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5 Essentials to Transform Your Life Now

Unpack 5 of the most common hinderances to growth that I encounter with my clients. Then, take simple steps to transform them from roadblocks to change agents that can help you become a better man.

Loneliness & Isolation

You and I are hard-wired for relationship. We were built for intimate connection. We were meant to BE KNOWN! It is both my greatest desire and most terrifying fear. I long to know that if I let you see me—ALL of me—you will stay with me, committed to offering me love, kindness, and grace. Yet, most of my relational experiences in life have seduced me into believing the diabolical lie that such vulnerability leads to death, figuratively, if not literally! So, tragically, we remain hidden, isolated, unknown and alone!

We live in a culture that worships independence. We are told directly and indirectly that real men can do it on their own. If I can somehow convince the world that I am indeed a “self-made” man, I am heralded as strong and deemed worthy of a following, esteemed as a leader in my field. Yet, behind closed doors and in the privacy of my own mind, even the most successful man fears he’s a fraud. He knows that he cannot let anyone see him sweat or appear weak in any way. But this deep commitment to “go it alone” leads to profound loneliness and isolation. Before I know it, I’m shipwrecked on a relational and emotional island where I will live and die alone.

Interdependence—creating a safe community of fellow sojourners—is the way to real life. Brotherhood, comrades-in-arms, standing shoulder-to-shoulder interconnected within an intimate circle of warriors where I have your back and you have mine is where the power comes. Counter to our cultural belief, LIFE is a team sport. Sometimes we will win, succeed, and thrive, and other times we will struggle, suffer, and fail, yet the vital ingredient is that we always do it together. There is a direct correlation between isolation and things like suicide, depression, and divorce. I need you... you need me. We need one another.



Do The Work

1. *It was at summer camp...*
2. *My senior year...*
3. *My wife doesn't know...*

1. Trust me on this one, I promise you won't have to share this exercise with anyone. On a separate sheet of paper, write down 2-4 of your most painful life experiences. These are likely those place that hold your deepest points of shame. Include as little or much detail as you wish.
2. Reflect on these core experiences and write down the central beliefs you concluded about yourself as a result. Ask yourself, “Is there another man in my life with whom I feel safe enough to share these most personal stories?”
3. BURN THIS PAPER as a gesture of your commitment to begin moving away from isolation and toward authentic connection.

Sexual Struggle

I am intimately acquainted with the tyranny and grief of sexual struggle. My struggle with unwanted sexual behavior—and yours, too—is primarily a relational problem. That's not to say that it is only a problem of connection, but invariably when I find myself trapped in destructive addictive behavior, it exposes my lack of supportive, intimate, and healthy community. I know often we as men are turned off by the notion of intimacy because it smacks of touchy-feely weakness. However, research has shown that when I perceive that I am fully seen and known in the safety of an intimate community of allies and offered unconditional love, the pull of compulsive behavior loses much of its power.

Unwanted sexual behavior is also a clue that points to places in my story that hold unresolved shame and grief. To the degree that I ignore those clues and refuse to explore them, my sexual addiction becomes sabotage. The very thing to which I turn for relief and escape from loneliness, exposure, and failure inevitably creates more. It kills my hope of becoming more of the man I was meant to be for myself, my family, and my community, and serves as evidence that I am not worthy of the very thing I most deeply long for, love and respect.

I believe that stamped deep into the core of every man's heart is a primary desire for wholeness, nobility, and integrity, and to allow my heart to be undermined by the lure of sexual destruction without a fight diminishes the fullness of all I am meant to be. I was built to lead myself, my family, and others with passion, vision, and purpose. When that reality becomes intimidating or overwhelming, I become susceptible to being sucked into the black hole of sexual darkness as a way of insulating myself from failure and exposure, but inevitably compromising my divine essence and robbing strength from who I am meant to be. I want—and I know you do also—to be the man of strength who fights against it.



Do The Work

Negatives to give up	Positives to stand on

1. Create a basic T-Chart. Carve out 15-20 minutes and thoughtfully ponder the impact of your sexual choices on yourself and others. On a sheet of paper, draw a vertical line creating two equal columns, the left headed “Negatives to Give Up”, and the right “Positives to Stand On”. Write your thoughts into the corresponding column. For example:

Negatives to Give Up = loneliness & shame are intensified

Positives to Stand On = my sense of felt strength & honor grows

2. Now, from the “Positives to Stand On” column, select at least 2-3 of your comments that resonate most deeply, and write them as if they are already and established and true statement. For example:

I am a man who engages my family and others with strength and honor.

Being Abba's Child

I have the words “Abba’s Child” tattooed on my arm. It is a term of soul-satisfying endearment that pays tribute to my own journey, and continues—though often I wished it were more sudden and final—transforming the way I live. I need to be reminded daily, hourly, minute-by-minute that I am the delight of His heart...and so are YOU! He is not ashamed of us. He is not sitting in heaven somewhere shaking his head, rolling his eyes, or wagging his finger as if to loathe our humanity. Rather, this is the God of the universe—our Creator—who named His creation (us) as “good” and pursues us relentlessly even as we fail, just as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden. We always have been and always will be His Beloved. Abba Father sees me—and you—in the same way He sees His Son... righteous.

The central overarching theme of the gospel is God’s radical, relentless, scandalous Love. It is an absolute that I can neither enhance nor diminish. NO THING I do will ever make him love me more, or make him love me less. He simply loves me...period. Because of our unique individual stories which hold our darkest places of shame, we find this truth nearly impossible to believe, and easily forgotten amidst the demands of daily life. I have this deeply embedded but erroneous belief that the less I sin, the more God loves me, or at least the less disappointed He is with me.

Many of us find such extravagant, unconditional love inconceivable, often because we have rarely—or never—experienced such love from an earthly parent. We spend a lifetime striving to prove our lovability and likeability to a Father whose primary objective we imagine is to make us conform to some moral code that will finally appease his wrath. But, for our Abba Father, it’s never about less sin; he settled that long ago on the cross! Ten thousand years from now into eternity, we’re not going to be sitting around the campfire in heaven hearing Abba critique our behavior with comments like, “Well, I wish you would have masturbated less.” Instead, I imagine Abba will offer us the very thing we have always longed for, a loving, encouraging arm around our shoulder squeezing us affectionately and saying “I am so proud of you, and I’m so glad you’re here. I’ve been looking forward to being with you.”



Do The Work

My Abba Father thinks that I'm...

1. Close your eyes for a few minutes and imagine Jesus appearing in the space where you are right now. On some paper note these observations: What is the look on His face toward you? Where is He in the room in relation to you? What words is He speaking to you and about you?
2. Read the following scriptures in your favorite Bible version and write down what each says about who you are because of Jesus:

2 Cor. 5:17

John 15:15

Eph. 1:3-5

Deut. 32:10

1 John 3:1

Rom. 8:15-16

Col. 1:12-13

Marriage & Parenting

Having suffered the heartbreak of divorce (twice), and being a father of five, I am keenly familiar with the pain and failure that comes with marriage and parenting. Thankfully, I am slowly, but surely also receiving the gracious blessings of forgiveness, kindness, restoration, and redemption. Many days my ambivalence is palpable. On the one hand, I can easily succumb (and many of my enemies are glad to pile on) to the voices that claim my own broken and scarred resume disqualifies me from offering anything valuable or reliable. Yet, there are also days like now when I'm humbled by the truth that in my weakest moments, in my ugliest places the strength of Jesus' love for me is immovable and inseparable. Each new day presents me with numerous opportunities to love my wife and children like He loves me.

Loving like Jesus means suffering and serving...ugh. I wish there were another way. Too often I believe we do a gross disservice to the invitation of such Christ-like love, by reducing it to a list of behaviors—family devotions, praying with my wife, or getting my kids to church every Sunday—as if there is some prescriptive magic in doing so. Don't get me wrong, I think reading the Bible is great, praying is great, and attending church is great! But, I can do all these things and more, yet completely fail to love (remember “noisy gong & clanging cymbal”?). I know because I've done it. Jesus taught us that loving like He does requires death! That's right, it requires the willingness to die so that others—my wife and children—might live!

Candidly, I've come to realize—and continue to learn—that it's about being quicker to listen and slower to speak. It's about more grace, and less rules. Loving my family through serving is about mutual submission, rather than machismo, bravado, or some other puffing of my chest that attempts to intimidate, control, or otherwise manipulate those under my care. The key to healthy submission is mutuality, meaning that first I surrender my heart, my ego, my will to the loving care of Abba Father living out for my family the humility necessary to trust the goodness of a Loving Father who will move heaven and earth, leave behind the ninety-nine, and sacrifice the very life of His Only Son to demonstrate the infinite scandal that is His Love.



Do The Work

I want my family to remember me as a man who...

I live out service to my family by...

1. Think about the legacy you desire to build for your family beyond financial security. Spend some time considering and describing on paper the relational, emotional, and spiritual culture you wish to create. What do you imagine it looks like in the day-to-day movement of your family? What do you desire to be the residue left behind for them once you are gone?
2. Do you resonate with the values of suffering, service, and mutual submission? If not, why and what do you value? If so, how do you imagine them being lived out within your own family relationships?

Community Impact

I am convinced there is a call on your life, a purpose imprinted into your heart that has been uniquely woven into your very DNA. There is a role you and I are meant to play in the Story of God that can only be lived out the way we were meant to live it out. You and I have been particularly shaped and prepared by trauma, failure, betrayal, and heartache to offer our world a particularly unique perspective on the goodness of God. Those places in our story that hold our deepest wounds also hold clues to our potential to offer life and love to the world in uniquely transformative ways. This is more than a vocation, title, or job description, it's an irresistible pull to move into our world on behalf of a mission that's bigger than my resume and skill set.

On the inside of my right forearm I have a large tattoo depicting the head of a Greek warhorse. It's meant to symbolize the biblical notion of Gentleness. In ancient times, the Greeks would train wild stallions for battle, much like what was depicted in the 2011 movie, *War Horse*. They retained their fierce spirit, courage, and power, but were disciplined to respond to the slightest nudge of the rider's leg, undistracted by arrows, spears, or torches. This is the Greek word "praus" used by Jesus in Matthew 5:5 when he said, "Blessed are the meek..." and in 11:29 where He invites us to, "...learn from me, for I am gentle..." Gentleness or Meekness is NOT weakness. It is the notion of exercising God's strength under His control, offering His power on behalf of others without harshness.

I love what's been referred to from the Old Testament as the "Micah Mandate" from the minor prophet Micah 6:8, "...And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." When you hold this declaration alongside the Greatest Commands of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 to love God and to love others (like I love myself), then echoed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13 when he concluded, "...the greatest of these is love," we must wrestle with how we live this out in all our relationships. How do I allow justice, mercy, humility, and love to shape my life and impact how I live where I live? It must manifest in the way I treat my wife, my children, my friends, my work, the widows, the orphans, the defenseless, and the unlovely or it's meaningless!



Do The Work

The movies that struck the deepest chords in my heart are...

The obstacles that keep me from living that vision are...

- 1.** Find a distraction-free place and take time to recall some of your favorite movies, those that aroused your heart to cheer, weep, or fight. For me, it's scenes from *Dead Poet's Society*, *Braveheart*, and *Gladiator*. Beneath your visceral reaction to your favorites is an invitation beckoning your soul, your heart to a greater mission, vision, and purpose. Describe what you sense you're being invited into?
- 2.** Now, identify and write down what you perceive to be the obstacles that are keeping you from entering into your unique impact?

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