minute walk. A bodyweight circuit. Eight thousand steps.

**Relational Baseline:** One intentional conversation with someone who matters to you. One check-in with your group. One act of service, however small.

### **The River Banks**

A river doesn't always run straight down the middle of its banks. But as long as it stays between the banks — as long as it keeps moving — it is still a river. It still arrives where it is going. Your Baseline is the river banks. Stay between them. Keep moving forward, however slowly.

*"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"*

**ISAIAH 30:21**

## **Setup Sunday**

Once a week — Sunday works for most men — spend an hour planning the week ahead. Not thinking about it. Planning it. Review your goals and Baseline. Meal prep. Training plan. Calendar review. Virtue reflection. Share your plan with your group.

## **ZAP and Check Downs**

This week's challenge: hit every habit and goal every day. For the days when the full plan is genuinely impossible, you need Check Downs — pre-planned alternatives. Think about them in advance, not in the moment.

Full workout not possible → Twenty-minute bodyweight circuit at home. Full Journal not possible → Five minutes: one gratitude, one prayer, one intention. Full Bible reading not possible → Read one chapter, one psalm, one verse. 8,000 steps not possible → A fifteen-minute intentional walk.

## **DISCIPLINE — WEEK THREE: You Fall to the Level of Your Training**

The Warrior trains in chosen conditions so he is prepared for the unchosen ones. This is the whole point of training. Not to perform in the controlled environment — to be ready for what comes outside it.

You rarely rise to the occasion. You fall to the level of your training. The man who handles the genuine crisis with honesty, presence, and steadiness is the man who has been practicing honesty, presence, and steadiness in the ordinary moments that preceded it.

Everything is training. Not just the designated sessions. The way you respond to your wife's distress when you're already carrying your own stress — that's a training rep. The moment you feel the pull to fix a problem when someone needs to be witnessed instead — that's a training rep.

The husband who immediately moves to solutions when his wife speaks is not leading. He is managing his own discomfort with her distress at her expense. He is leaving her alone in the experience rather than staying present with it. That response was trained somewhere. And it can be retrained — in the lower-stakes moments that precede the high-stakes ones.

Learning this through Tuesday's ordinary moments and every training session reframes what you thought was just a hard job or an unchosen situation. You begin to hear yourself say — I trained for this. Or simply: this is training. When the unchosen situation arrives, the capacity is already there because the chosen, ordinary moments built it.

The Lord's own steadfastness is the model. He does not fix the Psalms. He receives them. Lament after lament — and the posture of God throughout is witness. He stays. That presence, in the difficulty, is what makes genuine relationship possible. The Warrior who would love and

lead well must learn the same posture. And it is learned — in the chosen, ordinary, low-stakes moments — before it is required in the unchosen ones.

One more thing the valley teaches: the cycle continues. The valley after this summit will eventually give way to the next ascent. Sanctification continues. The journey through the next valley after the summit is not regression. It is the next arc beginning. The man who knows this is not surprised or discouraged by the low. He is the Warrior who shows up — because he has made the commitment and the commitment holds.

*"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*

**JOSHUA 1:9**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: DISCIPLINE**

Continue daily practice. Add the ZAP review each evening: "Today I posted a zero in \_\_\_\_\_ / Today I did not post a zero. Here is what made the difference." Read all seven entries before Sunday.

Choose one ordinary daily situation as a deliberate training ground for the capacity you're building. Go into it with intention: I am training here. Debrief it afterward in your journal: what happened, what you did, what you would do differently.

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share your Baseline with your group — all three areas. Let them hold you to it.

Follow-Up Friday: ZAP report. How many days did you hit every habit? Where did you almost post a zero?

This week's community prompt: Share one Check Down you used this week — and one zero you almost posted but didn't.

### **Weekly Reflection Questions**

*Where did you fall to your level of training recently — for better or worse? What did that reveal about what the training has been building?*

*Where are you still looking up at the summit while the valley is already underway? What would it look like to descend with clear eyes, aware of the Lord's presence, prepared for what the valley asks?*

*What is my honest Baseline right now — not what I want it to be, but what it actually is?*

*What would it mean for my life if I never posted a zero from today forward?*

### **Next Week**

*Honesty about effort is the only way forward.*

Weekly challenge: Lectio Divina, 30 minutes. Stage Two closes.

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## **Week 8 — Reflection: Are You Doing the Work?**

### **This Week's Goals**

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Lectio Divina — 30 minutes daily
- 

### **This Reflection Is Different**

Week 4 asked: What did you find? Week 8 asks something harder: Are you doing the work? It is entirely possible to go through a program like this and feel like you are growing while quietly not doing the physical and habitual work it requires. Spiritual engagement without consistent action is not transformation. It is inspiration. And inspiration without action eventually becomes self-deception.

| *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*  
**JAMES 1:22**

### **Before You Read This Week**

Go back to your Journal and find what you wrote at the end of Week 4 — the paragraph describing the man you wanted to be by the end of Stage Two. Read it. Then answer: How close am I to that man — and where is the gap?

### **The Audit**

On the Journal: Have you done the Journal daily? When you have journaled, have you been honest — or writing what sounds good?

On the physical work: Have you done the workouts — five times a week, consistently? Are you training for your physical challenge, or has the goal sat on the calendar untouched? Have you stuck to your nutrition plan — honestly?

On the spiritual disciplines: Are you in prayer — genuinely, daily, conversationally? Have you built the Bible reading habit? Are you in fellowship — actually showing up, going to church, investing in others?

The summary question: If the man you described in Week 4 could see how you have spent the last four weeks — what would he say?

### **What to Do With What You Find**

You have done the work: The habits are building. The gap is closing. Do not coast. Stage Three is the hardest stage in the best possible way. Go into it with everything you have.

You have done some of the work: Identify the two or three areas where consistency has been weakest and make a specific decision right now about what changes in Stage Three. Not a vague intention. A decision.

You have not done the work: Do not quit. But do not pretend that continuing without change will produce a different result. Stop now, go back to Week 5, and decide: are you actually in? If yes — recommit today and begin again.

### **Follow-Up Friday — Made Permanent**

Did I get up early and do my Morning Ritual? Did I Journal? How many times? How was my Virtue practice this week? Did I do the workouts? Did I stick to my nutrition plan? Did I hit my Baseline every day? How can I improve my planning for next week?

### **Lectio Divina**

Choose a short passage. Read it slowly and repeatedly. Lectio Divina is done in four steps: Read (Lectio) — Read the passage three or more times. Slowly. Out loud if possible. Meditate (Meditatio) — Sit with the passage. Consider it being spoken to you, in your situation, today. Pray (Oratio) — Pray over the passage. Contemplate (Contemplatio) — Be silent. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak. Then be quiet long enough to hear.

## **DISCIPLINE — WEEK FOUR: Faithful Presence — Discipline Without Tyranny**

The Warrior has been showing up. The daily practice. The incremental overload. The ordinary moments treated as training grounds. The valley navigated with clear eyes and the Lord's company. Four weeks of accumulated presence, depositing capacity that compounds over time.

The Gardener and the Warrior together.

You are not only the Warrior — committed, disciplined, showing up for Tuesday. You are also the Gardener — patient, receptive, trusting the process, holding the outcome with an open hand. The Warrior without the Gardener grinds but doesn't receive. The Gardener without the Warrior trusts the process but doesn't show up for it. Both together produce what neither can alone.

*Faithful presence in a process you don't control, over time, trusting that the work is working even when you can't see it.*

The act of doing is the act of becoming. Four weeks of that principle lived out is not a small thing. The man who has shown up for the valley — who kept the daily practice when nothing seemed to be happening — has been becoming, rep by rep, through every week of this stage.

This is what the Discipline stage produces in a man who has worked it faithfully:

### **Discipline without tyranny.**

The disciplined man asks hard things of himself. He holds the daily commitment. He doesn't wait for the feeling. But discipline without tyranny means the demand comes from the servant leadership posture — present, caring, oriented toward the flourishing of the one led. Not self-punishment. Not the workhorse grinding through sheer force. The Warrior who asks hard things of himself from the same posture the Gardener tends the soil — patient, faithful, firm when necessary, never cruel.

*"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*

**PHILIPPIANS 3:12**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: DISCIPLINE — THE FINAL ACCOUNTING**

Write a full honest accounting of your Discipline practice over four weeks. What have you consistently named and done first? What have you consistently avoided anyway? Where is Discipline now becoming identity rather than effort? Then write: "The man I am becoming through Discipline is \_\_\_\_\_."

Reflection week practice: Map the four weeks of this stage as a training log. Not what you felt — what you did. Where did you show up? Where did you miss? Where did the capacity increase measurably, even slightly? Where does it still need more reps? Bring it to your coach. The honest accounting is the practice.

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share the result of your audit with your group. Where have you done the work? Where have you not?

Follow-Up Friday: Full Follow-Up Friday report — the first official one. Share it with your group. All of it.

This week's community prompt: Tell your group one thing you have been performing in this program. Then tell them what is actually true.

### **Weekly Reflection Questions**

*Where has the Warrior been operating without the Gardener — grinding without receiving, disciplining without patience? What does the balance look like for you?*

*What evidence has this stage deposited in you that you can bear more than you thought? Where is the embodied confidence that wasn't there four weeks ago?*

*Am I doing the work — or performing doing the work?*

*What am I carrying into Stage Three that I did not have eight weeks ago?*

*"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

**PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14**

### **Next Week**

*The goal is not the destination. The journey is the transformation.*

Weekly challenge: 5K ruck, 20lbs. Stage Three begins.

## **Stage Three: Cultivate**

**WEEKS 9–12 • VIRTUE: LOVE**

Love is not the beginning of the arc. It is what the arc produces.

A man who has not done the Honesty work cannot love well. He cannot see himself clearly, so he cannot see others clearly. He manages instead of witnesses. He fixes instead of stays. He requires others to support his managed image rather than receiving them as they actually are.

A man who has not done the Discipline work cannot sustain the Love that the Honesty stage revealed was possible. He had the breakthrough. He saw what was needed. And without the daily, accumulated, faithful practice of carrying it into his ordinary life, the insight faded and the old patterns reasserted.

But the man who has worked both stages — who has looked honestly, pulled what didn't belong, tended faithfully, shown up consistently, built the capacity incrementally, navigated the valley with clear eyes — that man has something to give. Something real. Something that comes from the ground up rather than being performed from the outside in.

The primary moral ethic at work in this arc has not been a list of rules successfully followed. It has been virtue — the formation of the character from within, through the faithful practice of the virtues, until the right response to any situation flows from who the man is rather than from the rule he is consulting. The rules were always guardrails for the man in formation. The formed man carries the telos of the rules in his character. Against such things there is no law — because the law was always pointing here.

A fruit tree takes three to five years to produce fruit. Three to five years of watering, tending, pruning — with nothing to show for it yet. No fruit. Just roots going deeper, branches growing stronger, the slow invisible work of becoming. You are not behind schedule. Stage Three is where the work of the first eight weeks begins to bear fruit.

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

**JOHN 15:5**

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## Week 9 — Embrace the Process

STAGE THREE: CULTIVATE • VIRTUE: LOVE — WEEK 1 OF 4

### This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
- 8,000 steps
- Workout x5
- Nutrition plan
- Weekly challenge: 5K ruck — 20lbs, complete once this week

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### Welcome to Stage Three

Nine weeks ago most men would have quit by now. Some reading this did quit — and came back. All of you are here. That matters more than you know. Stage Three asks: what is this life for?

## The Process

Here is what the process actually looks like — not a straight line moving steadily upward, but a cycle: Concept → Reflection → Acceptance → Planning → Action → Failure → Reassessment → Reiteration. This is not a broken process. This is the process. Every iteration — including the failures — is a step. The man who understands this cannot be permanently defeated. Because for him, failure is not the end of the process. It is a step in it.

## Sanctification

*"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*

**1 JOHN 3:2**

Sanctification is the lifelong process of being conformed to the image of Christ. It never ends. The trials we face are not interruptions to that process. They are instruments of it. We are not yet what we will be. But we are not what we were. And the gap between those two truths is the process — the sacred, unglamorous, daily process of becoming.

## The Fear and Failure Protocol

Every man has a default response to stress, fear, and failure. Most men have never examined it. This week you are going to build your personal protocol — not a description of what you currently do, but a deliberate plan for what you will do instead.

Step one: Name your current default. What do you actually do when things go wrong? Withdrawal, aggression, numbing — be specific. Write it in your Journal.

Step two: Identify the trigger. What specifically sets off the default response? Name the trigger.

Step three: Build the new protocol. What will you do instead? Your new protocol should include: A physical action (walk, workout, ruck). A spiritual action (prayer, Scripture, Lectio Divina). A relational action (call a man in your group, tell someone what is happening).

Share it with your group. Tell them your trigger. Tell them your default. Tell them your new protocol. A man whose group knows his Fear and Failure Protocol has removed the hiding space that the old pattern depends on.

## Hills and Valleys

In the natural world, nothing grows on the high mountain. But in the valley — where the water runs, where the soil is deep — that is where things grow. The mountain is reward. The valley is growth. The God of the mountain is still God in the valley. His faithfulness does not depend on your feelings.

*"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."*

**1 JOHN 4:4**

## The 5K Ruck

Three miles with twenty pounds on your back, completed once this week. Use the ruck as an extended prayer walk. Bring the Fear and Failure Protocol work. Walk with the Lord for three

miles and see what He says. If twenty pounds is too much, start with ten. The point is carrying weight intentionally, moving forward anyway, and finishing what you started.

## **LOVE — WEEK ONE: Self-Love in the Real Sense**

Self-love has been so thoroughly corrupted by its distortions that the phrase requires rehabilitation before it can do its work. Self-love is not self-indulgence. It is not self-protection. It is not self-promotion.

Self-love in the real sense is the genuine care for the self that a man can only develop once he has stopped suppressing the image of God in himself. Once he has looked honestly at what he is — the Honesty work. Disciplined himself toward what he is called to be — the Discipline work. And arrived at a settled, uncondemning acceptance of the man he actually is, in process, being formed, not yet arrived, but genuinely on the way.

Here is the connection the Honesty stage introduced and this stage names fully: the man who cannot accept himself as he actually is cannot afford to see others as they are. His perception of them is in service of his managed image, not in service of them. He needs his wife to be supportive, his children to reflect well, his colleagues to affirm the story. When they don't — when they are simply human, struggling, complex — he cannot receive it. Because their reality threatens his image. So he fixes them rather than witnesses them — not to help them, but to restore the conditions the managed image requires.

Genuine love requires the freedom to see. And that freedom is only available to the man who no longer needs others to be anything other than what they are.

The act of doing is the act of becoming. The man who practices receiving — who allows honest feedback to land, who lets care be offered without deflecting it — is simultaneously becoming the man who can give the same. You cannot give what you cannot hold. And you cannot hold what you have never allowed yourself to receive.

| *"We love because he first loved us."*

**1 JOHN 4:19**

## **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: LOVE**

First week of Love. Each day: one specific act of love for one person. Write it in your Journal. Do it without mentioning it to anyone. Add one honest sentence: "My honest motive for this act was \_\_\_\_\_."

Also this week: practice receiving. Once each day, identify one thing that was offered to you and receive it without deflecting, dismissing, or immediately converting it into something you have to perform. Write one sentence about what it felt like to let it land.

## **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share your Fear and Failure Protocol — your current default, your trigger, and your new protocol.

Follow-Up Friday: Ruck report — did you do it? What came up during the three miles?

This week's community prompt: Tell your group one valley you are currently in — and what you are learning about the Lord's faithfulness there.

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*What is your default response when someone offers you genuine care or accurate encouragement? What does that response reveal about your capacity to receive?*

*Where have you been requiring others to support your managed image? What becomes possible in those relationships when you no longer need them to perform that role?*

*Where am I in the process right now — which step?*

*What valley am I in right now — and what is growing there?*

### Next Week

*You were filled to be poured out.*

Weekly challenge: Morning workouts + one volunteer opportunity

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## Week 10 — A Life of Service

*STAGE THREE: CULTIVATE • VIRTUE: LOVE — WEEK 2 OF 4*

### This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Morning workouts + one volunteer opportunity this week
- 

### The House I Built

I need to tell you the rest of a story. When my wife and I married, she had four children. I had none. I decided to build us a house — without ever having built anything before. Over three years I worked 45-hour weeks and spent every remaining hour building. Eighty percent by myself. No debt. Paid off six months after we moved in.

I expected to be received as a hero. The parade never came.

My family knew I was never around. They knew I never played with them, never made memories with them. I had given them a house. I had not given them myself. The result was the last thing I ever wanted to feel. Hatred began to grow in me — for my own family. I did not want it. I fought it. But it consumed me.

It was in that wreckage that I first read the Gospels and met Jesus on the cross — a man who had done nothing wrong, crucified by the people He came to save. And with some of His final breaths He said: "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing." He understood my pain. And He said something to me I will never forget:

*"If you had done it out of love, their response wouldn't have mattered."*

I had served my family. But not for the right reason. I had made a real sacrifice — for myself, not for them. The right sacrifice, made for the wrong reason, in the wrong way, still misses.

## **We Are Called to Serve**

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

**MARK 10:45**

Jesus — the Lord God Almighty in human flesh — did not come to be served. He washed the feet of the men who would abandon Him. He healed people who did not say thank you. He forgave the men who nailed Him to the cross while they were doing it. This is the example He has given us.

## **The Right Reason**

Why do you actually serve? Most men, if honest, serve for at least one of these reasons: to be appreciated, to be seen as a good man, to earn love or acceptance, to avoid guilt, to feel needed. None are entirely wrong. But none are the right reason either.

The right reason: For their benefit. Full stop. Not for what you will receive. Not for how it will make you feel. For their genuine benefit — whether they recognize it or not, whether they appreciate it or not. When you serve for the right reason, the response doesn't matter.

## **Fill Your Cup First**

*"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine."*

**JOHN 15:4**

I was serving my family out of my own reserves — out of my own need to prove something, out of my own hunger for acceptance. I was not abiding in the vine. Eventually the cup runs dry. And when it does, what comes out is not love. It is resentment. The man who serves from overflow is different. He has been with the Lord. He has been filled. What pours out of him into others is not his own supply. Abide. Be filled. Then pour. The order cannot be reversed.

## **Set the Margin**

Ten weeks into this program you have added a significant number of practices to your life. Every addition takes something from your margin — the space between your obligations and your capacity. When margin disappears, burnout follows. Remove something this week. Create margin intentionally. Protect it.

## **LOVE — WEEK TWO: Compassion and Differentiation — Present Without Merged**

The man who has learned to receive care has developed something that genuine love requires: the capacity to be present with another person's distress without being consumed by it. To stay without fusing. To witness without absorbing. To be genuinely moved without losing his own ground.

Most men default to one of two failures. They absorb — they take on the other person's emotional state and either collapse or withdraw. Or they distance — they manage the exposure, offer advice from a safe remove, fix the problem to make the discomfort stop. Both are failures of presence. Both leave the other person alone in their experience.

The husband who immediately moves to solutions when his wife speaks is not leading. He is managing his own discomfort at her expense. He is leaving her alone in the experience, which is exactly the opposite of the witness she needs. And she registers this, even if she cannot name it. A woman who is consistently fixed rather than witnessed learns not to bring what is real to the man who will not stay with it. The management produces isolation, not intimacy.

What she needs — what most people need when they bring their distress to another person — is the specific experience of being witnessed. Of having someone stay in the room with the difficulty, feel the weight of it, and not flinch.

The Lord's own steadfastness is the model. He does not fix the Psalms. He receives them. Lament after lament — and the posture of God throughout is witness. He stays. His presence in the difficulty is what makes genuine relationship possible.

The mind and body keep score here too. The woman who has been consistently witnessed rather than fixed accumulates something in the relationship: trust, safety, the experience that the real interior is safe to surface. Every rep of genuine witnessing deposits into it.

| *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*

**ROMANS 12:15**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: LOVE**

Continue the daily practice. In one conversation this week where you feel the pull to fix or advise — stop. Stay. Ask one question instead of offering one solution: what is this like for you? Then listen — not to formulate a response, but to receive what is being offered. Write about it. The debrief is part of the training.

Add one Evening Journal question: "Did I serve anyone today for the right reason — or did I serve for what I would receive? What is the difference in how it felt?"

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share what you are going to give up this week to protect your margin. Name it specifically.

Follow-Up Friday: Report on the volunteer opportunity — what did you do, what did it cost, what did it produce?

This week's community prompt: Share one way you have been serving the people in your life for the wrong reason — and what serving them for the right reason would look like.

### **Weekly Reflection Questions**

| *Where do you default to fixing rather than witnessing? What are you protecting when you move to solutions?*

| *What is the difference between presence and absorption — between staying and being consumed? Where is that line for you?*

| *Why do I actually serve — what am I looking for when I do something for someone else?*

| *Am I abiding in the vine — or am I pouring from an empty cup and calling it faithfulness?*

### Next Week

*God planted the seeds of your mission in you before you were born.*

Weekly challenge: Write a five-year plan

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## Week 11 — My Mission

STAGE THREE: CULTIVATE • VIRTUE: LOVE — WEEK 3 OF 4

### This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: Write a five-year plan
- 

### Known Before You Were Born

| *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."*  
**JEREMIAH 1:5**

| *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*  
**EPHESIANS 2:10**

You were not an accident. You were known — specifically, personally, intentionally — before you took your first breath. You were formed with purpose. The Lord has not changed His mind about you. Whatever you have done, whatever has been done to you, whatever season you are in — He has not revised His purposes for your life downward.

| *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*  
**ROMANS 8:28**

### The Mission Is Already In You

God is not hiding your mission from you. He planted the seeds of your mission in you from the beginning. They are already there. Your job is not to discover a hidden mission. Your job is to uncover what is already planted and cultivate it.

Look at your talents: What are you genuinely good at — not what you wish you were good at, but what you do with a natural ease that others find difficult?

Look at what brings meaning: What activities, conversations, or contributions make you feel most alive — most like yourself, most like you are doing what you were made to do?

Look at what burdens your heart: What problems in the world produce something in you that goes beyond sympathy? What makes you angry in a way that wants to do something rather than just feel something?

The place where your talents, your sense of meaning, and the burden of your heart converge — that is where your mission lives.

## Your Mission Is Not Your Job

*"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."*

**COLOSSIANS 3:23**

Your mission may not pay. It may never produce a platform. It may be entirely ordinary in the eyes of the world and entirely significant in the economy of the Kingdom. A man whose mission is to raise sons who know the Lord is doing some of the most important work in the history of civilization — and no one will ever give him a stage for it.

## You Are Not Late

Abraham was 75 when the Lord called him to get up and go. Moses was 80 when he stood before Pharaoh. Peter publicly denied Christ three times before preaching the sermon that opened the Kingdom to three thousand people in a single day. The Lord is not constrained by your timeline. Get up and go.

## The Five-Year Plan

Write a vision document — a written picture of the man you are becoming and the life you are building. Four sections: The Man — Who are you in five years, spiritually, physically, and in character? The Relationships — What do your most important relationships look like in five years? The Mission — What are you pursuing in five years? The Work — What are you doing vocationally — and how are you doing it as unto the Lord? Write in full paragraphs. Let it be visionary. Then share it with your group.

## LOVE — WEEK THREE: The Follow Me Posture — Trailblazer, Not Sender

The man who has done the Honesty work and the Discipline work has something now that he didn't have before. He has been through terrain. He has scars that are specific and honest. He has failed at the right depths and learned what the failure was telling him. He has built capacity through the small, faithful, daily reps that the summit-chaser skips. He has the evidence of his own body and soul that the ground holds.

That man has a specific kind of authority that the man who only knows the theory does not have. Not the authority of achievement or title or impressive performance. The authority of a man who has been where he's asking others to go — and who reached back.

Jesus did not say: go and do this. He said: follow me. The distinction is everything.

Go and do is instruction from outside. Direction given from a position of distance, from a man who may or may not have been where he is sending others. It asks for compliance. It may produce behavior change at the surface level. It cannot produce transformation at the depth the

framework describes — because transformation at that depth requires a guide who is on the trail, not a sender who is watching from outside.

Follow me is the invitation of a man who is already on the path, who has paid the cost, who is moving and turning back to say: I know this terrain. I have been through this specific darkness. I have found what I'm telling you is findable. Come with me.

Jesus went all the way down. Through betrayal, abandonment, suffering, death, and the grave. And the invitation to follow is credible precisely because of that. He is not sending. He is leading. And leading from within the same conditions — having paid the same cost — is what makes genuine following possible.

You are not Jesus. But you are called to the same posture — to be a man whose life is the evidence that the trail is real, that the terrain can be navigated, and that what is found at the summit is worth the cost of the journey.

The act of doing is the act of becoming. The man who reaches back is simultaneously becoming the guide — in the act of reaching back itself. You become a guide by guiding. You become a trailblazer by blazing the trail.

Show up. Do the work. Reach back. Not go and do. Follow me.

| *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."*  
**1 CORINTHIANS 11:1**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: LOVE**

Continue the daily practice. Add one daily sentence: "The person I served today — and the way I served them — was an expression of my mission because \_\_\_\_\_. Or honestly: ...was not connected to my mission at all. What that reveals is \_\_\_\_\_."

Identify one man in your life who is behind you on the trail — in a stage you have already been through. Reach back this week. Not with advice. With presence and honest testimony. Tell him what the terrain was like from the inside. That is the follow me posture in practice.

### **Community This Week**

Setup Sunday: Share where you currently are in understanding your mission — confident, confused, or somewhere between.

Follow-Up Friday: Share a section of your five-year plan — the Man section, if nothing else.

This week's community prompt: Speak your mission out loud — one sentence, your best current version. Let the group witness it. Let them ask one question.

### **Weekly Reflection Questions**

| *Where have you been a sender rather than a guide — giving direction from a distance rather than walking the terrain with someone?*

| *What specific terrain have you been through that qualifies you to reach back? What do you know from the inside that theory alone cannot teach?*

| *What are my genuine talents — not what I wish I were good at, but what I actually do well?*

| *What lie about it being too late do I need to specifically reject?*

## Next Week

*This is not the end. This is where you begin.*

Weekly challenge: 24+ hour fast. The program closes. The mission continues.

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# Week 12 — Reflection: What Has Been Built?

*STAGE THREE: CULTIVATE • VIRTUE: LOVE — WEEK 4, THE DEEPENING*

## This Week's Goals

- Journal daily
  - 8,000 steps
  - Workout x5
  - Nutrition plan
  - Weekly challenge: 24+ hour fast — schedule and complete it
- 

## This Is Not the End

There is no finish line. There is no normal life to return to — because the man who has done this work honestly does not have the same normal life he had twelve weeks ago. What this week is — is a milestone. A marker on a long road.

*"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

**PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14**

## Question One: Who Were You Twelve Weeks Ago?

This question is about honest memory. What was his thought life like? What patterns was he running? What was he avoiding? Who was that man? Write about him honestly — in the third person if that helps. With accuracy, not cruelty. The distance between who he was and who you are now is the evidence of real work. It deserves to be seen clearly.

## Question Two: Who Are You Today?

What is genuinely different? Not what you hope is different — what is actually different, evidenced by your behavior over the last twelve weeks? Is the Journal a practice that belongs to you now? Has the Morning Ritual become part of your identity? What has Discipline produced in your character? What has Love produced in your relationships?

## Question Three: Who Is God Calling You to Become?

Not who you want to be. Who is God calling you to become — based on what you now know about your mission, your talents, your burdens, and the work He has been doing in you? Write the man you believe God is calling you to become with the same seriousness you would give a commission from a King. Because that is what it is.

## The 24-Hour Fast

| *"When you fast... your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*  
**MATTHEW 6:18**

No food from one evening to the following evening. Use the fast as a deliberate act of seeking — not eating so that you can pray, reflect, and listen with unusual focus. Every time hunger arises, let it redirect your attention to the Lord rather than to food. Fast quietly. Let it be between you and the Father.

## LOVE — WEEK FOUR: The Full Arc — What Love Actually Looks Like

Three stages. Twelve weeks. The Honesty work that got low and honest and pulled what didn't belong. The Discipline work that showed up every day, navigated the valley, and built the capacity incrementally. The Love stage — receiving, differentiating, reaching back — bringing everything together into the man the arc was always building toward.

This is not arrival. The Gardener and the Warrior are not finished. The soil still needs tending. The Warrior still shows up for Tuesday. The valley after this summit is already on its way. The arc repeats — at greater depth, with more that has been built, in service of more that can be given.

The act of doing is the act of becoming. Twelve weeks of that principle lived out is not a small thing. The man at the end of this arc is not the man who successfully completed a course. He is the man who became, through the act of doing, what the program was always inviting him to be.

This is what that man looks like. Not perfectly. Not finished. But genuinely:

### **Acceptance without allowance.**

He accepts what is actually there — in himself and in others — without pretending it isn't there or making peace with it by making it invisible. And he does not allow what needs to change to remain unchanged simply because acceptance feels like peace. He sees clearly and tends faithfully. Both.

### **Honesty without harshness.**

He tells the truth — to himself and to others — with the Gardener's voice rather than the judge's. The honest account is offered in service of the tending, not the verdict. He does not soften what needs to be said, and he does not weaponize what is true.

### **Discipline without tyranny.**

He asks hard things of himself and of those he leads — from the servant leadership posture, oriented toward flourishing, not toward the demonstration of dominance. The Warrior who tends as the Gardener tends. Firm when necessary. Never cruel.

### **Leadership without domination.**

He leads from within the conditions, not from above them. He has been on the trail. He reaches back. He is present with the men he leads — in the same load, under the same cost, not administering the challenge from outside but walking it from within. Follow me. Not go and do.

Now the old self-protecting armor comes off. It has been coming off throughout this program. The managed image, the contingent identity, the performance self — these have been named and tended and, over twelve weeks, progressively laid down.

What replaces it is not vulnerability without protection. It is a different kind of protection entirely. Paul names it in Ephesians 6: the Armor of God. Not inward-facing armor built to protect the managed image. Outward-facing equipment for a man who is going somewhere, doing something, on mission in territory that will push back. Truth. Righteousness. The gospel of peace. Faith. Salvation. The Word of God.

This is the Colossians 3 movement, completed. The old self taken off through the Honesty work. The new self put on through the Discipline work — being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. The Armor of God strapped on at the close of the Love stage — equipped and going out.

Not go and do. Follow me. The man who has completed this arc goes out as a guide — present, honest, formed, equipped. Reaching back from the trail to the man behind him, with the credibility of one who has been through the terrain and found what he said was findable.

*We love because he first loved us. The arc begins and ends there.*

| *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*  
**1 CORINTHIANS 13:13**

### **VIRTUE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: LOVE — THE FINAL ACCOUNTING**

Write a full honest accounting of the Love virtue over four weeks. Where have you served genuinely? Where have you served for the wrong reason? Where has abiding produced overflow that surprised you? Then write two sentences: "The man I am becoming through Love is \_\_\_\_\_." and "The person who will most benefit from that man is \_\_\_\_\_."

Reflection week practice: Write the honest answer to this question: who are you now, at the end of this arc, compared to who you were at the beginning of Stage One? Not who you wish you were. Not a performance report. The honest, Gardener's-eye assessment of the soil after twelve weeks of faithful work. What has grown? What has been pulled? What still needs tending? What do you have now that you can give? Bring it to your coach. The honest accounting is the final practice — and the beginning of the next arc.

### **Tools You Are Taking With You**

Daily tools: Morning Ritual — the daily returning to the Lord before anything else. The Journal — morning and evening, the keystone of self-knowledge. Breath prayer and meditative prayer. The Discipline practice — name what you will avoid, do it first. The Love practice — one act, one honest motive sentence.

Weekly tools: Setup Sunday — intentional planning before the week begins. Follow-Up Friday — honest accounting of how the week went.

Seasonal tools: The Baseline — your personal floor in three areas, maintained in any season. ZAP and Check Downs — never post a zero; have an alternative plan ready. The Fear and Failure Protocol — your named, chosen response to stress and failure. Lectio Divina — contemplative Scripture reading for seasons of seeking. The 24-hour fast — for seasons of significant decision, commissioning, or renewal.

Permanent frameworks: The process — concept, reflection, acceptance, planning, action, failure, reassessment, reiteration. The five stages of thought — assault, interaction, consent, defeat, passion; interrupt early. The five Christian habits — prayer, Bible, fellowship, service, charity. The five-year plan — revisit and revise annually.

## Community This Week

Setup Sunday: Share your answer to Question One — who were you twelve weeks ago? Let your group see the before.

Follow-Up Friday: Share your answer to Question Three — who is God calling you to become? Speak it out loud.

This week's community prompt: Tell your group one specific way they made a difference in your twelve weeks. Name them. Thank them. Then decide together: how do you continue?

## Weekly Reflection Questions

*Which of the four pairs — acceptance without allowance, honesty without harshness, discipline without tyranny, leadership without domination — is most natural for you now? Which still requires the most intentional practice?*

*Where has the follow me posture become real in your life — not as an aspiration but as an actual way you are relating to the men around you?*

*What is the one thing you are carrying out of this program that you did not have when you entered it? Name it specifically.*

*The next arc is coming — the next valley after this summit. What do you know now that will help you descend with clear eyes, prepared, aware of the Lord's presence in whatever comes next?*

*Who is one man I know who needs this program — and will I give him this copy or run it with him?*

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## The Commissioning

You have dug deep. You have named what was hidden, confronted what was broken, and planted the Word of God in soil that was hard when you started.

You have shown up. Not perfectly — no man does. But consistently enough that something has been built.

You have begun to cultivate. You have looked outward — at the people who need what you are learning to give, at the mission God planted in you before you could speak, at the world that is waiting for men who know who they are and who they serve.

Now go.

Take the tools. Keep the Journal. Maintain the Baseline. Protect the Morning Ritual. Stay in your group. Keep showing up for the men who ran alongside you. Keep showing up for the Lord who ran ahead of you and blazed the trail.

There will be valleys. Keep going. There will be mountains. Receive them with gratitude. Do not make your home on the mountain. The valley is where you grow.

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

## MICAH 6:8

Act justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God. That is the mission. For every man. In every season. For the rest of your life.

You are a Gardener and a Warrior. Tend what has been entrusted to you. Fight for what matters. Do not give up.

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**The harvest is coming. Let's go further together.**

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## Common Questions

### **Does the Journal have to follow the exact structure given?**

No — but do not change it until you have actually used it as written. Adjust it only after you understand why each element is there and have experienced what it produces.

### **Can I repeat a virtue?**

Yes. If after four weeks you know you have more work to do with Honesty, Discipline, or Love — repeat it. There is no graduation from virtue. There is only deeper practice.

### **Do I have to wake up early?**

The morning ritual requires time that has to come from somewhere. For most men, early morning is the only time they can control. If your life genuinely cannot accommodate early mornings, protect whatever time you can control and treat it with the same intention.

### **What if I fell behind or missed weeks?**

Go back. Restart from where you lost the thread. This program does not expire. The man who does Week 5 six months after he started Week 1 is not behind — he is still in it. Consistency over time matters more than pace.

### **What if I did not do the work honestly?**

You already know the answer. Start again. This time, do the work.

### **Is this program only for Christian men?**

It is built entirely on Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. A man who is not yet a Christian can use the tools — and may find that the Lord meets him in the work in ways he did not expect. Come honestly. The rest will follow.

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# How to Continue Working with Ronald

If this program has produced something real in you — I want to hear about it. Genuinely. Send me a message. Tell me what happened. It matters to me more than you know.

Website: [rdpcoaching.com](http://rdpcoaching.com)

X / Twitter: @RonaldDPotts1

Substack: Son of Encouragement

Email: [ec.pottsr@gmail.com](mailto:ec.pottsr@gmail.com)

## Coaching Options

One free consultation call — if you want to talk through where you are and where you are going, reach out. The first conversation is on me.

One-off coaching calls — for specific seasons, decisions, or challenges where you need a thinking partner.

Monthly coaching — no contract, paid monthly or as a single payment. For the man who wants consistent accountability and guidance.

Community programs — once you are part of the community, you are welcome to stay as long as you want. Future group programs are available free or at a significantly reduced price.

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| *"Bear fruit with steadfast endurance."*

**LUKE 8:15**