

HOW
GOD
MAKES
MEN

10 EPIC STORIES.
10 PROVEN PRINCIPLES.
ONE HUGE PROMISE FOR YOUR LIFE.



PATRICK
MORLEY

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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HOW GOD MAKES MEN

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*To Story, Callie, Annie, and Davis.
Our grandchildren.
I love you.*

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PREFACE

When I travel and meet strangers, someone will often say, “You work with men. That must really be hard.”

My response is always the same. “You’ve got the wrong guy! I have the best job in the world. Every day we see men coming to Christ and growing as disciples. God is powerfully at work in men’s lives!”

With that said, we need to do a reality check. Men today are under severe attack. A counter-Christian pop culture ridicules men in general and Christian men in particular. The battle line against biblical manhood is clearly drawn and fiercely contested. As a result, legions of men struggle to sustain what they started and finish the race.

Because I get to work with men as my vocation, I’ve been watching this battle play out and intensify at an alarming rate. Every week at our Bible study, I meet men who have professed faith in Christ but who, for the last five, ten, fifteen, or more years, have been living by their own wisdom. Many were told, “Just pray this prayer and everything will turn out okay.” But it hasn’t. They enlisted and were issued a weapon they’ve never learned how to clean and shoot. These men are not bad, just confused.

Most men I talk with feel like there’s another man coiled up inside of them who desperately wants to get out. How about you?

- Maybe your faith is being tested to the breaking point.
- Maybe you’ve been down so long you feel God has abandoned you.

- Maybe you thought God was going to use you, but now you feel like you've been sidelined.
- Maybe you feel inadequate for your roles in life.
- Maybe you're in a tough situation and see no way out.
- Maybe you are not genuinely content with who you are and what you do.
- Maybe you feel like giving up.
- Maybe you find it difficult to let go of the cares of this world.

Can you relate? If so, I've got some really great news for you. It's all wrapped up in the one sentence that best describes my own life: *Because God is good, your life will not turn out like you planned.*

That's because God has a better plan. A much better plan. So what is this plan, and how can you make it your own?

God's plan is made up of strikingly relevant, time-tested lessons written down and preserved for us in the Bible. It pulsates with stories about men who released and sustained the passion of their faith. They became the men God created them to be.

And you can too.

However, it's shocking how many of these life-changing principles are gathering dust. It's as though we're afraid to tell men, "Following Christ is harder than it looks and takes longer than expected. But God *does* have a plan, and it comes packed with real answers and genuine hope."

So in *How God Makes Men*, I want to share with you the most powerful principles of manhood from ten of the most well-known men in the Bible. In each of their epic stories, we can see the hand of God at work—shaping them, leading them, making them into the men He always planned for them to become. That "always planned

for them to become” is for you too. And it’s one of the main features we’ll be exploring together.

How did God mold and mobilize these men? What were the obstacles they faced? What held them back? How did God get them uncoiled? And what was their part? As we spend time listening to their lives, we will come face to face with the gritty truth that can release and sustain the passion of our faith too. When added together, they’re not just ten amazing stories but one big story—yours!

Here’s the promise of *How God Makes Men*. And it’s a huge one. If you will absorb and embrace the timeless principles offered by these ten men, you can get past the shallow, cultural Christianity that wants to gut your manhood, and get to—or back to—a more biblical Christianity.

If you will let these ten men mentor you, then, like them, *you* will become the man God created you to be. *You* will release the power of God in every direction and detail of your life. *You* will know how to sustain the passion of your faith. And *you* will be well on the way to writing your own epic story. Why? Because God is way too good to let our lives merely turn out like we planned!

You always knew that one day you would be called upon to take your place on the battlefield, right? This is that call. Together, we can turn this around. This is a battle we can win. We cannot, we must not, and by God’s grace we will not fail.

If these are the things you want, turn the page. I have some guys I want you to meet.

ABRAHAM

THE PRINCIPLE OF BELIEVING GOD ANYWAY

HOW GOD MAKES A
MAN'S FAITH STRONGER

James and Brandy both went into their marriage fully intending to build their life together on the rock of Christ. James, who attends the Bible study I teach, told me, “And so it went...at first.”

After five carefree years without kids, they started a family with two wonderful children, anticipating that life would only get happier. But in reality the demands of work and the stress of raising children began to take a toll on their marriage. They lost that important feeling of being close to your soul mate. That made it easier to dwell on each other's faults, and so they slowly drifted apart. At the fourteen-year mark, weakened by self-pity over his unhappiness at home, James fell

into the arms of another woman. When confronted by friends over his adultery, he said, “I felt like I was being torn in two.”

With the help of their church community, James and Brandy reconciled and started over. But this transgression, along with the unresolved issues each had brought into their marriage, kept eating away at them. For his part, James was quick to anger and wore his feelings on his sleeve. Brandy, in contrast, buried her feelings because she thought that was the Christian thing to do.

When the children hit their teens, James and Brandy decided to get counseling to help them become better parents. But those conversations opened a can of worms. His affair came back to center stage. Their arguments became more and more frequent. Brandy, particularly, seemed annoyed at every little thing James did.

One day James said to her, “Brandy, if these things bother you so much, then why don’t you ask me to leave?” So she did.

After a few days of living alone, James realized what a horrible mistake he had made. His repeated pleas for reconciliation fell on deaf ears. Brandy was boiling with a volcanic anger, and she wanted nothing to do with him. In the months that followed, he found e-mails that revealed his wife was getting emotionally attached to an old flame. That attachment eventually led to an affair.

James still believed God wanted them to reconcile and stay married. But after everything that had gone on, he was thinking, *You’ve got to be kidding me. How could that possibly happen now?* Brandy clearly despised him, and she had opened her heart to the other man. There appeared to be no way his marriage could recover.

He started losing weight and couldn’t sleep. He routinely woke up at around 3:00 a.m. and pleaded with God to save his marriage.

One morning God whispered to his heart, “James, I have you. But you need to give Brandy to Me.”

James wasn’t sure what that meant. He said, “How can I give her up when what I really need to do is win her back?”

Meanwhile, Brandy continued moving away from James. She began bringing up the topic of divorce in their infrequent communications, though James resisted it every time. He wanted to find some way to get Brandy back, but he didn’t know how to begin.

One day James yelled at the top of his lungs, “God, I don’t think I can hold out any longer!”

When he was done venting, he heard God whisper, “Are you finished?”

Then, “Wait.”

One day, after a couple of years of separation, Brandy sent James a text: “Happy Father’s Day.” For an hour James sobbed uncontrollably and cried out to God to bring his marriage back from the dead. Later that day, when James picked up his daughter for dinner, Brandy asked if she could join them. They had a wonderful evening talking and laughing.

The two started dating again. Each saw changes in the other. Then they went to counseling together and began learning how to open up and express honest feelings without letting their emotions become destructive. They sought and received forgiveness from each other.

After two years of prayer and pain and waiting on God, James and Brandy got back together.

And here’s what I don’t want you to miss: in his darkest times, James did not see how God could possibly bring to pass what he hoped for—the restoration of his marriage. But he did his best to

keep trusting God during the wait. And in His time, God did what seemed impossible.

But God didn't bring about this dramatic turnaround overnight. It was a process—a process that took time. “Bible Time,” actually, as you'll soon see. God's goal in this process was to release unwavering faith in Him. To that end, He is going to take each of us through a similar process of transformation, though your personal issues will most likely be very different from what James went through. God graciously “forces” our faith to grow by creating or permitting situations that require us to find reserves of faith we don't even know we have. And through that process, we become stronger, wiser men. We become men of faith. Men who are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. How does it happen? By the process described in the first of the ten principles we'll be looking at together in *How God Makes Men*:

God makes men by showing us how we can believe Him anyway in the face of what seem like impossible circumstances.

What is God calling you to trust Him for that makes you say, “Are You kidding me, God? How could that possibly happen?”

Whatever it is, you're not alone. There is no Christian alive who always has faith and never doubts. Run from anyone who tells you differently. It's normal to have doubts. But by the end of this chapter, you will see how God wants to forge us into men who can believe Him anyway, even when we've really messed up. Even when our circumstances seem impossible.

So let's get to it.

If you think James messed up—if you think *you've* messed up—consider this guy.

A FLAWED MAN AMONG FLAWED MEN

While writing this chapter, I spent many hours with a man who once encouraged his wife to sleep with another man so he could get ahead. He also fathered a child with his housekeeper and later cut them both off financially. Once, when he was surrounded by thugs who had their eyes on his pretty wife, he pretended to be single to avoid getting roughed up.

What kind of man would do those things?

Would you be surprised to learn I'm talking about Abraham, the father of our faith (see Romans 4:16)?

As I implied in the preface, none of the ten men we'll be looking at in this book were perfect. Not even close. These men were flawed—like us. They learned and grew over time—like us. That's what makes their stories so perfect for us to study. Bit by bit, God made them more nearly into the men He wanted them to be—just like He does with us. Let's face it. If God didn't work with flawed men, He wouldn't have any to work with at all.

So why, precisely, did the Holy Spirit include the story of Abraham in the Bible? I can tell you one reason why. Abraham faced three different tests that, by degrees, you and I will also face—if we haven't already.

Let's take them one at a time.

GOING NOT KNOWING

Abraham spent most of his life in the city of Ur, located in what is now southern Iraq. A major population center, Ur boasted a robust economy and vibrant culture.

At seventy-five years old, Abraham was healthy, wealthy, and active, with lots of friends, relatives, and employees to share his life with. But he and his wife, Sarah, were childless—a deep pain for both of them.

Abraham no doubt looked forward to his golden years. With the climate of Scottsdale, Ur might have made the list of “Ten Best Places to Retire.” Except for having no heir, everything else felt familiar and comfortable. But Abraham’s plans were about to change dramatically.

One day God delivered a message to him that would upend the rest of his life. The Lord said, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

Try to imagine Abraham’s shock at hearing the voice of his Creator. First, God told him to leave everything that was familiar. Second, He didn’t tell Abraham where he was going. “I’m not going to tell you where you’re going just yet. I’ll let you know.” But if Abraham answered the call, God promised:

I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
 and whoever curses you I will curse;
 and all peoples on earth
 will be blessed through you. (verses 2–3)

This was the first test God put to Abraham: Will you believe God's great promise for an invisible future or cling to the visible present?

We know what Abraham did. "Abram left, as the LORD had told him" (verse 4). The book of Hebrews puts it succinctly: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Genesis 11:8).

By faith.

Obeyed and went.

Even though he did not know where he was going.

This is not some crazy, ancient idea. It's part of the normal Christian life. God routinely tests our faith as part of the process by which He makes men. The question this test puts to us is this: Will we believe His promise or cling to what we know? Will we leave what's familiar—if that's what He calls us to do—for the promise of a better future?

Faith is letting the reality of the unseen rule over the unreality of the seen. To leave the familiar present for an unknown future is a supreme test of faith—but it is the kind of faith God rewards. That's what Bill and Sherry did when they gave up their personal comfort to adopt an Asian orphan. That's what Fernando did when he went back to school to learn a new trade that would provide for his family after his factory job went away. That's what Jake and his family did when

they left their familiar church to be part of a new church plant. How about you? Is God asking you to trust Him with something? Will you believe God's great promise for an invisible future or cling to the visible present?

Abraham passed his first test, and I hope you will pass yours too when it's your turn. But God was far from finished making Abraham into the man He had created him to be. An even bigger test was right around the corner. And again, it's a test that applies to us too.

THE TWENTY-FIVE-YEAR WAIT

God's plan for our lives is revealed in stages, as Abraham discovered. God sent him to the land of Canaan, but then a famine forced him to move to Egypt. Later, when he returned, he established a large free-range herding operation. Once again, he was enjoying a comfortable existence—one of the leading men of the area.

Still, something was spoiling the satisfaction of the life he was living. And frankly it seemed to fly in the face of the promise God had given him—the promise that God would make him into a great nation. How could that be, when he and Sarah were childless?

So one night God took Abraham outside and told him to look up at the heavens and count the stars. I'm sure it was a clear night, like a special night our family experienced on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We stopped our car, shut off the motor, got out, and looked up into a sky bulging with stars that dangled so close we felt as though we could reach out and pick one, like an apple or an orange. The majesty of the heavens overwhelmed us. I imagine that's how Abraham felt that night as he looked up.

As Abraham was drinking in the spectacle of an uncountable number of stars, God said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5).

God tested the faith of Abraham again. His second test was this: Will you trust God to do what seems impossible? After all, how could he father offspring? He was well over seventy-five years old, and his wife was barren. They had been trying to have a child for many, many years. What reason was there to believe that they would have a child now?

Abraham had to decide. To believe this crazy promise God gave him about the stars and his offspring. Or not.

Again, we know what Abraham did. Verse 6 says, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” That single moment is why the New Testament repeatedly calls Abraham the father of our faith. He believed God in the face of unbelievable circumstances.

But the test wasn’t over. A decade after the promise made to him that star-studded night, Abraham *still* didn’t have a son!

That’s when Abraham once again revealed his flawed humanity. His wife coaxed him into sleeping with their housekeeper, Hagar, who got pregnant and had a son, Ishmael. For years Hagar taunted Sarah because she had a child and Sarah didn’t. When Sarah couldn’t take it anymore, she demanded that her husband banish Ishmael and Hagar. And he did. He put them out.

Now fast-forward to Abraham at ninety-nine years of age. It was now twenty-four years since he had left his homeland, and yet he still had no heir. But again God reaffirmed the promise that he would have a son with Sarah (see Genesis 17:1–16).¹

Abraham’s first reaction? He laughed. The Bible tells us exactly

what he was thinking: “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” (verse 17).

Put that way, it does seem laughable. But even though twenty-four years had passed since the promise was made, Abraham continued to believe in the face of unbelievable circumstances. He passed the second test and was rewarded with a son, Isaac, just as God had promised.

As Hebrews 11:11 tells us, “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

A long test is obviously more difficult to pass than a short test. It’s one thing to have faith in God if He delivers on His promise quickly. But as the years roll by, it’s human nature to assume, *I guess I heard wrong*.

I’ll give you an example. Chris, a thirty-two-year-old single man who loves to work with children, said to me, “I know my purpose. It’s to be a husband and father. But I feel like something is blocking me.” He became a committed Christian in college. Then five years ago God called him to move to Orlando. He said, “I thought it was to find a wife, start a family, and settle down. But now I’m not so sure.”

Most men I know can point to something they believed God was calling them to—something He promised, something they believed they were led to pursue. For some, it’s to get married and have or adopt children. For others, it’s to go to college or start their own businesses or change careers. Still others sense God calling them to move to another city or go into ministry.

But now it’s five, ten, fifteen, or more years later and they’re still waiting. They’ve begun to doubt. They think, *Maybe I didn’t hear from God after all. Maybe I just imagined it. Or maybe I’ve let God down and*

He's changed His mind about giving me this thing. There's a blockage somewhere. It's just not happening. Or so it seems. What's going on?

Here's the advice I give them: start thinking in Bible Time.

THINKING IN BIBLE TIME

God has an altogether different way of looking at time than we do. As Peter said, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8). In "earth time" Jesus died two thousand years ago. But in Bible Time it was only the day before yesterday.

Bible Time is elastic. At our Bible study I asked a couple of men to measure the length of a bungee cord. It was two feet. Then I asked them to stretch it as far as they could and remeasure. This time it was five feet. So which was it: two feet or five feet? It was both. What may seem like an eternity to us can be like the blink of an eye to God.

Though Abraham no doubt felt as if twenty-five years was a long time, it wasn't much in Bible Time. From the time God promised a new country to Abraham, it took nearly 500 earth years for that promise to be fulfilled—430 years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years through the wilderness. But in Bible Time, God fulfilled His promise by noon!

Suppose you and I meet for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. I ask you, "What do you want more than anything else in the world that is righteous, pure, noble, and honors God?" Let's say you share your dream and calling to become a godly man, husband, and father.

Now imagine I hold the power to make that happen. Suppose I say, "I love and care about you so much that I promise to make your

dream come true.” If I could give you the thing you want most in life, would you be willing to wait until noon? How about for an hour? How about ten minutes? In Bible Time, ten minutes could be ten years.

Thinking in Bible Time will give you an eternal perspective and help you manage expectations. Also, when you think in Bible Time, verses like this one make more sense: “We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For *our light and momentary troubles* are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

Bible Time has many practical applications. I meet men all the time who are so impatient for change that they are making huge decisions—to close a business, to cut off a child, to divorce a wife, to bail out on a home mortgage—because they are impatient. They are not willing to wait on God. They don’t have a concept of Bible Time.

How about you? Whatever God has called you to start, pull an Abraham. Reset your clock and don’t give up. God is testing you. He might test you for decades. Will you trust God to do what seems impossible? Whatever is not happening that you believed God was going to do, here’s my advice: Give it a few more years. Give God a chance to bring glory to Himself by fulfilling your longing.

Once you embrace Bible Time as the norm, it takes off a lot of pressure. It’s the kingdom perspective on time that will not only help keep your faith intact but help release the power of God in every direction and detail of your life. Cru founder Bill Bright loved to say, “Faith is like a muscle. The more you exercise it, the bigger it grows.” That’s a good thing, because Abraham would need it. God would soon put him to the ultimate test of faith.

MAKING THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

Abraham was now well over one hundred years of age. (There are no expiration dates on growing in faith.) He was living in Beersheba, an area at the northern edge of the Negev desert where his herds could roam freely. Again God came and spoke to him. This time His command was truly shocking: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2).

This may not have sounded quite as insane to Abraham as it does to us, because many pagan religions of his time sacrificed children. But it was terrible nevertheless. As God Himself made very clear, He was asking him to sacrifice not just any child but his own son—the one he had waited to hold in his arms for a quarter century. The only one he would ever have with Sarah. The one he loved more than his own life.

Abraham must have thought, God, I don't understand. I believed You. My wife wept herself to sleep night after night because we couldn't have children. I carried that ache around for decades. I trusted You for the thing I wanted so much—this son—and by a miracle You gave him to me. Now You are asking me to do what?

The third test God put to Abraham could be expressed this way: Are you willing to give God the one thing you most want to keep?

Whatever else was going through his mind, he obeyed immediately. Without delaying, “early the next morning” Abraham got up, took Isaac and a couple of servants with him, and headed to Moriah (Genesis 22:3). Before long, he came to the hill identified by God for the sacrifice. His servants waited at a distance, out of sight of the bizarre scene about to be enacted on the hilltop. He tied up his son

Isaac with ropes and put him on a pile of firewood that Abraham had arranged on the large rock that would double as an altar.

Abraham had a knife in his hands. He may have hesitated, but he wasn't going to disobey. His testing over the years had built his faith muscle until it was like the bicep of a bodybuilder. As Abraham took the knife in his hand, and at the last possible moment, the angel of the Lord cried out to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" The angel went on, "'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son'" (verses 11–12).

Again Hebrews summarizes the story for us:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17–19)

Abraham got his son back. You see, the test was never that God was going to take away his son. The test was always about whether Abraham was *willing to let Him*.

One thing we can say for sure. No matter how severely God may test your faith, you will never be tested more than He tested Abraham. But His reasons are the same. The test God put to Abraham is the same one Jesus puts to us: Are you willing to give up the one thing you most want to keep?

For many of us, the one thing we most want to keep is our own

lives, especially if we're comfortable. But the gospel of Jesus calls on us to give up our lives and follow Him with our whole hearts, which is exactly what Abraham did. So where did Abraham get his radical faith? There's only one way that will ever happen. That kind of absolute loyalty can come only from putting our complete faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Some call this radical, and of course it is, but it's also the way the Bible describes the normal Christian life. And there is no "second" way. There is only "the" way. We'll have a lot more to say about this as we go along, but that's exactly the kind of radical faith in God that Abraham had and that, by following his example, we can have too.

What are you hanging on to that keeps you from fully trusting Christ with the details of your life? Like James at the beginning of the chapter, what is your "Brandy" that you need to give back to God? That is the thing He is asking you to let go of.

GROWING YOUR FAITH MUSCLE

My first calling was as a real estate developer, and I loved it. It made me feel alive. But then the Orlando office market became seriously overbuilt. Vacancies hit an all-time record. A major tenant moved out of one of our office buildings. As hard as we tried, we just could not find a replacement.

One of my investors had too much of his money in that one deal, and he came unglued. He started spreading rumors and threatened a lawsuit. It got to me. At that point I didn't have much faith in myself and I barely knew God. The situation seemed impossible, humanly

speaking. I thought for sure this investor was going to splash my name all over town, my reputation would be ruined, and that would be the end of my real estate career. Before long, I also started to question my faith in God.

Then one day I read,

Have no fear of sudden disaster
or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,
for the LORD will be your confidence
and will keep your foot from being snared. (Proverbs
3:25–26)

My chest started to pound. The Lord spoke to my heart, and I believed God in the face of unbelievable circumstances—only a little at first. It was just a baby step, but I took it.

My little bit of faith must have been at least as big as a mustard seed because I found the courage to carry on. Even though the business deal got worse, not better, I was able to resolve my problems with the investor without legal action. And my faith grew.

So the next time you're in a situation where God asks you to strike out into unknown territory, or He makes you wait far longer than seems normal, or He asks you to give up so much that you wonder if it's worth the cost, pull an Abraham. Believe God anyway in the face of what seem like impossible circumstances.

That's one of the main ways He is making you into the man He wants you to be. The more you use your faith muscle, the bigger it will get.

The advantage of walking with God in faith over the years is that you actually come to a place where it is harder to doubt than believe, because you have seen Him act so many times before. That's what has happened to me over the many years that have passed since that miracle in my early real estate days. That's what happened to Abraham. And maybe that has already happened to you. If not, God most definitely wants that to be your experience too.

So, what has God called you to do that may look outrageous? You may have no idea what you're getting into.

The question He is asking you is simple: Will you do it anyway?

For Reflection and Discussion

1. What is God calling you to trust Him for that makes you say, "Are You kidding me, God? How could that possibly happen?"
2. What was the operative principle in Abraham's life according to Hebrews 11:8, 11, and 17? How did that principle play out in the three tests we looked at in this chapter?
3. Which of Abraham's three tests—or some other test—are you currently facing? How is God showing you that you can believe Him anyway in the face of what seem like impossible circumstances?



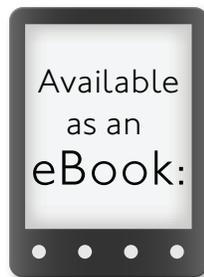
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