**Four Keys to Navigating the Narrow Road**

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For some, the last several weeks have been a time to slow down and reconnect with God, their families and themselves. But for many, what started with a surprise exit lane has taken them farther and farther off course.

Whether it’s been the absence of routine, too much alone time, not *enough* time alone (in the case of dads with small children), grief, a high-stress job, financial trouble, or the loss of community, a lot of men are struggling. There have been reports already, for example, of an increase in domestic violence calls, pornography use, and calls to suicide helplines.

The Bible tells us the road is narrow and difficult that leads to true life, and we want to help you and the men in your family, neighborhood, friend group, and ministry get back—or stay—on track. You may also have someone in your life who has never surrendered to Christ and this is the opportunity to share the gospel and bring him on the road alongside you.

For you and everyone God has placed in your sphere of influence, here is our encouragement: **Even when much of life seems to have stalled, we can keep going and growing together.**

**First, we want to give you four helpful keys to navigate the narrow road in your own life, and second, a practical, easy way to support the men around you that you can get started on THIS WEEK.**

**Four Keys**

**1. Take the right on-ramp.**

What you believe about who God is and how you allow that belief to impact you will alter the course of your life. It’s easier to take an alternate route than most realize.

In the gospels, when people meet Jesus, we see case after case of mistaken identity. But we still experience that today, even among well-meaning Christians. Patrick Morley teaches: “There is a god we want and there is a God who is, and they are not the same god. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god we *want* and start seeking the God who *is*.”

To seek the God who is, we go to the Word of God. But how we respond to it makes all the difference. In [Matthew 13:3-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2013.3-23), we have the parable of the sower. Which of the four men that Jesus described most closely represents you, recently?

* You hear the gospel, but you don’t understand so it is snatched away quickly by the enemy.
* You receive the gospel with joy, but because you lack roots, when trouble comes you fall away.
* You hear the gospel, but the worries of life and deceitfulness of wealth make it fruitless.
* You hear and understand the gospel, and it produces fruit that multiplies.

Sometimes our worry and distractions, the idols we create, a lack of understanding, and even a lack of support can keep our hearts from being good soil for the seed of the Word to fall on.

If you recognize a lack of fruit in your life currently, here are some check-engine lights that might be coming on in your journey: Are you adding Christ to your life without subtracting sin? Are you giving something or someone else first place in your heart? Are you reading the Word and praying consistently? Are you looking to the Holy Spirit for understanding and conviction? Are you connected to other believers? Is worry choking out the Word?

Ask God to help you make adjustments where needed. [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James%201.5) tells us that if we ask God for wisdom, He will give it to us generously without finding fault in us!

**2. Merge lanes smoothly.**

The relationships we have—those surrounding us on the road—impact our lives greatly, for better or worse. On the narrow road, the gospel should radically influence every corner of our lives, but especially our relationships.

If you feel like your relationships aren’t working as they should, here are some check-engine lights that might be on: What does the use of your time reveal about your priorities? Are you giving your key relationships the place they deserve? Do you have difficult relationships right now? If so, how are you conducting yourself in them? Are you bearing with one another in love? How do you view weakness in others? In yourself? Do you see yourself as a much-loved child of God?

God wants us to have healthy relationships that reveal His character, and although there are many components to emotional and relational health, there is a cornerstone for the Christian: grace.

Pete Alwinson, author, teacher, and retired pastor, says it like this: “The gospel of grace produces and energizes relational maturity.”

When we understand the depravity of our own sin and God’s grace toward us, it should inspire us to extend extravagant grace to others; in fact, it’s a command.

Are your relationships grace infused? With your family? With a difficult coworker? With a friend who has wronged you? With someone who thinks and votes differently than you?

How can you cultivate a more grace-based way of interacting with those whom God has placed in your life? The starting place may be to sit with your own sin before God—not as something you see in the rearview mirror on your journey, but as a current reality, for Paul lamented in [Romans 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom%207.21) that even when he wants to do good, he finds evil is right there with him. Our capacity for sin is a lifelong one, a state of our humanness. And it makes God’s gift of grace (one to share) all the more amazing.

**3. Trust the navigation system.**

Most of us have a deep urge to be independent. It started in the Garden with a bite from an apple and it continues today!

As Christians, we don’t declare that we don’t need God, in open rebellion. It’s far more insidious and usually disguises itself as self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

The truth is many of us live in a place and time when we can navigate much of life apart from God, and it turns out okay, from a worldly perspective. We may have enough food to eat, a roof over our heads, money in the bank, and enjoy good health. When all our practical needs are met, God can become an afterthought in our lives, if a thought at all.

There is power in an unmet need, because it can drive us to Christ and force us to confront our dependence. One person shared with us recently: “This time has actually been refreshing to me, because it has forced me to recognize that I’m not in control. Control is an idol for me, and because this virus and economy are 100% out of my control, it’s been almost relieving to be forced to place my trust in God.”

But we want to let God navigate the daily details of our lives, trusting Him with it all, whether we have an unmet need or not. Because even if we *feel* we’re in control, of course we are not. Our independence doesn’t make us strong; it makes us weak.

As Brett Clemmer reminds us: “Truth strength grows from faithful dependence on a loving and powerful God.”

In [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer%2017.5-8), we’re given a description of two men: the first trusts in man and gets strength from his flesh, and the second trusts in the Lord and places his confidence in Him. As a result, the first is compared to a bush in the wastelands, dwelling in a parched desert, and the second is compared to a tree planted by a stream with deep roots that always bears fruit and has no worries in times of drought.

Which man do you identify with recently? If you aren’t sure or if you feel it’s the former, here are some check-engine lights that might be coming on: Are you consumed with worry? Do you thank and credit God when good things happen? Do you feel peace about the future? Is surrender your first line of defense or final resort? Is your prayer time merely a relaying of concerns and complaints or a transfer of burden? Are you isolating yourself from friends?

As Christians, it becomes clear FAST that the narrow road isn’t always a smooth one. We don’t want you to navigate it in your own strength.

**4. Avoid your potholes and put up guardrails.**

We all have vulnerabilities—potholes on the road. These are our personal, high-risk areas. During times of stress when our hearts are troubled, these can become coping mechanisms, such as uncontrolled anger, sexual thoughts about someone other than our spouse, alcohol abuse, or arrogance.

[Proverbs 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov%204.23) warns us: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Part of guarding our heart is establishing it firmly and solely in Christ—not the culture, the news, the stock market performance, our good behavior, or even the love from another person. And the other part of guarding our heart is recognizing what has the power to fill it, *and what doesn’t.*

Pastor Collin Outerbridge puts it this way: “The life we’re building is only as strong as the integrity of its foundation.” Anything less than Christ—and anything more—makes the foundation unsound.

The other thing that leaves us vulnerable is a lack of boundaries and a lack of brothers to help us stay within those boundaries. These boundaries and brothers serve as the guardrails in the journey. We must give two or three trusted men access to how we’re*really* doing at the heart level. Many refer to this as “accountability.”

If you are being overwhelmed by temptation in this difficult season, here are some check-engine lights that might be on: Do you have a trusted brother in Christ that you are staying connected to? Do you have firm boundaries in place—both mental and physical—around your high-risk area(s)? Are you anxious? How are you coping with stress right now?

***THE BIG IDEA:****Navigating the narrow road is a difficult journey—one best taken as a road trip with other men.*

**It’s Time to GO**

Are you struggling right now with worry, loneliness, boredom, or feeling overwhelmed?

Are you lukewarm in your faith or disconnected from the body of Christ?

***Or—Is God calling you to reach out to men who are?***

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