

# THE WAY FORWARD – A LEADER’S GUIDE

BY JOE BARNARD



## THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

A lot of Christian men – and small-groups of men – feel stuck. They have a sincere desire to grow but feel confused about what to do next. *The Way Forward* is a road-map for men who want to cut through the noise and distraction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and take definite steps toward spiritual maturity.

The following guide is a tool to help a small group of men meeting for 10 sessions to discuss *The Way Forward: a Road-map of Spiritual Growth for Men in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Joe Barnard (available from Christian Focus Publications). The group leader can use these questions to help participants reflect on the most important ideas from the book.

## Outline of Sessions:

### THE PROBLEM: WHY CHRISTIAN MEN ARE STUCK

Week 1 – The Surface of the Problem

Week 2 – The Depth of the Problem

### THE SOLUTION: THE IDEAL CANDIDATE FOR GROWTH

Week 3 – Men Need Captivation

Week 4 – Men Need Clarity

Week 5 – Men Need Camaraderie

Week 6 – Men Need Competence

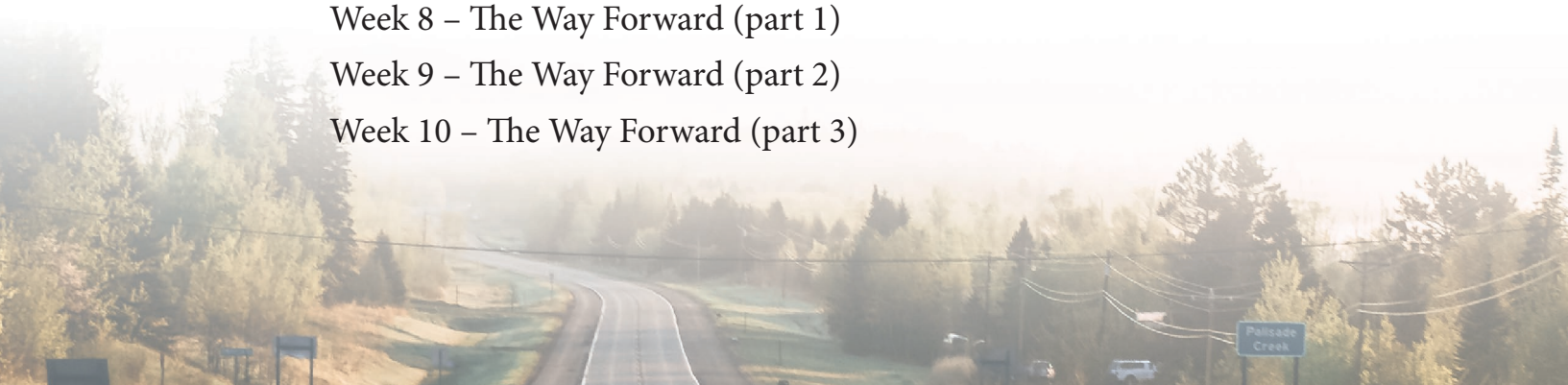
Week 7 – Men Need Self-Control

### THE PLAN: A ROAD-MAP TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Week 8 – The Way Forward (part 1)

Week 9 – The Way Forward (part 2)

Week 10 – The Way Forward (part 3)



# SESSION 1: THE SURFACE OF THE PROBLEM



(Before the session have everyone read ‘**The Warning Label**’ and **part 1** of ‘**The Problem**’, pp. 7-38.)

1. How does exhaustion affect the discipleship of Christian men?
  - a. How has the workload of men changed over the last 50 years?
  - b. Do you agree that pastors and church leaders often wrongly diagnose exhaustion as laziness?
2. The book claims that ‘what often looks like resistance is frustration, especially the frustration that comes from inadequate training’ (p. 24). How does the spiritual motivation of men suffer due to inadequate training?
  - a. Name specific areas of discipleship where you would like to receive more training.
  - b. Motivationally, what difference does it make when you feel competent and equipped for a task?
3. What impact does isolation, or the lack of spiritual friendship, have on Christian men?
  - a. What are specific dangers and risks that arise when Christian men live isolated from close fellowship with other men of faith?
4. The book makes the claim that ‘the Christian life depends upon a long-term perspective, the ability to see not only what is at hand, but also what is at the edge of life – eternity’ (p. 31). Why is it so hard to maintain an eternal perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
  - a. Do you think it is harder now than 100 years ago?
  - b. What new difficulties have arisen for discipleship since the advent of television, the internet, smartphones, and social media?
  - c. Describe your struggle to focus on God in a world of constant amusement and distraction.



## SESSION 2: THE DEPTH OF THE PROBLEM



(Before this session have everyone read **part 2 of ‘The Problem,’** pp. 39-58)

1. The book says, ‘At the end of the day, love always wins. Whatever a man loves most will direct the course of his life’ (p. 42).
  - a. What does your use of time indicate about what you really care about?
  - b. How does your stress, worry, and focus indicate what you really care about?
  - c. What do your lifestyle choices indicate about what you really care about?
  
2. The book claims that the growth of Christian men suffers when important gospel truths are forgotten or neglected.
  - a. Why is it important for men to understand that spiritual growth requires effort? (Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27 for evidence of this truth.)
  - b. What impact should the Judgment of Christ have on the spiritual motivation of men? See Rom. 14:9-12, 1 Cor. 3:10-15, and 2 Cor. 5:6-10.
  - c. What will happen if a man believes that the world is a playground (the teaching of popular culture) instead of a battlefield (the teaching of the Bible)?
  - d. How will a man’s life plan change if he believes the words of Jesus that ‘one thing is needed’ (see Lk. 10:42)?
  - e. What difference does it make to believe that ordinary men can powerfully contribute to the mission of God?

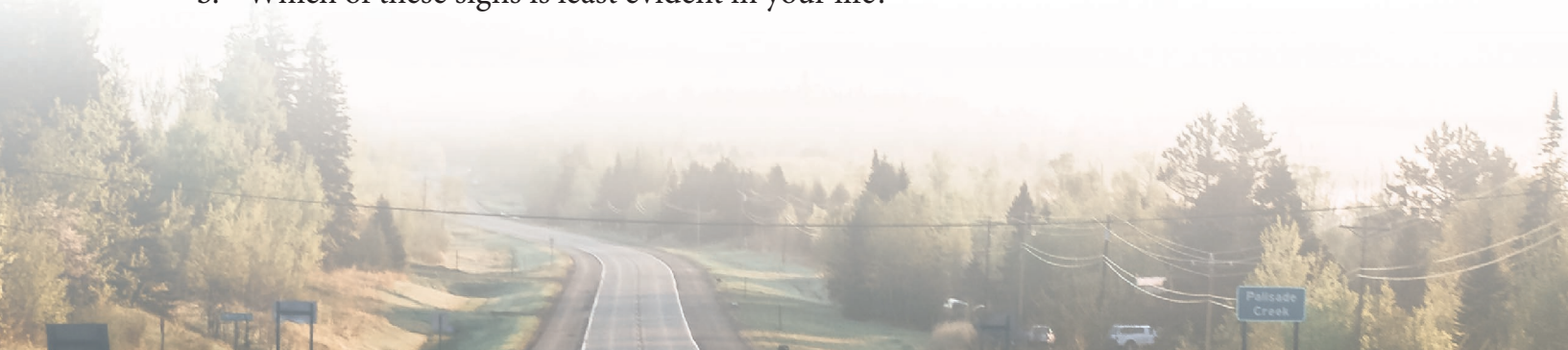


## SESSION 3: MEN NEED CAPTIVATION



(Before the session have men read ‘**Men Need Captivation**’, pp. 59-74)

1. What does it mean to have a *captivated* heart? Try to put this idea in your own words?
2. The book says, ‘To attempt discipleship without captivation is like entering into marriage without a deep desire to have and to hold a single woman’ (p. 65).
  - a. How is discipleship like a marriage?
  - b. How is discipleship different from a marriage?
3. Idolatry, that is, caring about lesser things more than God, is a constant threat to discipleship. How is captivation the key to overcoming the deep idols of the heart? (see pp. 66-67)
4. The book says that ‘captivation empowers’ and that ‘love is a renewable resource’ (p. 67). This truth is perhaps most easily seen in the relationship between parents and children.
  - a. How does love motivate the behavior of parents toward their children?
  - b. What can we learn from this picture about the power of love to motivate obedience to Christ?
5. Share with the group a time when you felt overwhelmed either by the majesty of God or by the love of God.
6. This section mentions four signs that indicate when a heart is captivated: (1) submission, (2) sacrifice, (3) sorrow, and (4) satisfaction (pp. 73-4).
  - a. Which of these signs is most evident in your life?
  - b. Which of these signs is least evident in your life?



## SESSION 4: MEN NEED CLARITY



(For this session have men read ‘**Men Need Clarity**’ pp. 75-86.)

1. The book contrasts viewing life as a quest (without a clear destination) and viewing life as a pilgrimage (with a clear destination). What difference does it make to know the final destination of life?
  - a. Consider the examples of Jesus and Paul. How do each of them give us an example of what it looks like to live with clear focus and direction?
2. The book claims that the road to spiritual growth is defined more than anything else by ‘hard work, unanticipated trials, unavoidable suffering, uncomfortable assignments, and difficult relationships’ (p. 81).
  - a. Consider your own example: when have you grown the most spiritually? When life was comfortable and easy or when it was difficult and uncomfortable?
  - b. Why is it important to have an honest sense of the difficulty of the journey of faith?
  - c. Why is it dangerous to think that discipleship is something that happens mainly in a classroom?
3. There are three main threats to discipleship revealed in the Bible: the devil (1 Pet. 5:8), the world (1 Jn. 2:15-18), and indwelling sin (Gal. 5:17, 1 Pet. 2:11). What factors keep Christian men from being aware of just how dangerous each of these threats are?
  - a. What resources does God give us to overcome these threats?
4. How does having *clarity*, that is, a true perspective of life, help men avoid growing slothful and lazy in discipleship? (see p. 84)
  - a. Do you have any personal experience of how losing a true perspective on life led to being careless and negligent in discipleship?
5. Reflect on 1 Pet. 1:13. What does this verse teach us about the importance of having a true perspective on life?



## SESSION 5: MEN NEED CAMARADERIE



(For this session have men read 'Men Need Camaraderie' pp. 87-94.)

1. Why do you think that Christian men often avoid the need for close friendships with other Christian men?
2. More often than not the men's ministry of a church is one of its weakest ministries. Why do you think men's ministries often struggle even where women's ministries, small group ministries, children's ministries and youth ministries succeed?
3. How is spiritual friendship, or camaraderie, different from other types of friendship?
4. Why is *right intention* a vital trait of spiritual friendship (p. 89)?
5. What does it mean to have a 'shared thermostat' (p. 90)?
  - a. Do you agree that a 'shared thermostat' is an important ingredient of a spiritual friendship? Why or why not?
6. Describe the nature of a 'covenant agreement' (p. 91).
  - a. How would a group of spiritual friends benefit from making such an agreement?
  - b. What dangers or risks are involved in making such an agreement?
  - c. How might these dangers be avoided?
7. What do you think a spiritual band of brothers should look like?
  - a. Would you like to be involved in this kind of group?



## SESSION 6: MEN NEED COMPETENCE



(For this session have men read ‘Men Need Competence’ pp. 95-108.)

1. The book says, ‘The problem is not that Christians materially lack the stuff in their life that would promote growth. The problem is that they are unskilled in using, applying, or participating in the resources that are within arm’s reach’ (p. 96). How does your experience confirm this statement?
2. The book makes the point, ‘Men need more than teaching. They need more than equipping. They need *competence*. The test of competence is not how well I was taught, but how well I have learned’ (p. 97). What examples can you think of that demonstrate how a lot of discipleship is focused more on teaching well than learning well?
  - a. Consider the example of how Jesus disciplined the twelve. How did Jesus actively involve the disciples in the learning process to make sure that they were competent and equipped (eventually) to carry on the mission of the gospel?
3. Too often Bible studies are organized in one of two ways: either everyone listens to an expert talk or participants follow a guide with fill-in-the-blank questions. What would a Bible study look like that actually equipped men to rightly handle the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15)?
4. The book claims that a lot of men are uncertain how to make adoration and confession meaningful parts of their prayer life (pp. 102-3). Why is it important for men to learn how to adore the glory of God and to confess sin before Him?
5. One of the first things people do once they become Christians is to start going to church. Yet, oddly enough, most Christians are never taught how to engage intellectually, emotionally, and relationally in a public worship service. How might your experience of Sunday morning worship improve if someone, for example, taught you how to listen to a sermon or how to prepare to take communion?
6. A common exhortation in sermons is for Christians to go out and share the gospel. Do you feel competent to share the gospel with an unbeliever? Why or why not?

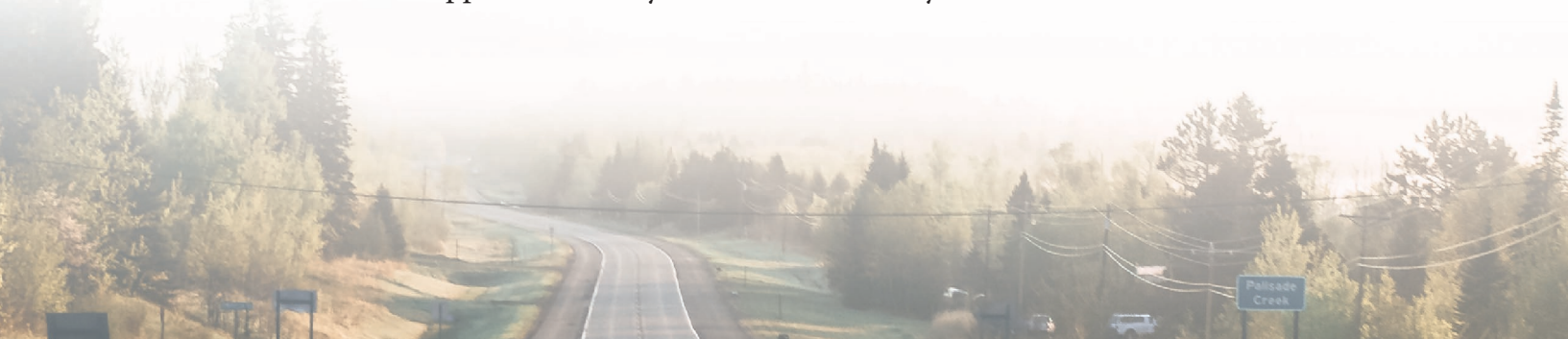


## SESSION 7: MEN NEED SELF-CONTROL



(For this session have men read ‘Men Need Self-Control’ pp. 109-124.)

1. This section spends significant time trying to clarify not only what self-control is, but also what self-control is *not*.
  - a. What is the difference between self-control and self-reliance (p. 110)?
  - b. What is the difference between self-control and self-mastery (p. 110)?
  - c. What is the difference between self-control and absolute control (p. 110-11)?
2. Self-control is undeniably the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Why do you think men do not get much teaching on the topic of self-control?
3. The book says, ‘The Achilles heel of a lot of Christian men is not that they willfully desire to conform to the world around them, but that they never detach sufficiently to see where they are conforming and where they might be transformed’ (p. 113). What evidence do you see of this problem in your own life?
4. The book says, ‘The goal of self-control is far greater than resisting momentary temptations. The goal of self-control is to stay the course of holiness through a long and tumultuous life’ (p. 115). Why is vision, or imagination, an important muscle involved in exercising self-control (p. 116)?
5. The book says, ‘Perception is more important than willpower when it comes to self-control’ (p. 117). What do you think this statement means?
6. Most of us do not think that distraction is a big deal. Distraction may affect our productivity, but it does not affect our worship. On this topic the book makes a bold claim: ‘There is a squatter’s rights law that pertains to spirituality. Whatever we allow to sit on the mind will eventually have rights to the heart’ (p. 118). What evidence do you see that this is true?
7. What is the main application that you want to take away from this section on self-control?





## SECTION 8: THE WAY FORWARD (PART 1)



(For this session have men read pp. 125-140.)

1. What do you think it means to catch a better vision of glory (p. 129)?
2. Why is reading about the person and work of Jesus so important if we desire to catch a better vision of glory?
3. Read the classic hymn 'When I Survey.' What do you think would happen to your heart if you memorized this hymn and meditated on the ideas and images in it?
4. A. W. Tozer famously said that the most important thing about a person is what comes to his mind when he hears the word 'God.' Do you agree with this statement? How can you improve your knowledge of God?
5. How might reading a Christian biography ignite a deeper passion to know and serve Jesus?
6. What do you think it means to clarify a true perspective on life (p. 135)?
7. Name some areas where you believe your perspective of life has been distorted by modern culture.
8. Speaking of Satan, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, 'For we are not ignorant of his devices' (2 Cor. 2:11). How well do you feel like you know the tactics of the devil?
9. A lot of modern men struggle to read. They struggle both to find time for books and to concentrate their mind for careful thought and reflection. Why is reading a vital practice for the Christian life?
  - a. Of the books mentioned in these sections, which one are you most interested in reading? Why?



## SESSION 9: THE WAY FORWARD (PART 2)



(For this session have men read pp. 141-148.)

1. The book says, 'Men need to realize that they are players whom God wants on the field, using their gifts and opportunities to advance His kingdom' (p. 142). Why is it important for each Christian man to feel like he is a player, not a water-boy or fan, in the mission of God?
2. In your mind, what is the difference between teaching and training (p. 142)?
  - a. What are the marks of effective training?
3. The book says, 'Rare is the person who, left to his own devices, will challenge himself to grow continually and to resist the state of equilibrium' (p. 144). What kind of coaching or support do you need in order to persist in spiritual disciplines and to attempt acts of courage and sacrifice in the name of Christ?
4. Read Proverbs 18:1. Why is it a serious danger to live outside of close fellowship with other Christians?
5. If you are going through these questions, more than likely you are already in a small group of men that meet regularly. The book outlines the shape and culture of a spiritual 'fire-team' (pp. 145-147). What are the similarities and differences between your current small group and the spiritual fire-team as outlined in the book?
  - a. What steps could be taken to bring your small group more in line with the blueprint of a spiritual 'fire-team'?
6. The book says, 'No band of brothers can meet together for long without eventually having some daredevil ideas about how to turn the world upside down for Christ' (p. 148). Do you agree with this?
  - a. Where do you see opportunities in your family, local church, or community to step out in faith and begin to show the love and service of Christ?



## SESSION 10: THE WAY FORWARD (PART 3)



(For this session have men read pp. 149-165.)

1. The book says, 'In Christ, we are liberated, equipped, and authorized to take leadership for our lives and direct ourselves and our families along courses that bring praise and glory to His name' (p. 149). We live in a culture that is stripping men of their calling to be spiritual leaders. Why is it important for men to feel authorized to direct the course of their families?
  - a. What are the dangers of this call to be spiritual leaders?
  - b. What difference does it make to view ourselves as under-shepherds rather than chief executives?
2. Life planning is a common 'secular' practice. What are the benefits of having a clear vision in life?
  - a. What are the dangers that arise from trying to draft a life plan?
  - b. How can the image of standing before the judgment seat of Christ protect us from drafting a self-centered life plan?
3. We often think of a Christian worldview as something that children need to develop. However, how important is it for adult men to develop a Christian worldview? What are the practical benefits of being able to see the modern world through the lens of God's revealed truth?
4. The book claims that men need to 'audit their attention' (pp. 153-4). In other words, they need to keep tabs on how much of their focused attention is wasted on trivial topics. Read Phil. 4:8 and Psalm 1. How do these texts provide useful guidelines for thinking about how to invest our attention?
5. As an adult, how do you feel about the idea of memorizing Scripture? What scares you about the idea? What excites you?
6. The book claims that, if we want to simplify life, we need to cut the fat (p. 158). What commitments could you let go of in life in order to prioritize 'the one thing needed' (Lk. 10:42).
7. Read Lk. 9:23. What excessive baggage is keeping you from being able to take up your cross *daily* to follow Jesus?

# A TWELVE MONTH ACTION PLAN FOR SMALL GROUPS AND MEN'S MINISTRIES



## MONTH 1 – MEMORIZE THE HYMN 'WHEN I SURVEY'

Your assignment each week (for four weeks) is to memorize a stanza of the hymn and reflect on its meaning. The prayerful objective of the assignment is that the Holy Spirit would use this hymn to reignite your passion to know and serve Jesus. Have each man recite the memorized stanza at the start of the group meeting.

## MONTH 2 AND 3 – READ *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* (IN MODERN ENGLISH) BY JOHN BUNYAN

The assignment is to read and discuss this book over two months. The objective is to use the book to gain a clear perspective of what to expect from the Christian life. Try to focus conversation on how Bunyan's description of the Christian life differs from secular assumptions about life.

## MONTH 4 – WRITE A CHRISTIAN LIFE PLAN AND GET FEEDBACK FROM THE GROUP

The assignment is to try to clarify God's calling on your life. Use Col. 1:10 as a mission statement. Ask questions about what it would look like for you to steward all of the roles and responsibilities that God has providentially given you. Try to get a sense of where God is leading you (and your family if you are married) over the next year, over the next 3-5 years, over the duration of life. The objective of the exercise is not to outline an immovable itinerary, but to develop and deepen a sense of *vocation*. This is the key question: *what would it look like for you to be able to stand before Jesus and say, 'I have finished the work which You have given me to do' (Jn. 17:4)?*

## MONTH 5 AND 6 – READ NEIL POSTMAN'S CLASSIC BOOK *AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH*

Though the book is dated, the critique of Postman is more relevant today than when he wrote the book thirty five years ago. One of the benefits of this book is that it will give you a sense of history, of cultural shifts over the last 200 years. The chief objective of this assignment is to ask the following: *How is my cultural environment hindering my spiritual growth?*

## MONTH 7 – BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY INTO YOUR SMALL GROUP

John Wesley had all of his small groups (which he called ‘bands’) answer the following five questions:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. Is there anything that you have thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

Use these questions in your group to build a culture of confession, support, and accountability.

## MONTHS 8-12 – GET CRACKING ON THE TOPICAL MEMORY SYSTEM

The Topical Memory System will do two things for your group. First, it will encourage you to memorize and meditate on Scripture. Second, it will provide you with a holistic framework of discipleship, pushing you not only to practice spiritual disciplines, but also to go out and get involved in the active mission of God. Whether you download the app or use the old-fashioned memory cards, no man will regret having completed the TMS system.

