

Pathway to Blessing

COURAGEOUS ANCESTORS

Bold witnesses who turn setbacks into mission

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Director of Disciples Men

Courageous Ancestors walks men through eight New Testament figures whose faith was tested, tried, and transformed under real pressure. Each lesson explores how God restores identity, meets us in doubt and failure, reframes power into partnership, and calls us toward costly, generous love. Participants engage Scripture, honest discussion, and action prompts that move faith beyond the meeting room. By tracing these courageous ancestors, men discover that a faith worth having is one that has wrestled honestly and been transformed in the wrestling.



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ABOUT *PATHWAY TO BLESSING*

Pathway to Blessing: Courageous Ancestors is the second installment in the ***Pathway to Blessing*** series of studies. These eight lessons were written by Rev. Dr. Alex Ruth and follow in the same format as the *Foundational Ancestors* studies. The series was intentionally designed for both in-person and online groups.

Modeled loosely on the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading”), the lessons affirm that each participant brings a unique perspective and experience of God, and that every voice matters. They can be led with minimal preparation and materials. Participants are encouraged to use a small journal—readily available at most retailers for just a few dollars—for recording insights. Everyone will also need access to a Bible; however, printed scripture passages can be provided as an alternative. Facilitators will need a simple way to track time.

The studies follow the same flow whether in-person or online. For virtual gatherings, having a co-facilitator (or a facilitator and a tech support person) is helpful. Aim to keep groups to six or fewer participants. Online breakout groups can be pre-assigned, though it is often easiest to set them each session based on attendance.

Scheduling is flexible. Lessons can be offered as an eight-session program either weekly or monthly, in two four-week segments, or adapted to fit local needs. Expect each lesson to take 60–90 minutes, depending on group discussion.

For more information about Disciples Men, or to contribute to this ministry, please scan the appropriate QR code below. Or, you can visit discipleshomemissions.org.



Find out what Disciples Men and
Disciples Home Missions are doing.



Support the work of Disciples Men through
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LEADER'S GUIDE

Welcome and Overview

Thank you for stepping forward to facilitate this men's study series! Whether you are a seasoned leader or brand-new to group ministry, this guide will give you the tools, confidence, and structure you need to walk your group through eight engaging sessions focused on biblical faith ancestors, healthy masculinity, and community impact.

Goals of the Series

By the end of these sessions, participants will:

- Deepen their understanding of God's story through key faith ancestors.
- Reflect on their own identity, relationships, and purpose.
- Practice spiritual disciplines that nurture authentic faith.
- Take concrete "outside the walls" actions that bless the wider community.

Anatomy of a Session

Each lesson follows a simple rhythm, but feel free to adapt the timing to your context:

Session Component	Approximate Time
Welcome and Prayer	2 - 3 minutes
Gathering Reflection	8 - 10 minutes
Scripture Reading	5 minutes
Discussion Prompts	25 - 30 minutes
Faith Practice and Responses	15 minutes
Closing Prayer	5 minutes

LEADER'S GUIDE

Preparing to Lead

- Read the upcoming lesson at least twice—once devotionally, once analytically.
- Pray for your group members by name.
- Select at least three (3) discussion prompts you believe will resonate.
- Gather supplies: Bibles, pens, journals, handouts, and any materials for the action prompt.
- Set the environment: arrange chairs in a circle, provide refreshments, if possible.

Guiding Discussion Prompts

Use open-ended questions. Allow silence; it often precedes deeper sharing. Affirm contributions and gently redirect if the conversation drifts.

Introducing Faith Practices

Demonstrate the practice briefly, then invite participants to try it during the week. Follow up at the next session to celebrate progress and troubleshoot obstacles.

Facilitating the Response Section

Explain both parts: personal reflection (journaling) and the “outside the walls” action. Encourage each man to set a specific, realistic plan (who, what, when).

Leading the Closing Prayer

Invite participants to voice a single word or phrase of gratitude during the prayer pause. Model brevity and sincerity. End decisively so the group knows the prayer is complete.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Handling Common Challenges

- **Dominating Voices:** Thank them for passion; ask others directly for input.
- **Silence:** Wait at least 6–8 seconds; rephrase the question if needed.
- **Sensitive Topics:** Reaffirm the covenant of confidentiality. Redirect to scripture and shared values.
- **Time Management:** Use a timer or an appointed timekeeper to stay on track.

Creating an Inclusive, Safe Space

Establish a simple group covenant in your first session. Suggested ideas are: confidentiality, respectful listening, no unsolicited fixing, and equal opportunities to speak.

Adapting for Online or Hybrid Groups

- Use breakout rooms for small-group discussion.
- Share scriptures and prompts via screen-share or chat.
- Invite quick “thumbs up” or chat responses to keep engagement high.

Encouraging Accountability and Growth

Create a group chat, a private group on social media, a Discord group, or other method to allow participants to check in between sessions about their Faith Practice and Action Prompt.

Leader's Quick Checklist (print or screenshot)

- Review lesson & pray for the group
- Select discussion prompts
- Prepare space/materials
- Identify time-keeper
- Ready opening & closing prayers
- Record attendance & key insights

LESSON ONE – PETER

New Beginnings & True Identity

THEME: Think of a time you felt disqualified — by failure, fear, or others' opinion of you. What helped you try again, or what is still holding you back? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Gathering Reflection

Think of a time you felt disqualified — by failure, fear, or others' opinion of you. What helped you try again, or what is still holding you back? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Luke 5:1–11; John 21:15–19

Jesus calls Peter from his nets; later, Jesus restores Peter after his denial, asking three times, “Do you love me?”



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- What part of Peter's call or restoration speaks to you today?
- Where have you felt disqualified, yet sensed Jesus saying “Follow me” again?
- How does Peter's impulsiveness show up as both a strength and a weakness in your own life?
- Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” — echoing Peter's three denials. Why might restoration require that kind of repetition?
- What fresh start do you sense God inviting you into this season?



Faith Practice

Each morning this week, speak one “I am...” statement of identity aloud, for example, “I am God's beloved son, forgiven and called.” Let it shape how you carry yourself through the day.

LESSON ONE – PETER

New Beginnings & True Identity

THEME: Peter's story moves from confident calling, to public failure, to tender restoration. His life reminds us that our truest identity is not defined by our worst moment, but by the One who keeps calling us back to purpose.



Personal Reflection

Each evening, ask: “Did I live from that identity today, or did I let failure, fear, or old labels write the story instead?” Note one sentence and bring an insight to the next session.



Action Prompt

Apology & Repair

- Identify one relationship where an apology or repair is overdue.
- Reach out and name specifically what you’re sorry for; avoid over-explaining or excusing.
- Offer concrete restitution if appropriate — a returned favor, restored trust, or simply consistent follow-through.

Reflect afterward: What did it cost to be honest, and what did it open?



Closing Prayer

God, who calls the unlikely and restores the fallen, You met Peter on the shore not with blame but with breakfast and a question: “Do you love me?” We pause now to lift a word or phrase of gratitude for the ways You have called us back...

Help us release the labels failure has given us, and receive again the identity You speak over us; beloved, forgiven, called. Give us the courage to feed Your sheep with the same grace we have received. We pray in the name of Jesus, who never stops calling us by name. Amen.

LESSON TWO – STEPHEN

Conviction Under Pressure

THEME: Stephen shows us what it looks like to hold fast to truth and grace even as opposition rises around us. His witness (clear-eyed, Spirit-filled, and unwilling to return hatred for hatred) challenges us to consider what convictions are worth standing for, and how we might stand for them without losing our humanity.



Gathering Reflection

Recall a moment when you had the chance to speak truth but chose silence instead, or a time you spoke up despite the risk. What shaped that choice? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Acts 6:1–10; 7:54–60

Stephen's Spirit-filled ministry, his testimony before the council, and his death as the first Christian martyr.



Discussion Prompts *(Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)*

- What qualities made Stephen's witness so compelling, even to his accusers?
- Describe a time you risked speaking truth. What helped or hindered you?
- How might seeing "Jesus standing" (Acts 7:56), rather than seated, have changed Stephen's courage in that moment?
- Where are you currently tempted to stay silent for the sake of self-protection or comfort?
- Stephen prays for his enemies as he dies (Acts 7:60). What practices build that kind of grace before pressure ever arrives?



Faith Practice

At midday each day this week, pause wherever you are, look upward, and pray Stephen's own words: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Let it recenter you before the afternoon's demands.

LESSON TWO – STEPHEN

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Personal Reflection

Each evening, log one moment when you chose truth over comfort and one moment you didn't. What made the difference? Bring one insight to the next session.



Action Prompt

Stand with the Standing

- Identify someone in your life or community currently taking a costly stand for justice or truth.
- Write them a specific note of encouragement, name what you see, and why it matters.
- Consider one tangible way to stand alongside them, not just cheer from a distance.

Reflect afterward: What did it cost you to notice, and to act?



Closing Prayer

God of Stephen and every faithful witness, You do not promise us safety, but You promise us Your presence, standing with us, not distant, when pressure rises. We pause now to offer a word or phrase of gratitude for the courage You have given us...

Steady our convictions, soften our hearts toward those who oppose us, and give us grace to forgive as freely as we hope to be forgiven. We pray in the name of Jesus, who stands at the right hand of God for us still. Amen.

LESSON THREE – PAUL

Purpose That Outgrows the Past

THEME: Paul's Damascus Road encounter did not erase his past; it redirected it. His story invites us to consider how grace can take our zeal, our regrets, and even our worst chapters, and repurpose them for blessing far beyond what we could imagine.



Gathering Reflection

What past credential, failure, or reputation still quietly shapes how you see your own worth? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Acts 9:1–19; Philippians 3:4–14

Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus; Paul counts his credentials as loss for the sake of knowing Christ.



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- Which part of Saul's conversion most surprises or unsettles you?
- Paul moves from persecutor to pastor. Where might God be inviting you to redirect your own zeal or drive?
- What does "forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13) look like practically in your life right now?
- Who are the "nations," the people, causes, or communities, God might want to bless through your particular story?
- How does knowing Paul's past shape the way his letters land for you?



Faith Practice

Spend ten quiet minutes each day this week asking, "Lord, what would You have me do?" Record any impressions, however small, without judging them too quickly.

LESSON THREE – PAUL

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Personal Reflection

Each evening, note one surprising nudge you sensed during the day. Look for a pattern by week's end and bring one insight to the next session.



Action Prompt

Cross-Table Conversation

- Initiate a conversation with someone outside your usual circle, with a different background, culture, or life stage.
- Ask about their story and simply listen; resist the urge to relate everything back to your own experience.

Reflect afterward: What did I learn about God's wider family?



Closing Prayer

God who meets us on our own Damascus Roads, You took a life bent toward harm and turned it toward blessing for the whole world. We pause now to lift a word or phrase of gratitude for the ways Your grace has redirected us...

Where we carry shame from our past, replace it with purpose. Where we carry zeal, aim it toward love. Make us willing instruments of Your reconciling grace for people who don't yet know they belong. In the name of Jesus Christ, who called Paul by name and calls us still. Amen.

LESSON FOUR – ONESIMUS & PHILEMON

Reconciliation & Reframed Power

THEME: Paul's brief letter to Philemon carries enormous weight: an appeal to remake a relationship of ownership into one of brotherhood. This lesson invites us to examine where we hold power over others, and what the gospel asks us to do with it.



Gathering Reflection

Where in your life (at work, at home, or in the community) do you hold more power or advantage than someone else? How aware of that imbalance are you day to day? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Philemon 8–21

Paul's appeal to Philemon to receive Onesimus back "no longer as a slave, but... as a dear brother."



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- What stands out to you in the way Paul makes his appeal to Philemon?
- Try to imagine how Onesimus might have felt returning to a man he had wronged and who held power over him.
- Where do you hold power that could become partnership instead?
- What does forgiveness look like when the wrong involved money, labor, or economic loss?
- How can communities of faith model equal brotherhood today, across lines of status or power?



Faith Practice

Each day this week, pray: "Lord, show me where I need to seek forgiveness, and where I need to grant it." Sit with whatever name or face comes to mind.

LESSON FOUR – ONESIMUS & PHILEMON

Reconciliation & Reframed Power

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Personal Reflection

Record whose name surfaced during your prayer, and note one step, however small, you took toward that person this week.



Action Prompt

Tangible Peace

- Identify someone with whom you've experienced tension, particularly where power or resources were involved.
- Offer a concrete act of service or generosity toward them, helping with a task, extending a thoughtful gift, or simply showing up.
- Do this without expecting anything in return, and without narrating it as a "gesture."

Reflect afterward: What shifted in the relationship — or in you?



Closing Prayer

God of reconciliation, You sent Paul to write on behalf of a runaway slave, asking a friend to receive him as family instead of property. We pause now to offer a word or phrase of gratitude for the relationships You are healing in us...

Where we hold power, teach us partnership. Where we hold grudges, teach us grace. Make us people who welcome others home as family, not as debts to be settled. In the name of Jesus, who made us all one household. Amen.

LESSON FIVE – TIMOTHY

Intergenerational Mentoring

THEME: Timothy inherited a faith that was not his own invention. It was passed down through his grandmother, his mother, and his mentor, Paul. His story calls us to consider both what we've received from those who went before us and what we are actively passing to those who come after.



Gathering Reflection

Who first modeled faith for you? Who, if anyone, are you actively mentoring or discipling today? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

2 Timothy 1:3–8; 1 Timothy 4:11–16

Paul recalls Timothy's inherited faith and urges him not to let anyone look down on his youth.



Discussion Prompts *(Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)*

- Who were Timothy's spiritual mentors, according to these passages? Who have been yours?
- What gift or strength in you needs encouragement right now, from a peer, a mentor, or the next generation?
- How do you respond when others dismiss you as "too young" or "too old" for leadership?
- Where might you practice being a "Paul" to a younger man in your life?
- What disciplines help keep your doctrine and your daily life in step with one another?



Faith Practice

Identify one younger man you can bless this week. Send him one specific, encouraging text each day naming a strength you see in him.

LESSON FIVE – TIMOTHY

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Personal Reflection

Each evening, note his responses (if any) and your own feelings about the practice of mentoring. What is easy? What is uncomfortable?



Action Prompt

Coffee & Calling

- Invite the younger man you identified to coffee or a meal.
- Ask about his goals, hopes, and current challenges — then listen more than you talk.
- Offer to check in with him again in a month, and follow through.

Reflect afterward: What did you learn about the next generation and about yourself?



Closing Prayer

God of every generation, You wove faith through Timothy's grandmother, his mother, and his mentor before it ever became his own. We pause now to name a word or phrase of gratitude for those who passed faith to us...

Make us faithful links in that same chain; humble enough to keep learning, generous enough to keep teaching. Fan into flame the gifts You have placed in us and in those we mentor. In the name of Jesus, our elder brother and truest teacher. Amen.

LESSON SIX – JOHN MARK

Learning from Missteps

THEME: John Mark left the mission field early, and it cost him Paul's trust for a season. But his story doesn't end there — years later, Paul calls him “useful for ministry.” This lesson holds space for our own early quits, and the slow, patient work of rebuilding trust.



Gathering Reflection

Recall a time you walked away from a commitment before it was finished. What led you to leave, and how did it affect how others saw you afterward? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Acts 13:4–13; 15:36–41; 2 Timothy 4:11

John Mark leaves the missionary journey; Paul and Barnabas's sharp disagreement over him; Paul later calls Mark “useful to me for ministry.”



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- Why do you think John Mark left the mission partway through?
- How do you personally relate to early failure or walking away from something hard?
- What does Barnabas's advocacy for Mark teach us about the risk and value of second chances?
- Years later, Paul calls Mark “useful.” Who believed in you when you had let someone down?
- What practices help rebuild credibility after a failure, for yourself, or for someone you're extending grace to?



Faith Practice

Write a brief “failure inventory” this week: three or four moments of past failure, and one lesson God taught you through each one.

LESSON SIX – JOHN MARK

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Personal Reflection

Each evening, thank God specifically for one lesson from your inventory. Notice whether gratitude changes how you carry that memory.



Action Prompt

Show Up Again

- Identify a setting, ministry, or relationship where you once fell short or underperformed.
- Offer to show up again (volunteer, reach out, or re-engage) openly owning what happened before, without over-explaining.

Reflect afterward: What did it feel like to be trusted with a second chance, or to extend one?



Closing Prayer

God of second chances, You did not write John Mark off when he walked away, and years later he stood useful beside Paul once more. We pause now to lift a word or phrase of gratitude for the grace that has carried us back...

Where we have quit too soon, give us courage to return. Where others have let us down, give us patience like Barnabas's. Teach us that “useful again” is always still possible with You. In the name of Jesus, who restores what failure has broken. Amen.

LESSON SEVEN - THOMAS

Honest Doubt, Deepening Faith

THEME: Thomas is remembered for his doubt, but his story ends in one of the boldest confessions in Scripture: “My Lord and my God.” His honesty reminds us that faith that has wrestled with real questions is often sturdier than faith that never has.



Gathering Reflection

What question about God, faith, or Scripture have you been afraid to say out loud? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

John 20:24–29

Thomas refuses to believe the resurrection without seeing, and Jesus meets him in his doubt.



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- What do you appreciate about Thomas’s honesty, rather than pretending to believe?
- Where do you currently doubt God’s presence, power, or goodness?
- Jesus meets Thomas’s stated conditions and then blesses those “who have not seen and yet believe” (v.29). How do both truths sit together for you?
- How can a men’s group create space for honest doubt without shame or judgment?
- When has a season of doubt eventually opened into deeper conviction for you?



Faith Practice

Practice a simple breath prayer each night this week — inhale on “My Lord,” exhale on “and my God” — ten times before sleep.

LESSON SEVEN - THOMAS

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Personal Reflection

Journal one question you are currently holding before God. You don't need to resolve it; just name it honestly.



Action Prompt

Bring One Doubt

- Identify a mentor, pastor, or trusted friend you could ask a hard question.
- Set up a conversation and bring one honest doubt or question, without softening it to sound more “faithful.”

Reflect afterward: What did it feel like to say it out loud?



Closing Prayer

God who meets us in the upper room of our doubts, You did not turn Thomas away for asking to see and touch. We pause now to offer a word or phrase of gratitude for the ways You have met our own honest questions...

Where we doubt, meet us gently. Where we pretend certainty we don't feel, free us to tell the truth. Grow in us a faith sturdy enough to hold real questions and still whisper, “My Lord and my God.” In the name of Jesus, who shows His wounds to the doubting. Amen.

LESSON EIGHT - ZACCHAEUS

Transformation & Community Healing

THEME: Zacchaeus climbs a tree out of curiosity and comes down a changed man; his transformation immediately overflows into concrete, costly generosity. His story closes this volume by asking whether our own faith moves beyond private belief into public repair.



Gathering Reflection

Think of a time your internal change led to an external, costly action. What made you follow through? Take some time to jot notes, then share in small groups.



Scripture Reading

Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus, is called down by name, and pledges to give away half his wealth and repay those he defrauded.



Discussion Prompts (Choose the most helpful prompts for your group)

- What moves Zacchaeus from curiosity to costly change?
- Why do you think Jesus calls him by name and invites Himself to his house before Zacchaeus repents of anything?
- What does restitution (not just apology, but repayment) look like in modern contexts?
- How might generosity, offered publicly, help heal wounds in a community?
- Who in your city or circle is “up a tree”; watching from a distance, longing for a glimpse of grace?



Faith Practice

Before any purchase this week, pause and pray: “Is this just, generous, and necessary?” Let the question, not just the price tag, guide the decision.

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Personal Reflection

Track one decision you changed this week because of that prayer. What did it cost, and what did it reveal?



Action Prompt

Pay It Back, Pay It Forward

- Identify a person, cause, or community you have previously overlooked, shorted, or harmed — even unintentionally.
- Make a tangible gift, repayment, or donation as an act of restitution or generosity.

Reflect afterward: What did generosity change in you, not just in them?



Closing Prayer

God who calls us down out of hiding, You saw Zacchaeus up in his tree and called him by name before he'd said a single word of repentance. We pause now to lift a word or phrase of gratitude for the ways You have called us down and toward change...

Turn our private encounters with You into public generosity. Where we have taken more than our share, make us willing to give back. Where we have hidden at a distance, draw us close enough to be transformed. In the name of Jesus, who came to seek and save what was lost. Amen.