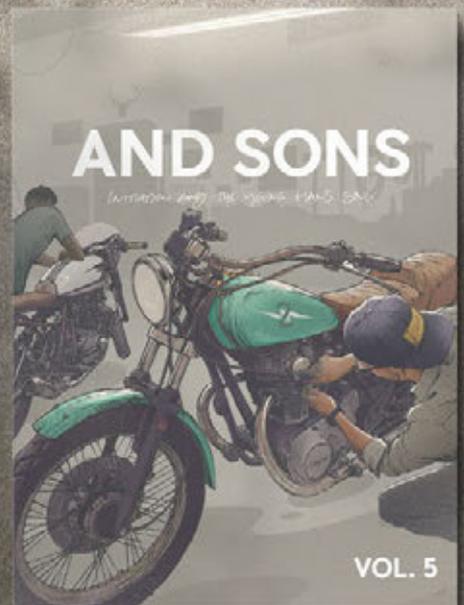
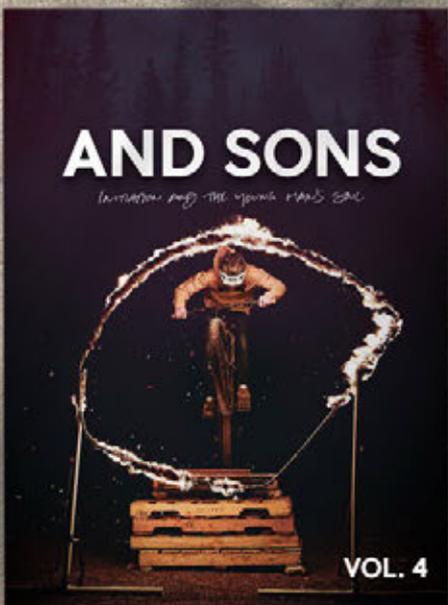
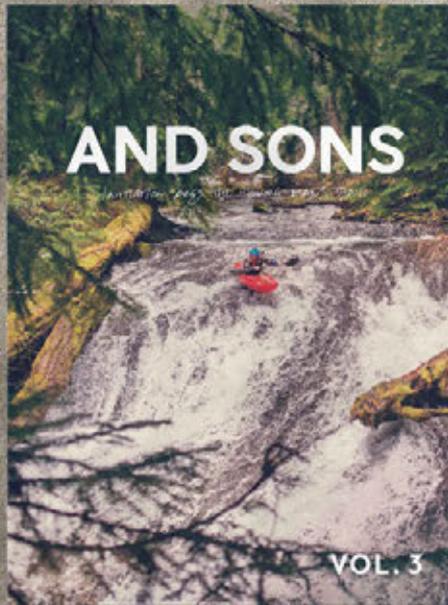


AND SONS

INITIATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL



VOL. 10



AND SONS

IMITATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL

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CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT

(But only the stuff that will feed a young man's soul)

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Front cover and this page by Eli Dale





Image courtesy of the Rollie Free collection.

In 1948, motorcycle racer Rollie Free made history by breaking the world motorcycle speed record on the Bonneville Salt Flats. Free achieved a remarkable speed of 150.313 miles per hour on a modified Vincent HRD Black Shadow motorcycle, wearing nothing but a bathing suit, a shower cap, and shoes to reduce wind resistance. This daring and iconic feat has become a legendary moment in motorcycle racing history. As seen on the front cover of this issue, our own Wookie Jones took a stab at recreating a bit of Rollie's glory while on the Bolivian Salar. However, his top speed was significantly lower.

FOREWORD

Early this spring, I read *The Hobbit* to my children of 6 and 4 years old. Well, at least I read it to my six-year-old. The four-year-old seemed more content to do headstands and hum to himself. I did my best to recreate an experience from my own childhood: tucked into the blankets of my bunk bed, eyes wide as I listened to my father do the voices of Gandalf, Thorin Oakenshield, Gollum, Smaug, Bilbo and the rest. As we neared the end of the book, where Bilbo is retracing his steps and saying his farewells to first the dwarves, then the elves, then Beorn, and finally Gandalf (something we accomplished over weeks of reading snippets at a time), I noticed that my six-year-old was crying. I asked her why. “I hate goodbyes, daddy. I’m so sad to be leaving Bilbo and his adventure and his friends.”

That’s when I started crying too. “I hate goodbyes as well, sweetheart.” Endings can be really hard. And here we are at another ending: Volume 10 of *And Sons*, the final print volume and the ending of *And Sons*.

After 10 years, two series on YouTube, 34 issues of the online magazine, 242 episodes of the podcast, a feature-length film, hundreds of interactions on social media, email, and in person, and 10 print volumes, it is time for this chapter to end.

As its steward, I feel the emotional nature of this deeply. I am proud of what we have created, brought to my knees by the stories that you, our tribe, have shared over the years. I am grateful for the relationships built over this decade, and for the growth I have personally experienced throughout this endeavor. It’s difficult to land something that I have built with so many other people. But it is also time for the next story to begin.

In the words of Mary Oliver,

*you must be able to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it*

*against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.*

(from “In Blackwater Woods”)

And Sons is hardly a mortal being, but the people that create it, edit it, read it, and share it are. To you I say: Thank you. Endings are hard. It has been my honor to play some part of your story.

– Sam Eldredge

READER MAIL

Sam, thank you and the whole And Sons team over the years for your courage to risk and your creative spirit. I've met some amazing people through your work and have encountered the Father in ways I never thought possible.

– @anthemoftheadventurer

And Sons has been a huge blessing for my life. You guys have been inspiring me for many years already. Thank you for the project, thank you for being honest and real. And I really mean that. Speaking about younger me: oh I miss that little girl. When I remember what it was to be a child, I can feel alive again.

– @art.and.god

Sam, thank you to you, your brothers and the team for leading with the courage to be vulnerable, for seeking a deeper, truer way and for the willingness to share your treasures. And Sons has been a blessing. For now, may the road rise up to meet you. Further up, further in.

– @jon_timms



Luke and Victoria Massey, seen here in 2019, sent this snapshot in with this comment: “Husband and wife that And Sons together go through hell and stay together.”

And Sons Magazine has been a major blessing in my life as it has to many others. There's a sense of loss as it all comes to an end, but the legacy you all built remains in the lessons learned, the joy, laughter, and tears from reading the stories and listening to the podcast over the years. I'm still going through and listening to old podcasts and gleaning from the wisdom and experiences shared! May a fair wind be ever in your sails. God bless you all on your journey!

– Christopher Morgan

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!! It has been a blast and a beautiful ride! Now, on to the next adventure ahead. We will cheer you on!

– Paul Leininger

As an older son with a son of my own, And Sons has fueled my list for all things good in my manhood journey and to face the fears that held me back.

– David Riffel

Wow. What courage it must take to truly listen to the nudge that it's time to end something and look onward to the next adventure. Thank you for all that you have done and stewarded for so many. So excited for whatever you have coming next. Blessings to you and your whole family.

– @artbyskay

Thank you for the life change and growth you inspired in me. Thank you for your courage and vulnerability. Thank you for the generosity of sharing your life with many. I have been inspired, encouraged, and challenged by your efforts and by the way you have created space for Jesus to do his thing.

– @clocksd

Thank you so much Sam and all at And Sons magazine. Your work has been such an encouragement—glad I have (almost) the full collection to share with my children in a few years time! If you're ever over in England, drop me a note and I'll gladly take you out stalking (that's British for deer hunting) and share a glass around the fire. Cheers!

– Paul Boulton



July 4, 2018: Blaine Winters and dad Greg on the summit of Mount Harvard.

And Sons has been a source of life and refreshment and challenge to my soul for a number of years. It will be sad to see it go. But thank you for everything you have invested into it. It's been an incredible privilege to have been a part of it. Please say that the article archives will stay accessible! Take care, and I pray God's favor on you and your family during this next season.

– Tim Ashcroft

And Sons has truly been a blessing in my life. While I'm incredibly sad to see it end, I'm eternally grateful for you and the team. I'm also excited for you and what God has planned in your next chapter. I hope our paths cross again soon.

– Will Clarke

So amazing, guys. Ten years. Well done. Excited to see what's next!

– Justin Rizzo

The podcast was the greatest ever. In respect to the magazine, in a time when print media was pretty dead, it was such an interesting immersive experience reading the magazine. You guys will be missed!

– Andy Flaherty

Thank you for everything. If I were to sit back and tell the stories of how God used And Sons in specific and wonderful ways, we'd be here for quite a while. The words, "thank you" cannot do it justice. Y'all have shown this generation what a genuine walk with Jesus can look like, and the joy that follows from it (despite the many hardships). Whatever is next for you guys, I'll be praying. Enjoy this celebration of finishing this race!

– Isaac Groeger

Thanks for the journey. And Sons and Wild at Heart have impacted my life and my family more than y'all will ever know.

– Ryan Douglas Martin

LOSS IS PART OF THE PROCESS

Words: John "Padre" Eldredge
Images: Wookiee Jones





I hate endings. I really do.

Even though I understand. There's a time for everything, a season for all things. I get that. But still. It has been such an honor and such a rich source of joy to produce this journal for 10 years with my sons and my team. We have loved walking alongside you, each of you. So this is hard, landing this project. There is loss—and it's really important to name loss when it occurs in our lives.

Caring for your soul requires that you don't just blast past it. Much of the anxiety and depression sweeping the world right now is the result of people ignoring loss, transition and the ending of things. It all just stacks up inside.

This, too, is an important lesson in initiation—things have a season to them. Even friendships. Some last for a lifetime, but those are few and rare. Most friendships are for a season of our lives. It isn't wrong when the season comes to an end. You haven't blown it; God's not holding out on you. Everything has a season. Learning to navigate transitions like this is crucial for the masculine soul.

The art is to watch carefully what rises in your heart and tend to it.

Through a series of transitions, endings and losses, we come to learn how to hold things lightly. To express gratitude for the time we get to enjoy them, and to be willing to accept transitions without going to feelings of abandonment, cynicism or resignation. It's important to "name" endings and transitions, and to grieve them. We will grieve the landing of this beautiful journal.

But we will not despair. We will not go to that orphaned place that says, "It's always like this. Why even care?" Because we know that God is with you, he is with us, and he has good things for all of us ahead.

*Everything has a season.
Learning to navigate transitions like this
is crucial for the masculine soul.*

Still, I hate writing this last article. I really do. My stomach feels queasy and my eyes are tearing up. "Catch my heart, Lord." That's my go-to prayer when stuff like this is happening: "Catch my heart." May he catch yours, too.

Now, having said that, it's not like we're leaving the planet. The plan all along was to integrate the followers of And Sons into the broader community of Wild at Heart. There is a rich and lively "kingdom" going on still! We have weekly podcasts, daily readings, robust apps and a host of treasures you can feast on. So though this journal is landing, we invite you to come and walk with us, in many ways.

Let me suggest a few...



1. PODCASTS

There's the weekly Wild at Heart podcast hosted by me. We also have a bi-weekly podcast called Become Good Soil hosted by Morgan Snyder on our team (he's been a contributor here for years). Morgan's podcast focuses a good deal on masculine initiation, so take note of that.

2. OUR APPS

There's the Wild at Heart app, which has some really cool features like our Daily Reading, and a lot of our video content for free. There's also the Pause app, which is designed to help you center yourself in God every day and receive his care, his strength.

3. GET TO A BASIC

We've been hosting Wild at Heart "Boot Camps" for men here in Colorado for years. They are killer...but they're hard to get into. So we launched a new program called "Basic," in which local allies are holding these retreats all over the U.S. and the world. It's our teaching, our content by video session, with live interaction and hang time with some really good men. The reports are that they are just like getting to an event in Colorado. If I were you, I would get to a Basic this year. (Or host one for your pals!) Check it out at WILDATHEART.ORG/BASIC.

Now, let me close with this:

We are really proud of you. Really. Your choice to walk with us over the years says so much about your character and your good heart. You are in a rare company of men. Well done!

You are going to be well. You are going to flourish. Because the God who is our Father is your Father, too, and because Jesus himself lives within you.

This transition is hard, and that's good, because things should matter to us. Tune into what's surfacing in you as you process this final issue, and especially as you lay the last issue of *And Sons* down. Pay attention to what your soul is saying, and invite God right there.

We'll see you on another platform of ours, or we'll see you at The Feast.

Love,
Padre ■



THE AND SONS INTERVIEW

Jonathan David Helser

By Darren Thornberry



Jonathan David Helser and his wife, Melissa Helser, lead worship around the world and are deeply entwined with their artistic community in North Carolina. We are grateful that Jonathan took time to discuss with us the relationship that men have with worship music and also the beauty and power that occurs when guys let go and engage in worship wholeheartedly.



AS: *What obstacles do men, both leaders and participants, encounter in worship?*

JH: The obstacle goes all the way back to the first question God asked us in Eden: Where are you? Will we dare to own where we are and step out from behind our fig leaves of performance, step out from behind posing, and dare to say, “God, this is where I actually am.” That’s what captured God’s heart when King David would come before Him with his broken and bleeding heart as his sacrifice. The book of Psalms has every emotion, moments of high joy and deep pain.

So we need to decide we’re not going to hide behind performance and instead rip our hearts open. To say “God, here I am. Have all of me. I pour myself out to you. I will dare to own where I am with You right now.” Think about the tax collector in the Temple (Luke 18). The Pharisees look down on him but the tax collector is asking God for mercy, praying David’s prayer from Psalm 51: “Have mercy on me, oh God.” He knows he’s a mess and he’s in touch with his heart. So who do you think went home from that event closer to the heart of the Father?

AS: *What happens when men go all in and freely worship?*

JH: I think many of us have become so familiar with certain scripture passages that we’re no longer fascinated by them. Things sound cliché. Many of us have heard the scripture “God inhabits the praises of his people” most of our lives, but we have lost touch with the sheer wonder of what that really means. I am fascinated by this verse! God fills the room, our bodies, and our thoughts when we praise. He can’t stay away when we open our hearts in that way. Anything can happen.

I host a mens retreat on our property called Becoming a Wholehearted Man. Last year, 55 men attended. After two days of deep heart work, we had a worship night. The sound was freedom, wild joy and deep passion. We then went into a time of praying for their families. Men were crying out for their kids, their wives, their homes and their cities. Thunder and war were erupting from their hearts. The God who is lion and lamb came into the room. And there is nothing like a room full of men fully surrendering and saying yes. Kingdom multiplication happens. Warfare occurs.

Worship is a picture of the heart, not necessarily music. In both Greek and Hebrew, it means to bow, to kneel, to press your face against the earth in reverence and adoration. Praise has much more to do with music. In fact, there are seven Hebrew words for praise and one of them is “Zamar,”

which means to pluck the strings of an instrument. Praise is very musical! If you play me one of the songs that Melissa and I fell in love to, the posture of my heart turns to my wife. It remembers. It rekindles. Music has a way of causing us to remember. So when we praise, we turn our hearts to the Lord. And yes, worship is way more than music, but I am so grateful for how music helps me fall in love. When King David played the harp, demons fled (1 Samuel 16:23). When King Jehosaphat positioned worshippers in front of the army of Judah, they routed their enemies (2 Chronicles 20:20-22). Something mysterious happens when music is combined with the presence of the Lord.

AS: *And what happens when men decide not to engage?*

JH: When just a few people are saying no, that little bit of yeast affects the whole room. I have seen the spirit of just a few people shut things down in a room. I have felt the judgment of guys standing in the back with their arms crossed, frowning on the whole thing, with the position that the expression of worship is too much, too extreme, and not necessary in order to touch God’s heart. It brings to mind the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume that was worth a year’s wages that she broke and anointed Jesus’ feet with (Mark 14). If you remember, there were people in the back of the room questioning her worship and saying it was too much. They asked, “Why didn’t she sell that and use the money to help the poor?” But Jesus said she had done something beautiful for him.

AS: *When you’re leading worship, do you notice what’s happening in people’s hearts?*

JH: I love getting to lead worship with my wife. She is so aware of how people in the room are responding to the Lord, and she can be in touch with her emotions a lot faster than I can. I learn from her every time we lead together. One of the things we always try to pray is that God will give us his love for the people in the room we are leading. That we would see them with His eyes. There can be a tendency as worship leaders to check out, close your eyes and focus on the Lord, but we want and need to be loving people with God’s heart in those moments.

AS: *You’ve said that your music reflects your desire for the Earth to look just like Heaven. What does that mean to you?*

JH: It’s in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray—Your kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven. Jesus pierced the veil between Heaven and Earth.





When we worship, we want to see hearts released, fear gone, people walking in with broken hearts and walking out whole-hearted, broken bodies healed . . . Heaven poured out in the room, in cities, in homes, in marriages and in hearts.

AS: *Have you seen physical healings happen during times of worship?*

JH: This might be one of my favorite stories. A couple of years ago, our dear friend Joel's 2-year-old son, Jackson, was in the intensive care unit, and one night the doctor said he would not survive the night without a miracle. Melissa and I were at home getting this news and being asked to pray like never before. I felt a giant of unbelief rise up in front of me. Heaviness and disappointment and resignation that the boy would die. But a violent hope was also building deep in my gut. I started singing this line, "I raise a hallelujah" . . . I saw a picture of a desolate battlefield where a soldier picks up and raises a fallen flag and ignites hope in the army. It was messy. Emotion and tears and singing. I recorded a voice memo of this song and sent it to Joel. When Joel got the song he would hold the phone over his son and play this song. Not only did Jackson survive the night but he was out of the hospital a week later. Six months later, when we recorded "Raise a Hallelujah," Jackson was right there on his dad's shoulders.

Another crazy story: a family was vacationing on the beach and their 12-year-old son went limp in the water. He was blue. No pulse. He was gone. Nurses who happened to be on the beach started CPR, and minutes were flying by with no change. The family was in a panic. Then the boy's younger sister and her cousins started singing "Raise a Hallelujah." Suddenly, there was a heartbeat. Long story short: Full recovery, no brain damage, totally fine. And all this from a broken little prayer in our living room.

I would say that I am thankful but not satisfied. I long to see more healings happen like those we read about in the gospels as we gather to worship. And in that I include my wife, who has had a chronic illness since we've been married.

AS: *What kind of lyrics do you write in worship and why?*

JH: I write worship songs that seek to create a meeting place for God's heart and the hearts of his kids. Songs that say something to God and expect Him to say something back to us. I think about the elders in Heaven casting down their crowns at Jesus' feet (Revelation 4). They do this over and over, but who keeps putting the crowns back on their heads? We are God's beloved. He puts crowns back on our heads.

So I want to create songs that cause us to remember who He is. I ache as a songwriter to help people say something to God that their hearts want to say but perhaps they don't know how. I am constantly frustrated by worship songs, even my own, because there is so much more I want to experience in God. I want to write the kind of music that causes my heart to see another side of God's face. Songs help us see a part of Him that we haven't seen before. Imagine angels who have been with God for [millennia] seeing new aspects of His face. God, help me see another part of who you are.

AS: *What is challenging about worship music also being an industry?*

JH: I believe one of the greatest acts of warfare is when we fully engage worship, when we fully pour out our hearts. If the enemy can't stop people from worshipping, he'll try to distract them with money, fame, and influence. I can see where we've both failed the test and passed it. So my prayer is for clean hands and a pure heart. A person might hear a song on Christian radio that doesn't come from the heart and associate it with all Christian music. But I know that God's doing good things in the industry. There's warfare in it. And I have had to repent about the judgment of the industry and pray for people. Some in the industry are heartbroken.

AS: *What is your hope for men who find themselves in a worship setting?*

JH: I long for men to slow down and surrender to the love song that God has been singing over them their whole life. To move beyond what's on the screen and sing what's really happening in their hearts to the Lord. We love God because he first loved us. Don't rush into trying to perform for the Lord. Slow down, pause, and realize Jesus has been chasing you for your whole life, asking "Where are you?" Psalm 139 says His thoughts outnumber the grains of sand on the shore. God, pour an ocean in each of our chests.

I am grateful that we have the songs of David to draft on. One hundred and fifty raw, honest prayers. You might want to read one every day. Read with your body, your tongue, your voice. Move with the psalm. Let David's words wake something up in you. ■

Editor's Note: Find Jonathan Helser wherever you stream music and online at JONATHANHELSE.COM.







Redeeming Power

RECLAIMING AUTHENTIC MASCULINITY

Words Andrew Bauman

Images Wookie Jones

The answer to becoming a safe and good man is not becoming weaker (humble, yes—weak, no); it’s about becoming more powerful (not aggressive).

However, stepping into authentic masculine power can seem like an oxymoron that conjures up images of the Marlboro man, or thoughts of violence, homophobia, misogyny, money, and greed. That is not the masculinity I am referring to, but only the kind that taps into our God-given glory and power. Healthy power is living into who God has made us to be. This is one of my biggest problems with the 12-step model of recovery. Naming your “powerlessness” over addiction is a very important first step, but if you don’t take your power back and reclaim your lost strength over addiction you can remain a slave to your addictive cycles. We can have power over addiction when we remember who, and whose, we are. We are children of God, heirs (Romans 8: 16–17) and image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:26), and are meant for glory, goodness, and liberation. We must redeem power from its negative connotations and reclaim an authentic masculine power that liberates rather than oppresses.

I remember as an adolescent trying to “prove” I was a man. I would attempt ridiculously dangerous feats, trying to reassure my fragile ego, knowing if I survived it, then I was a man. I remember jumping off an 80-foot bridge into a lake one night and not being able to move my neck for a week. Another time after college, I hiked the Appalachian Trail for three months, icing my swollen feet every few miles after I tore all the muscles in the bottom of my feet and falling 1,273 miles short of completing the entire 2,173-mile journey. I remember setting up boxing matches with some buddies, trying to knock each other’s heads off to prove how tough we were. I remember sexualizing and objectifying

women, trying to “get some” from the “hottest” girls at school as a way to fit in with the boys and feel more “like a man.” These are examples of fragile masculinity that I used to live in, though these feats could never answer the question inside my soul no matter who or what I brought my question to. I was committed to proving that I was not my father, which ultimately led me to be very much like him indeed.

I remember visiting a family member’s church during a holiday. The pastor put up two images side by side—one a male dressed in a romper and the other a picture of an American military man with an assault rifle. He said, “Which is the image of true masculinity? Which one would you want to protect you? This is a picture of what men are becoming these days, and this is what we men must return to.” My wife got up and walked out. I sat there a bit stunned, grabbed my pen, and wrote about what I was experiencing. Though I am not much of a romper man myself, the picture of healthy masculinity portrayed at this church was pure violence. Really?! What type of masculine power is that? If bearing an assault rifle is what makes us a true man, then we are deeply misinformed and misguided on what is authentically masculine. Katherine Fung of Newsweek reported in March 2021 that AR-15 rifles had been used in 26 percent of the last 80 mass shootings in America.

Evangelicals have had a long-standing confusion about what healthy masculine power truly is. Dr. Kristin Kobes Du Mez speaks to this reality in her book, “Jesus and John Wayne.” She states, “Although Wayne occupies a prominent place in the pantheon of evangelical heroes, he is but one of many rugged and even ruthless icons of masculinity





that evangelicals imbued with religious significance. Like Wayne, the heroes who best embodied militant Christian masculinity were those unencumbered by traditional Christian virtues... For many evangelicals, these militant heroes would come to define not only Christian manhood but Christianity itself.”

I grew up on this as the ideal of what masculinity was. No wonder I became an ass. Somewhere in my adolescent brain, my “assness” was connected to what it meant to be a real man of God. This is so backward and dangerous, and sadly, all too common.

So what is “redeemed power” and healthy God-pleasing authentic masculinity? We have many examples of what it is not, but what is it truly? We must have more models showing what it is and not just negative examples of what it is not.

I think of two examples from my own life and one from the life of Jesus. (Just to be clear, Jesus has a lot more examples of healthy masculinity than just this one, but I just thought of this one and wanted to write about it.)

First, I think of the masculinity it took me to hold my son’s lifeless body in my hands. We are not meant to

hold death and love so closely. I think of the agonizing act of handing his beautiful body back to the nurse as I crumbled to the floor and screamed for hours. I think of my courage when I decided that my friends and I were the ones that needed to bury him in the earth with our bare hands. Is that uniquely masculine? No. Yet, it took all of me; it took grief and courage for me to honor the truth of what needed to be done. I can think of nothing more painful and more masculine in my life. Authentic masculinity is a unique mixture of strength, kindness, courage, and grief.

Another more recent example of authentic masculinity from my own life was the sudden death of my father. It all happened so quickly. He was recovering from gallbladder surgery on Monday, talking to the nurse about his kids and doing well. Not long after that, he told the nurse he was not feeling well and his blood pressure suddenly dropped, his eyes rolled back in his head, and his heart stopped beating. They tried for 45 minutes to revive him. He was ready to go, but I still had things to tell him. Maybe that’s why I needed to face his body, to tell him the things he wasn’t ready to hear while he was alive. My wife and I flew down to Florida

and were greeted by the boisterous funeral director. The brash loudness of his voice on such a somber occasion caught me off guard. As we walked into the dimly lit entryway, we were surrounded by musty 1970s decor. Without ceremony, he hastily grabbed the viewing room door handle and invited us to walk into the room where my father's body lay. I stopped him and asked for a moment to prepare my own body, and for some water to help soothe the lump in my throat. A staff woman hastily passed by us into my dad's viewing room muttering, "Oh hell," then turned to us in apologetic horror upon realizing that we were standing right behind her.

The chatty funeral director quickly changed the subject, asking where we were from. "Seattle," Christy answered. She attempted to buffer his insensitivities as I stared silently at the door, trying to swallow my dread. He began showing us pictures on his phone of his daughter's apartment; she had apparently just moved to Seattle. I knew what I needed to do. I needed to face my terror and come face to face with my father. My grief and strength were so close to the surface. I interrupted the director's monologue about Seattle traffic and told him I was ready to see my dad.

He opened the door to reveal a large viewing room where there were more than 30 chairs set up and facing my dad's body. We slowly began to walk to the front of the room, but I had to stop about five feet away. I could not move any closer. My tears and loud moans began as I tried to wrestle with my body to move nearer. After about a minute or so, I had to turn my back; it was all too much to bear. I stood there and wept.

While he was alive, he had asked to be cremated, so there was no casket. My dad was lying on a bed covered by a blue patchwork quilt. He looked so peaceful, I could have mistaken him for sleeping. I kept wondering if he was going to open his eyes, if he would wake up, if maybe I would get another chance to talk with him. It felt strange and wrong that no one else was there to witness this. I wept for a long time, surprised by the amount of un-lived life I was grieving; all my hopes and years of fighting for my father to be someone he could not. He was like a familiar stranger. After my tears subsided, I asked Christy to sing. Soft stanzas of old hymns gently filled the room. Then I played a song my father loved: "Daddy's Song" by Dennis Jernigan. Another wave of emotion swept over me and I asked Christy to leave so I could be alone with him. With all the strength I could muster, I said aloud, "Why, Dad,

why? Why were you not around? Why??" I continued to ask, hoping to somehow understand how he had remained so distant and uninvolved in my life. I thought about what a cool person I'd turned out to be and how much he had missed out on. I told him I forgave and loved him. I told him the truth; that I was disappointed and had needed him when he wasn't there. I wept loudly. I told him I loved him and whispered goodbye. I turned and slowly walked out of the room, knowing this was one of the bravest and kindest moments of courage in my life.

Now looking back at this moment, I think this is what it means to be authentically masculine. A mixture of kindness, strength, and grief that creates safety, stability, and rest to others that I am in a relationship with. I listened to my body and knew what I needed to do. I knew what I needed to say. I knew I needed to face his body. My siblings said they weren't interested in viewing his body, so I needed to pay the \$400 to prep his body so I could have the viewing by myself. I knew what I needed to do no matter the cost. My body needed to process my loss in this way; it was the only thing that made sense to this grand new absence in my life. And here, two years later from the loss of my father, I am so glad I had the courage to face my heartache and my father in the way I did. This moment was one of the most masculine moments of my life up to this point.

*Now looking back at this moment,
I think this is what it means to be
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of kindness, strength, and grief that
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others that I am in a relationship with.*

My final example of healthy masculinity is Jesus himself. Stay with me here. The story that most reminds me of authentic masculinity is the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. This story has quickly become one of my all-time favorites and a beautiful picture of the healthy masculine.



*This is our call as well.
To step into our authentic masculine power
is to know who we are and give of ourselves out
of a place of centeredness and security.*

Jesus models the breaking down of stigmas and social strongholds in John 4:1-42 with the woman at the well. At that time, Jewish men were not permitted to even talk with Samaritan women in public. The woman wonders aloud in verse 9, “How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” Jesus ignores social barriers, demonstrating the truth that all are equally important. The cultural norm at the time was to view women as unclean as described so eloquently in the ancient Jewish texts: “menstruants from the cradle” (Mishnah, Niddah 4:1). Patriarchy and misogyny were thick in Jesus’ day, and it is in this cultural context that we see how radical this story of Jesus is.

Theologian Dr. Matthew Williams (2011) points out this woman was an “outcast within the outcasts.” He states, “The Samaritans would be labeled as unclean by Jewish people. And, the Samaritan woman would also be labeled as an unclean sinner by the Samaritans themselves. Thus, she was an outcast within the outcasts. Rejected by the Jewish people; rejected by her own people; apparently even rejected by her five husbands, she was unclean and carried shame around with her every day of her life. Perhaps that is why she came to the water well—alone—in the middle of the day.”

Yet Jesus treats her no differently than if he were there with King Herod himself. He invites this outcast into a deep intimacy by asking for a drink. He actually shared spit with an “unclean” woman! The prevailing thought of the day was that this act alone would literally send a person to Hell.

Jesus steps into his masculine power through this radical act of kindness and love! The strength he shows by choosing to break social norms and show love to this woman who was socially scorned is wildly powerful in every way. These are the types of powerful subversive actions that will eventually lead to our Savior being crucified on a cross and laying his life down for those who do not see him. It reminds me of the call of Ephesians 5:25, “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her” (NLT). This is our call as well. To step into our authentic masculine power is to know who we are (no more insecure boys masquerading as narcissistic men) and give of ourselves out of a place of centeredness and security. Jesus knows who he is with the women at the well, and he knows what he offers: “living water” (John 4:14).

Power is not a bad word. What will you do with yours? Will you abuse? Will you have power over or power with? Authentic masculinity is meant to help liberate not oppress, to humbly grieve loss, and celebrate and love with deep abandon. ■

*Editor’s Note: The author is Co-Founder and Director of the Christian Counseling Center: For Sexual Health & Trauma (CCC). Redeeming Power is a chapter in his new book, “How Not To Be An *ss—Essays on Becoming a Good & Safe Man.” Find him online at ANDREWJBAUMAN.COM.*



Photo by Avi Theret

Endings.

Words Stasi Eldredge



Let it be known that I hate endings, partings, goodbyes; even a “see you later” can be fraught with emotion for me when I don’t have any idea when the “later” will be.

We have had horses for 17 years. They have been boarded at Wolfe Ranch three minutes from our home. One of them was Kokolo, a gorgeous paint, Blaine’s horse. But when Blaine got busy in high school and then moved away first to college, then to grad school—well, he was John’s and mine. He was a noble horse. Regal as only a horse can be. He was mighty yet gentle. Opinionated yet never once reared up in all his years. When colic suddenly took his life four years ago, the loss of him was heartbreaking to us all.

Even if Kokolo hadn’t seen Blaine for nine months, he would rejoice in recognition, whinnying in delight at their reunion. In Kokolo’s heart, though I know he loved John and me, he remained Blaine’s horse. Blaine was the only one who could leap onto Kokolo’s back with no saddle and run with him in glory. It was a sight to see.

But I took care of Kokolo most of the time for many years. I gave him grain and groomed him. I took him out to the pasture and brought him back in; I tended him when ill, waited while the vet did her thing, stood mostly patiently by holding him steady while the farrier cared for him. It was me with all of them. I admit that I am aware my memory plays tricks on me now, enlarging my role. It certainly wasn’t always me. Not even close. But still. I have my memories. I have those years.

I didn’t grow up with horses. I didn’t dream of them as a child or as an adult. My husband did all three. In my forties, they were thrust upon me though I was willing. In those early years, my Father was teaching me a whole new terrain of my heart through them calling me to rise up and learn. To not give in to fear at the horse’s power. To become strong. To grow. To love them. To let them heal me in ways I didn’t know I needed.

And I did. I studied. I worked. I grew. I healed. My heart changed, enlarging in places to the shape of a horse.

Kokolo’s long-term companion is Whistle, a beautiful bay with two white socks on his rear legs. He was a cutting horse in his youth—of fine pedigree and stunning. Horse people always ask about his line. Whistle is gentle and needs much assurance, coming close and nuzzling often. Whistle is John’s horse. A natural horseman, only John could give Whistle the assurance he needed. Watching them together was a living symphony. John, so at home on Whistle, and Whistle exhibiting his glory stride by stride.

Whistle got injured five years ago. He can no longer be ridden but his beauty is not diminished. Still the loss of that glory stung. The vet thought we should consider putting him down. John gave an unequivocal “No” and nursed Whistle slowly, day by day, over many months, back to the place where he could walk again without a limp. And now, well, now Whistle can run.

When Kokolo died, the cries from Whistle lasted for two days — sounds no one at the stable had ever heard from a horse before. Sounds that would break your heart. Whistle grieved for months. Perhaps he grieves still. I know he remembers. We sure do.

The stable provided new companionship for Whistle, so he wasn’t alone but none of these horses were Kokolo—the horse he had grazed with, run with and sometimes been run off by for 17 years. It’s been hard.



Photo by Fernando Puente

Today, Whistle was trailered by John off the ranch he has known for the better part of his life. He is going to live on Blaine's farm now. He got into the trailer easily but became anxious once inside—whinnying for his old life. We prayed. I pray peace to his heart even now. Peace and ease to the transition. He is moving an hour away. He will be cared for and loved well and soon meet a new companion horse. I am so grateful that he is tucking in even more closely to our family. I will still see him though not nearly as often. No, not nearly as often.

I have been going to Wolfe Ranch for the better part of 17 years. Today was an ending. A goodbye. A passing with no “see you later” to the place.

In my life, I have lived through too many goodbyes: the endings of friendships, jobs, projects, relationships, my children's childhoods and the lives of those I love. I have sat with my soul and its mysteries until it could truly name the sorrow born of loss. Yes, endings are beginnings in disguise but sometimes the beginning won't be seen for a very long time and the “over” must be honored. And grieved. I have shed many tears. I know you have, too. As Gandalf said to Sam, “Not all tears are an evil.”

Back at the ranch, I took pictures of Whistle's stall, the stall that used to be Kokolo's. The stall I have wept with Whistle in as I told him my sorrows and my secrets, caring for him, singing to him, tending to him, and praying over him. I paid attention to the fragrance, listened to the unique sound of my footsteps on the sandy gravel—soaking it all in. I stood and remembered the place of learning, the place of apprenticeship, the place of challenge and beauty and longing and Fathering and loss and love.

I wept, my heart clenching in my chest, my tears falling in longing to hold on to the goodness and my soul almost bursting with the hope of the End to endings that can't come soon enough. ■

Not Good to Be Alone

Words & Image Erik Swenson

There are men who've done amazing things in isolation.

Adventurer Aron Ralston took a solo hike through Utah's Bluejohn Canyon and was pinned to a rock wall when a massive boulder shifted and rolled onto his hand. After being trapped for days, he eventually opted to break and amputate his own arm. He survived.

Or go back almost two centuries and you will find the story of Hugh Glass. He was a trapper who was left for dead after being severely mauled by a grizzly bear. It is said that Glass clawed and crawled hundreds of miles, mostly alone and under-resourced. Secondhand accounts and retellings can be fuzzy. And as with many old stories, real events have a way of morphing into legends. But the story of Glass grabs us for a reason. It provokes something in a man's heart. The will to survive, the choice to confront pain, all good things. The fight found in these rare men feels superhuman. But the risk is glorifying the idea of fierce independence.

Consider the following exchange between Alfred and Batman in *The Lego Batman Movie*.

Batman: "I don't do ships, as in relationships."

Alfred (later that night): "Do you want to talk about how you're feeling right now?"

Batman: "I don't talk about feelings, Alfred. I don't have any, I've never seen one, I'm a night-stalking, crime-fighting vigilante and a heavy-metal rapping machine. I don't feel anything emotionally except for rage, 24-7, 365, at a million percent. And if you think that there's something behind that, then you're crazy."

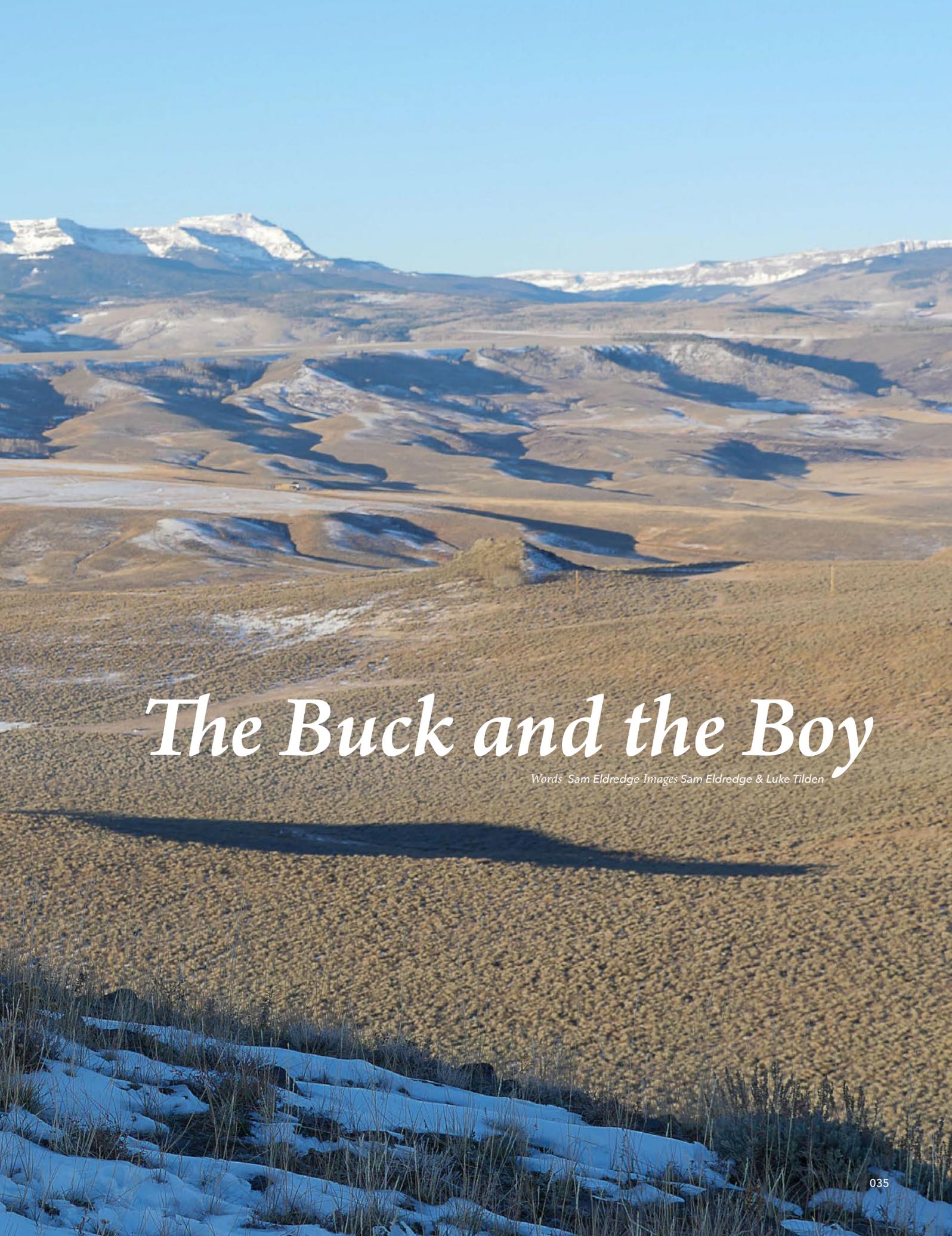
It's funny because it's true. It is tempting to close our hearts and our fists and just take on the storm. But the drive for independence is a lie. It is a lie that gets most men killed (you can die before your heart stops, by the way). Yes it is possible for a man to survive a bear attack or to inspire thousands with a story of self-rescue. But there is a reason these stories are rare. And what would have happened if these men had not been alone? How would their stories have ended differently?

It doesn't matter how strong we are, how much gear we have or what we think we know. If I am in the woods under a dense fog or buried in a blizzard, I need someone from the outside who can see clearly and show me the break in the trees.

There's no way around it. We need God and we need each other. The good news is God is already closer than we realize. All we have to do is ask him. The same principle applies to people. Those we love and who love us are often far more willing to help than we think. But are we able to communicate the need? And if we are looking for more friends who are willing to carry us, it's a good idea to become that kind of friend to others. ■







The Buck and the Boy

Words Sam Eldredge Images Sam Eldredge & Luke Tilden

Many hunting stories are apocryphal, which is a Protestant expression for: *Sure dad, I bet the bass you caught was 15 inches long but we really think you caught a minnow and spent the day drinking in the boat.*

Another way of putting it is this: With every retelling, the story changes a bit; it grows and takes on new shape and dimension. Was it cold that day? Give me a few tellings of the story and I'll be adding in how our breath misted in front of us and froze on our collars. Did you make eye contact with the animal you were hunting? After the fact we'll say that the whole world got still and a peace settled over us, that the animal seemed to speak through its brown eyes: *It's okay, I have come to you for just this moment.* You get the idea.

I think it is fascinating that our memories change every time we access them. Small, subtle changes, maybe. But other times we can change how we felt at a deep emotional level. It's like pulling out an old photo album ... we get our fingerprints all over them every time we crack it open. Don't believe me? The studies are out there.

So, now you have the admission of not only an untrustworthy narrator, but a self-admittedly fallible one. Under promise and over deliver and all that.

In the fall of 2022, I invited two friends to join me for a second rifle season elk and deer hunt at an undisclosed location. Like every good hunter and fisherman, I refuse to tell you exactly where I was lest you decide to join me there in the future and ruin all my fun. Safe to say we were in the mountains of Colorado or perhaps Pluto. For those non-hunter readers, this means that it was October or maybe November and that the first rifle season had already happened, which puts the animals on edge and makes the hunting more difficult. It also makes the tags easier to get.

The land that we were hunting is sacred to me, steeped in years, decades really, of stories and memories. On the Scottish island monastery of Iona there is an inscription on the wall meant to draw the attention of the pilgrims and visitors: This is a thin space. For me, that accurately describes the terrain we were visiting. In this thin space, I can still hear the echoes of the hammers and laughter as I built a deck the summer after I graduated high school with some friends. I can hear the sobs of my brother and his wife after they buried their miscarried daughter in the soil far too soon. I can smell the smoke of many a poker night cigar and the fields filled with wildflowers. I can see the faces forgotten from my youth and almost touch them. It is difficult to remember my age when I walk through these woods.

I have been hunting for around 20 years now, not always successfully, and somehow I still feel like a novice. They say you really know something when you need to teach it, and lately I've been feeling the pull to invite some friends into the space that is so much more than pulling a trigger. So it was that I found myself walking ahead of two friends in the predawn pitch, hoping to convey all the joy of the quiet, the pain of the miles and hours spent without so much as a tail spotted a mile a way to show for it, and the vastness of the ritual of going to the mountains in pursuit of meat for our family tables.

Most mornings, including this one, we began by climbing the bluff, which isn't all that impressive but sure kicks our butts at 5 a.m., having awoken just a handful of minutes before to pull on thermals, camo, boots, pack, headlamp, and rifle.











Rather than force myself to overcome the anxiety through sheer grit, I gave myself permission to feel the fear and understand where it was coming from.

Remember that bit about the thin space? I was hiking up the bluff in real time, leading my friends up the unmarked but memorized switch-back trail that weaves its way to the summit, and at the same time I was 16 and riding ATVs with my father... watching as I bail on the ATV right before it flips end over end all the way down the hill like something from Hollywood. We reached the top in distorted blue-black dawn, and I saw the memorial stone to my aunt, thought of when we used to climb this hill to get cell service and text our friends to remind them we still existed, and remembered how I sobbed my eyes out two years ago knowing that *And Sons* was coming to an end.

It's then that I felt a counterproductive thought bubble up from my distracted mind: I hope we don't see anything in the saddle. The thought surprised me. Why on earth would I go hunting, why would I take two friends into the mountains with all this history, and hope that we wouldn't see anything? And that's when the thought answered: because you've always had someone else to rely on and this time it's just us.

Oh. As I tune in internally I am aware of how young I feel. It's like I am a 13-year-old on my very first hunt, just there to wear the orange vest, drink Dr. Pepper, and shadow my dad. The 13-year-old in me is scared that we'll find something in the saddle and that we'll shoot it and that it will be entirely up to him to process the animal (not to mention teach the other guys how to do it the whole way through) and he isn't used to that. I mean, he's 13 and mostly thinks about playing Halo and kissing girls, for crying out loud.

Instead of getting pissed at myself, or succumbing to the feeling of inadequacy, I chose to honor and care for this inner boy. I felt compassion for him. I told him that I understood. Externally my booted feet were still moving forward, carrying me along the game trail that parallels the barbed wire fence along the bluff and leads

to the saddle. But internally I was giving the boy in me space to feel scared and out of his depth.

Then, I offered to take the wheel. I told him how old I am, how many years we have been hunting and how many animals I have processed. I told him that we have had lots of experience with our dad, with Blaine, with Morgan, and with others in how to handle what comes after pulling the trigger. I told him that it was okay to be scared, and that, if he would let me, I would take the lead and be the man for him. He said yes and settled back in a peace that came to define my morning.

The back and forth that morning was new to me, and also familiar. I have been learning to listen to the voices within and to give them the curiosity that they deserve. Rather than force myself to overcome the anxiety through sheer grit, I gave myself permission to feel the fear and understand where it was coming from. Then, with the grounding in the present, I offered to extend the strength to those younger places that I know I have. I doubt my friends trailing behind noticed my step falter, let alone had any idea of what was transpiring in my mind and heart. But for me, the interaction was crucial to my ability to be present, to enjoy the weekend, and to care for the young places within me.

We didn't see anything in the saddle that morning. Instead we saw a whole lot of nothing for several days and spent the time sharing stories, smoking cigars, talking about life and hunting stories and joining in the gambler's mindset that defines most hunters: I bet there's something over the next hill.

On the last day of the trip, we finally encountered a beautiful old buck, and as his deep brown eyes stared into mine and the world slowed before I pulled the trigger, I heard a voice inside me say: *It's okay, I have come to you for just this moment. You have what it takes.* ■



Voyage

Words KK Images Joel Bengts

The sails are pregnant with the wind;
they curve, full-bellied,
and the distance grows.
That once-familiar shore is left behind.
I seek new lands,
hope to return with treasure in my holds.
And now,
ripped sails on battered spars,
the long years passed,
I limp back home with empty, mildewed holds.
Search all you like:
you'll find no treasure there.
The place has changed, of course—
new houses and new barns, more sheep upon the hills,
the children grown and wed, their own bairns at their sides.
They glow with joy:
see what we have built.
I, too, had hoped to build.
But build with what?
I have no well-stocked hold.
And look.
My hands are scarred from wrestling with the sea,
and all my gold is only stories of the storm,
and barren tales of battles fought alone.
That ship? She'd been named Gift, you know. ■

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Sam asked, quite a while ago now, "Can you write a cover piece for this poem?"

"Sure, no problem," I said blithely.

The beginning of the next week I had some spare time, so I sat down to do just that.

Problem. I could not work out what to write. I reread it, felt it again to the extent of the palms of my hands hurting, but could not find words to put to it. It has taken me months to be able to name this poem, to define it.

It's a middle-of-the-story poem. It is what I wrote when I was in the midst of the chaos, the maelstrom, of a huge and devastating loss. And a loss that had come as a consequence of doing something that God had unmistakably put in front of me to do. It's the middle of a psalm of lament. And it is my worship. It is my worship for and in that time, when all I had to offer God was, "I will still turn toward you instead of away from you. All I have are the hurts of my heart, so I will offer those to you."

No "God you are so wonderful." No "God I am so confident in your goodness."

This is the middle of the psalm, and it was all I had at that time.



LESSONS FROM A RECOVERING MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

Words Ben Manly Images Wookie Jones



“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

I saw a stunning sunset the other day. The kind where you get a whiff of eternity, and it feels like Heaven reveals itself on Earth for just a moment. And yet, for as beautiful as it was, I didn't fully appreciate it. I wanted to! But I have this bad habit. Maybe you know the one.

I began to mountain climb. I thought to myself, “If I just walked up to that spot there, the view would be so much better.” Then I did it again...then again. Before I realized what I had done, the sun was below the horizon. The beauty had come and gone and I had left a gift not fully received.

I've done this type of thing countless times and in countless different ways. I reach and claw for more. For better. I look at the gift that I have on offer to receive from Abba and search for a way to will it into something better on my own. I do this really well... at least, I used to. Which is why I've done it for so long.

Throughout my life, the most prominent ways I climbed mountains were in school and sports. My identity was firmly in the prestigious “student-athlete” label for years. Between sixth grade and my senior year of high school, I earned straight A's on every single report card I got and, at the same time, I dedicated myself to becoming one of the best wrestlers in the state. At the peak of my mountain climbing, I desperately clung to a 4.0 GPA and a top 10 ranking as though they were life itself. I did truly love to learn and compete but somewhere along the way school stopped being about the joy of learning and wrestling stopped being about the joy of competition. They had become my identity and I wielded them as tools to control how others viewed me. Because, honestly, who doesn't admire intelligence and athleticism?

It's really comforting being in control of your own happiness like that. I would tell myself, “If I climb to the top of that mountain...If I just achieve this goal, then everything will be right. All will be satisfied and I will Finally...Become...Enough!” Some of that is natural, I suppose. I think that all of us wrestle with the feeling that we need to do or be certain things in

order to be satisfied in this life. But you would think that after getting to the top of enough mountains, and then being suckered into immediately climbing the next one, I would realize that the satisfaction I am convinced I would receive is only a hollow promise. I guess, at least subconsciously, I have known that for a long time. Yet, I haven't been able to find freedom from it because I haven't needed to. Until now.

Lately, much to my dismay, my ability to mountain climb has been declining. Every now and then helplessness seeps in like fog as it takes more and more effort to coax my heart into action. I no longer have the will to study for my classes the way that I once did. I prefer to spend my evening watching movies and reading instead of heading out to club events and job fairs. Unfortunately for me, this has come at a time and place where I am surrounded by peers who are able, as I had once done, to amass an abundance of accolades. I can feel my old habits trying to take hold.

Just the other day, as a lecture ended, I overheard a fellow classmate comment to another, “I don't even care about the exam tomorrow. It's not gonna be hard. I'm just waiting to hear back from the Detroit Tigers about the position that I got. I might need to go with the New York Giants as my backup plan.”

I can't deny that I wished that could still be my story, but I can't bring myself to do it anymore. The burden of placating my desire to mountain climb has become too great. It feels like I'm trying to pull-start an old mower. Even if I manage to muster enough willpower, I can feel my heart sputter into action for a few moments before it frustratingly falls dead again. Because, really, my heart is no longer interested in what I now know to be a hollow climb.

What my heart desires more than another accolade is healing. I long to grow a deeper understanding of my identity as God's beloved son, and now I would rather address the pain I've felt than try to butcher my heart any longer with the conviction that I am not good enough as is.



And that's scary! I'm not gonna lie about it. My need to mountain climb has been fueled by fear and shame at the thought that I alone wasn't worth getting to know. Striving for accolades offered me a path to keep that fear at bay. My achievements were tangible things I could point to that proved I had value. But that capacity to strive is gently being taken out of my grasp now. And Abba has been inviting me into freedom as my ability to confront my world without Him is slowly failing.

After observing my heart's reaction toward my growing inability to mountain climb, the wounding that I need to address has become more apparent. A message from my childhood is rising to the surface and its impact is slowly dawning on me.

When I was a young boy, life lessons and opportunities for spiritual growth were constantly emphasized to me. This led to me believing there was always something wrong with me. In other words, there was always something for me to be ashamed of. I was unable to escape my inadequacy; it was my shadow.

That is the root of my healing. Yes, inadequacy is my shadow. But it was always meant to be. It's taken me way too long to realize that God does not want us to be like Atlas and carry our worlds without him...to live independent from God.

During the first week following a recent surgery, I had a list of things that I had planned on doing while I was laid up. I needed to call to set my first appointment for physical therapy, answer an email, and write a letter to a friend. Not exactly an overwhelming workload. And yet, for as little as I needed to get done, I simply could not find the energy to do any of it. A few days removed from my procedure, I finally mustered the will to make a 10-minute call to set up my appointment. I took a two-hour nap before and after making that call!

As I began drifting off to sleep that night, I felt immense shame over not having enough energy to do the simple things that I expected to be capable of doing. I felt like there was something wrong with me. Then I heard God say, "When you cannot be enough, allow me to be enough for you."

*As my mountain climbing continues to get stripped away,
I am beginning to see that enough is not something I can achieve.
It is something that I am.*

I relaxed and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep that night. When I woke up the next morning, I still felt the pull toward willing my tasks into completion, but I slowly turned my hands over to receive God's strength to do those things instead. I didn't get everything on my to-do list done that day, but that was okay. I had the energy to finish everything that I needed to get done. And I didn't touch anything that could wait until later. God gave me exactly enough energy to do what I needed to. I don't think that was a coincidence.

Before I thought that I was meant to feel disgusted with my limits and inadequacies, but now I see that my limitations are meant to be a source of joy. Because that is where God fills in the gaps and whispers into my ear, "When you cannot be enough, allow me to be enough for you." Doing life with Him takes the pressure off of my shoulders. Now I can choose to rest knowing that my Abba will take care of me instead of worrying about how I can implement my own schemes.

The challenge is learning to accept that love more readily. I can still find it difficult to receive God's unconditional delight without having reservations, but even more difficult is receiving the love and kindness of other people. I feel most vulnerable when I find myself in need of others.

After I went back to work following the surgery, I found myself utterly exposed. I was wheelchair-bound in an entry level position. I was the lowest person on the totem pole with absolutely nothing to hide behind. I had very little to contribute and, worse still, I required help for almost everything I did. Which meant my coworkers had to go out of their way to help me.

So, stubbornly, I resisted and preferred struggling to do things on my own rather than face the abject terror of asking for a helping hand. I thought that by asking for help, I would be a burden to other people and that they would find my need for them as deplorable as I did. At the height of my inability, though, I didn't have much of a choice.

One day, two of my coworkers offered to help as they watched me struggle to maneuver my lunch over to a table. Of course, I turned them down as I convinced myself that I could handle it...I could not. Before I knew it, I had fumbled the meal all over my lap. As I sheepishly cleaned up the mess, I could see God smile as He said "You know, there was an easier way to do this."

I was being reminded that when I choose to receive love from the people around me, I am also choosing to receive love from God. Unintentionally, I had put boundaries on how God could offer his love to me by only choosing to accept it when I felt I had earned it. As my mountain climbing continues to get stripped away, I am beginning to see that enough is not something I can achieve. It is something that I am. And I can choose to take joy in every one of my failures because, when I run into my inadequacy, that is where I find God most present in my life. Every time that I fall, my Abba is there. And I can reach up to Him with the innocent trust of a child knowing that, even at my lowest places of fear and shame, I am deeply admired.

I haven't got that all mastered yet. But I must remind myself that belovedness is not a mountain that needs to be climbed. It is a lifelong journey of intimacy meant to be taken in its own time. I've spent long enough leaving the gift of an unforgettable adventure not fully received and I'd like to enjoy it more. So here's to discovering a better way up the mountain. The sunsets are beautiful here. ■





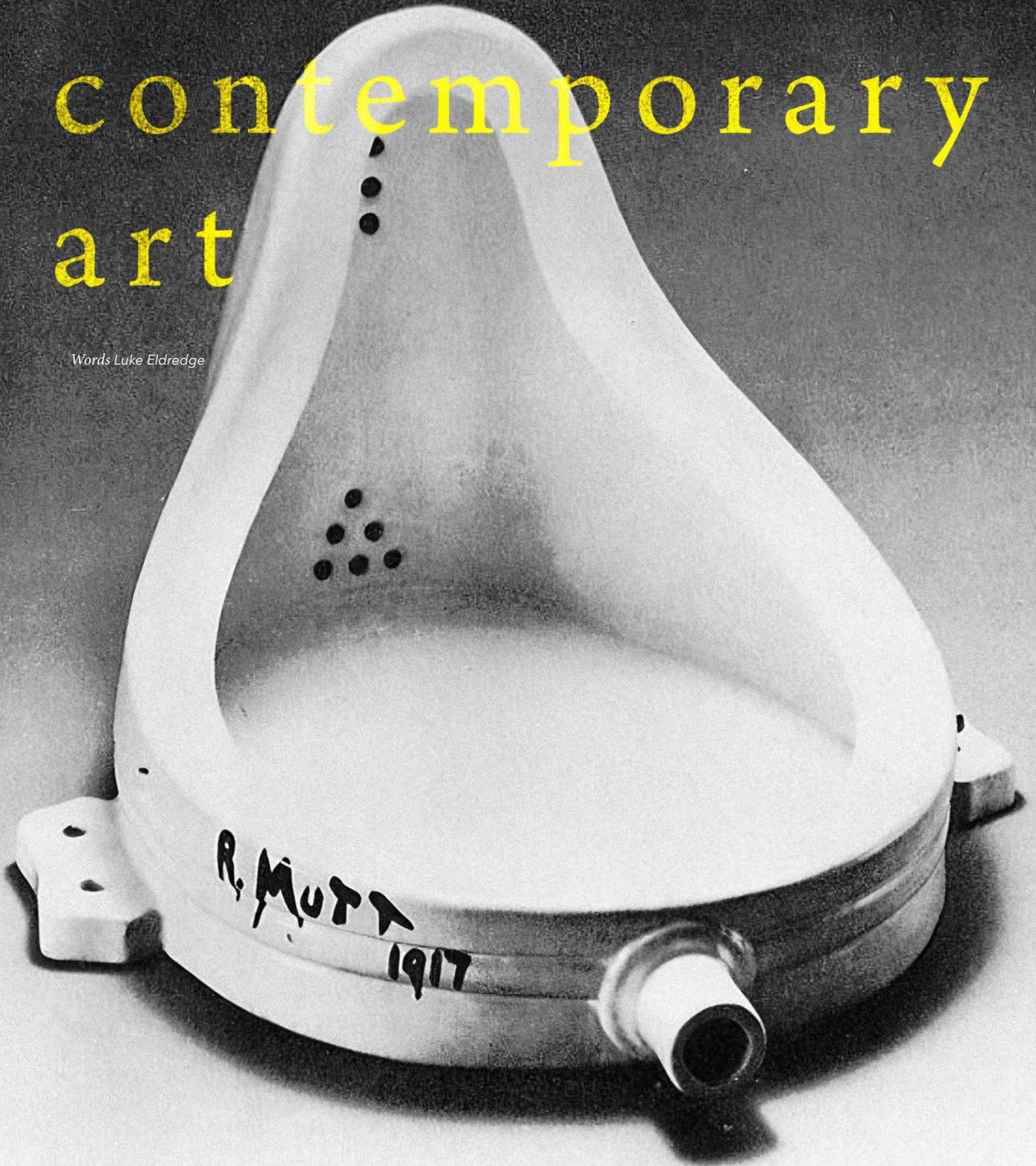


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in defense of contemporary art

Words Luke Eldredge



Maybe it happened on a field trip during high school or when navigating a museum on vacation. Maybe it happened while scrolling Instagram or looking through a magazine. Or maybe you can't even recall when you first saw a piece of modern or contemporary art, a painting, a sculpture. But what you can remember is the feeling of discomfort you had: That's art?

The feeling of discomfort was probably followed up with dismissal and a shaking of the head in the general direction of society's decline and the folly of people self-serving themselves into delusional views of reality.

There is a great discomfort in being denied meaning. We expect to see a painting and immediately understand it—we see the subject, a haystack, we see the pleasant colors and feel the peace that comes with images of the pastoral under the warm hues of a summer sunset. We move on. But modern and contemporary art offer no such easy access to meaning. We all hate feeling dumb. We hate feeling excluded and like everyone is getting something we don't get. But the problem is not that the art is trying to exclude you or insult you in some way (well, it might be). The problem is how we understand "meaning."

We think of meaning as a message: something coherent and consumable. Something that is delivered to you. And the meaning of art is delivered to you by the vehicle of the art itself. But what if meaning is experience? In modern and contemporary art, meaning is not a message but the experience you have interacting with that art. It, especially the more abstract, requires the viewer to interact with the object in some way and to become part of the meaning-making process.

Modern art introduced the idea of art as the experience of the viewer rather than a verifiable meaning. And that experience is not designed to be simply pleasant. It is not your grandmother's doilies or the smell of baking muffins. It's not these because we ask more of art than to be simply pleasant. To approach art with the assumption that art's primary purpose is to please you is a terribly solipsistic view of the world.

Sometimes the meaning-making process of art begins with the experience being intentionally negative: it upsets, it disrupts.

I have always been an avid fan of Degas and other impressionists and had a general bad taste in my mouth when it came to abstract art. But I had two moments of epiphany in small and large galleries in London (a story that begins with the immense privilege of having had the opportunity to study art in London in the first place). The first was in the gallery Sprüth Magers displaying the sculptures of Analia Saban as one of its exhibits.

A blank canvas stretched beyond the boards of its frame, but before the material fell to the floor it was taken up and became the upholstery of a Victorian couch: *Claim (from Chesterfield Sofa)* (2014). At first the sculpture appears to be two separate objects unified only in their matching neutral color (immediately suggesting the cliché of interior design, the sofa with wall art above it). Yet as the canvas spills over the edges of the frame that should have served to contain it within its borders and begins to invade the room, its growth is only taken up to be metamorphosed into an object that shouldn't be art at all. The sofa is defined by its utility—something to sit on, to rest. And yet the overstuffed, Victorian style of the sofa is reminiscent of the gaudy couches in the stuffy rooms of our grandmothers we weren't even allowed to sit on as children with our sticky hands. But it's the unification of the two that makes something new. The materiality of the sculpture is only emphasized by the partially exposed interior of the couch offering a window into the functional craftsmanship of the sofa itself revealing that it would be comfortable to sit on.

OPPOSITE: *"Fountain" (1917) by Marcel Duchamp.*

And the neutral color of the canvas suggests it's not what would be painted on it that validates its role, but the very cloth itself. I was captured by the perverse synthesis of such differing objects and the constant stage of metamorphoses the objects are in.

The paradoxes continued in the next sculpture where a marble slab was impossibly wrapped around a simple wooden sawhorse—the marble draped like a wet towel laid out to dry: *Draped Marble* (Fiori di Pesco Apuano) (2015). Cracks and fractures in its bend, yet holding its shape. An image that stands for the opposite of marble's inherent qualities. What should be a symbol of permanence and solidity is instead held in a stasis of yielding malleability. Confronted with such stark contrasts to my unexamined assumptions of the world, of objects and materiality gutted convention. Genre shapes our perceptions of art, and artwork affects our ideas of genre.

Saban's medium is her very subject matter, generating a conversation between delineated conventions and the characteristics they manifest.

The second was the painting *Bottle and Fishes* by Georges Braque in the Tate Modern: an example of very early modern art (c. 1910). The ordinary objects of several fish on a plate and a bottle laid on a table with a drawer are fractured and fragmented into a grid-like structure of intersecting planes all done in sober, dark colors. First looking at it, the objects are obscured by abstraction. Immediately the bottle and the head of a fish begin to emerge, but it is only after minutes of contemplation that the painting as a whole begins to emerge in the mind, almost like an optical illusion despite clearly not being one. The moment the abstraction took concrete form in my mind was akin to ecstasy. It was only through abstraction that I arrived at something real. The experience of interacting

with the painting, the discomfort of being denied immediate access to the subject matter and instead being forced to sit, to think, to go beyond the rational mind to something more to the core of sight by-passed the narrow borders of the mental schemas I constructed around meaning.

The impressionists (Degas, Manet, and post-impressionist van Gogh) are so often everyone's favorite because they require nothing of the viewer besides being a viewer. We know what the painting depicts and the colors and shapes are pleasing to the eye. But it's not just that; it's because these "impressions" have one foot in realism (approachability) and one foot in abstraction and it is the abstraction that begins to access something deeper than factual depiction (it is the combination of these two opposing forces that make them everyone's favorite). The abstraction, the blur that gives them the "impression" moniker they introduce to the subject begins to generate a genuine investigation into essence.

"Claim (from Chesterfield Sofa)"
(2014) by Analia Saban.
Photo courtesy of the artist.





*"Draped Marble (Fior di Pesco Apuano)" (2015) by Analia Saban.
Photo courtesy of the artist.*

What makes the stone stoney? The image begins to take on more inherent qualities than the subject even had in the first place. The image becomes more real than reality.

Abstract painting and sculpture takes this further by removing the foot that was planted in reality in 1:1 depictions and therefore moves entirely into essence, into the incorporeal realm that just might be where reality actually is.

A common critique of abstract painting like that of Mark Bradford or Mark Rothko is "I could do that." You have to chuckle at human arrogance. The genuine belief that understanding something so little shouldn't make one afraid, but rather its master. Sometimes the response is, "Well you didn't," when the real answer is a laughing "No, you absolutely cannot." Not only does it take a complete mastery of materials, mediums, and theory like

Rothko's genius of color and brush technique. One wouldn't even know where to start. Art is "ex nihilo," it comes from nothing. Nothing but materials and the mind and skill of the artist. It didn't exist and now it does—it came into existence from nothing but an individual's imagination, of which the one who says "I could do that" clearly has none. Once we push past our own discomfort into curiosity and self-reflection, whole worlds begin to open up.

A challenge, and honestly a tragedy, is that so much is lost in translation between the object to the object photographed. So few of us have access to art museums where we can engage with these objects in person—which is where the real art is made. We can't see Rothko's invisible paint strokes or the subtle gradients in color that are felt almost as temperature

rather than something seen with the eye; we can't experience the perspective in Abakanowicz's *Backs* that forces the viewer into a state of genuine empathy, horror, and concern.

Modern and contemporary art subverts and challenges. It pushes against your closely held assumptions; it subverts your unexamined views of what the world is or ought to be. It asks of you to engage, to think critically, to examine yourself and the world around you. It asks you to be more than you are, and more than what humanity ever could be. Yes, that is uncomfortable. But it is this discomfort that pushes us out of the quotidian malaise of our lemming-like march through life.

An extreme example of art that is simply in-your-face antagonizing is Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*—a normal urinal turned on its side, which he signed.

It is often held up as an example of the stupidity of modern art. But better understanding it demonstrates the power to challenge and subvert: Duchamp submitted the urinal to an art exhibition with whose curatorial committee he got into a heated argument over their admission criteria. He submitted the piece as a biting criticism of the art world, and its acceptance only proved his point. So are we now allowed to say it's no longer art? The purpose of the urinal-turned-sculpture was to be a biting criticism of the very culture to which the artist belonged, asking us to think critically about our values. The best art challenges us to rethink our assumptions and beliefs. It became art in the process of its own indictment.

After all, What is art? A pretty picture? What is pretty? Pleasing to the eye. We know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder but what that idiom suggests is both individual taste and the construction of beauty that we are socialized into in our own particular cultures and contexts. We know that every culture has a different standard of beauty when it comes to the human form (eating disorders are only prevalent in cultures exposed to Western ideals of "thinness.") Which is to say, defining art gets real nebulous real quick. Then you could say "I know it when I see it." Which is famously untrue.

Art is primarily an affect object. It is not a tool, it cannot be consumed, and it cannot be produced. Though art is its own justification just as beauty is its own, no other purpose is required. Generally, art is an object that generates emotion or thought in the person who interacts with it (often interaction simply means looking, but interaction is what is occurring in the internal world—wonder, awe, mesmerization, memory, an ineffable feeling, but also disgust, discomfort, grief, confusion, and dismay). And hopefully, the effect the piece had on the viewer goes beyond the initial epiphanic moment to an emotion and thought-life that continues to grow and generate real consequence.

But things can get messy because contemporary art is inextricably tangled up in class politics that further alienates the average person and antagonizes the majority of would-be art lovers (completely outside of the art itself mind you, but in culture): Who has access to this? Who has leisure time? Who has the resources for education to translate experience into something communicable? If Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa purchases Jean-Michel Basquiat's *Untitled* for \$110.5 million in 2017, does that mean the painting has an actual or exchange value of \$110.5 million dollars? Probably not. But does that mean that *Untitled* does not have immense value or is not a striking and evocative piece of art? Also no. So a helpful tool is looking to museums and galleries not as the end all be all authority on what is and is not art, but it is an immensely valuable tool on narrowing the scope.

Why museums and galleries seem to be the authority on art is because they are curated by people who spend a lot of time thinking about these very difficult questions of what is art, how do you know, and what is better than others, in order to offer us a selection that they promise is at the very least worth our time to consider. But most of us don't have access to museums or galleries, so I put forward the humble Instagram page. Most of us are on social media or have the capacity to be, and there are accounts on Instagram that curate art in the same way as a gallery or museum (spoiler alert, they're the Instagram pages of museums and galleries) (also, even if you refuse to use Instagram, these institutions also have websites that serve the same purpose). Here are a few of my favorites that are also good entry points:

@GAGOSIAN

A global gallery that features modern and mostly contemporary art whose posts range from paintings, to sculptures, to behind the scenes and editorial videos.

@MEPAINTSME

An online gallery that focuses on contemporary paintings by both emerging and mid-career artists. It hosts a rotation of thematic group exhibitions.

@TATE

The Tate Modern is one of the largest museums of modern and contemporary art headquartered in London. Its posts cover current installations and exhibits, work in its archives, and art history.

@LOUISIANAMUSEUM

The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art possesses an impressive collection of post-war art and is often named one of the most beautiful museums in the world. Its Instagram page shares works from its collection and current exhibitions, and sometimes photographs taken by visitors using its handle.

@MCASANDIEGO

With an impressive collection roughly totalling around 5,500 works, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego focuses on women, Chicano and Latino artists. The MCASD also has important works by Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Robert Irwin.

@BRETTGORVY

Brett Gorvy, the former International Head of Post-War and Contemporary Art at Christie's (a premier auction house), now runs his own gallery, Lévy Gorvy, with locations in London, New York, Paris, Hong Kong and Palm Beach. His Instagram page shares one artwork every day, captioned by a relevant poem, quote, or song lyric, often with some expert insight.



"Bottle and Fishes" by Georges Braque (c. 1910-12).

© 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Tate.

@SPRUETHMAGERS

A smaller contemporary art gallery with locations from Berlin to Hong Kong, Sprueth Magers is a trend setter in contemporary art. This account is for the more adventurous as this is where things get weirder and more interesting.

@POETRYPROSCIUTTO

Wait, that's me! I post about contemporary and modern poetry! It's not visual art but if you want to learn more about the poetry world and what books to read, check me out! Gotta throw in the self plug.

As is the case with any art form—movies, books, music—there are going to be those that are grossly overrated and those that are tragically underrated. But what matters at the end of the day is committing to genuine engagement, and then finding what you like.

How do we give incorporeal realities physical form? Whether an expression of the artist's inner world that could never be translated into language or perhaps grasping at outer realities that deny reason or calculation, or perhaps an investigation into materiality itself, art is the only way to even begin a discussion of the ineffable. But it is an attempt, because it is an impossible task. But like Sisyphus rolling up his rock, something entirely new is made in the process, something other than goal or result. ■





GEAR GUIDE

GO FAST DON'T DIE

Words Wookie Jones

A few years back a targeted ad delivered this motorcycle-themed apparel brand directly into my orbit. Not exactly the most romantic of “how we met” stories, but something about the gusto of the Go Fast Don’t Die name and the general attitude stuck with me.

Over time, I snapped up a few of their sassier items and have enjoyed how this swag regularly sparks engaging conversation with strangers, while serving as a reminder to me to get serious about living life and living it not so seriously. When it became apparent that the Bolivia motorcycle trip (page 76) was going to become reality, I reached out to G.F.D.D. to order some gear and used this opportunity to find out who exactly is behind this brand with a slogan. I was not disappointed. Not only did G.F.D.D. send us a choice selection of snarky threads for our trip, but when I asked Brady—one of the founders—for the inspiration for launching the brand, he let us in on their thinking:

“We looked around, and we asked ‘Am I living the story I want to tell?’ And when we found the answer was a silent, rhetorical but resounding and deafening ‘no,’ we were simultaneously called to set on a course to alter that storyline. Go Fast Don’t Die was born.”

“We always say no one gets out alive, live accordingly.”

That shed some light on why exactly these guys regularly come up with t-shirts I want to wear. Check out these products and more at GoFASTDONTDIE.COM



Sooner Than You Think Vintage Moto Jersey

Extra thick construction and a perfect balance of dark humor and piercing truth. Yes, Sam wears this regularly. Ideal for cooler weather riding (or some straight-shooting counseling sessions).

(120.00 USD)

Safety Second Tee

We wear this one to encourage conversation with strangers—we've had particular success in engaging building inspectors, OSHA compliance officers, and border agents. Yes, And Sons dads, these do come in kid's sizes as well.

(31.00 USD)





Jackalopes Are Real Long Body Tee

Because the only guys that can successfully rock a long-body tee know that jackalopes transcend the mythical. Also available as a standard cut tee for round-earthers. (As a bonus, our old pal Craig McConnell was an avid lover of the jackalope and all things tall tales. We know he'd dig this one.)

(34.00 USD)



Clock's Tickin' Tee

The perfect reminder to get out of the office or off the couch and start risking more.

(31.00 USD)



Fast Track Mesh Jersey

A very comfortable riding jersey that seems to pair even better with an obviously slow motorcycle. The white does show the dirt of many adventures, but who says that's a bad thing.

(98.00 USD) ■

Twenty Years in the Wilderness

Words and Image Aaron Hnyduik

Trip proposal. The Father spoke softly, “I have an adventure for you. Come with me.”

Three weeks later, 10,000 kilometers in the rearview mirror, and I was standing in the land that was ground zero for the war over the human heart. To say it was surreal is to put it mildly. But I need to back up.

Growing up as the oldest in a single-parent home doesn't do much to foster and encourage your dreams. My own broken relationship with my dad has always made it difficult to relate to my Heavenly Father. Sometimes I can hear Jesus speaking and it's beautiful talking with him, but there's always been a blank when it comes to relating with the Father.

I gave my life to Jesus when I was very young, around age 5 or 6. I still remember the day I prayed the prayer and the peace that settled over me. My parents separated when I was in my teens. The church did not reflect the Lord to us during those times. After years of trying to find a community that followed Jesus and only finding enervated cultural Christianity, I gave up and walked away from the body of Christ. I held to my faith but it was the start of a wilderness journey. A consequence of this is I didn't have an opportunity to be baptized. Flash forward 20 years.

The desire to be baptized started growing in me several years ago. I did not belong to a church community and I still felt an internal resistance to finding one. One of my prayers every night became, “Lord, please provide a time and place for me to be baptized. I really want to do this.” Several conversations with Jesus had removed the anxiety I felt about running out of time.

An unexpected email, the Father's joy-filled invitation, events miraculously lining up, and three weeks later I was on my way to Israel with the group from the Daily Audio Bible. Their goal for these trips is to make the land of the Bible come alive and boy, did it ever. I cannot speak highly enough of the hard work and heart the Daily Audio Bible crew puts into their pilgrimages. Feeling the vastness of the wilderness, seeing the waves on the Sea of Galilee, standing in a life-size replica of the tabernacle, sitting on the steps upon which Jesus had so many clashes with the religious leaders ... the details in the Bible make so much more sense when you are standing there. It was incredible.

One of the planned stops on the trip is a baptism in the Jordan River. It came after several days in the southern wilderness of Israel (the parallels to my own story weren't lost on me). February is the rainy season in Israel and winter storm Barbara had just dumped much-needed water on the country. The Jordan was higher than normal, flowing faster than usual, and very cold. As it was my turn to step into the river, I remember thinking, “The Father brought me halfway around the world and cleared every obstacle so that I can be baptized in the Jordan River ... All that's left for me to do is take these last few steps.” It occurred to me later that this was the very river where he declared His love for His Son to the world.

Being immersed in the Jordan was frigid and beautiful and overwhelming. His love was overwhelming. More than once during the trip, I found myself saying, “It's too much, Father. How can you give this much?” It's something I'll never forget. If I ever have any doubts of His love for me or feel abandoned, He's given me the ultimate counterpoint.

The land was beautiful in both its lushness and starkness. The barbed wire and fences and fields of land mines reminded me that we live in a world at war. The Father's heart is good though. Scandalous and extravagant in what He wants to give us.

I wasn't sure what it would be like hanging out with a large group of Christians again but I was met with so much curiosity and kindness and acceptance about my story. So many people showed courage in sharing their own struggles and it was clear how deeply God was working in their lives through this trip too. It was such an honor to witness it. I could feel the internal resistance in me start to give way and I have no doubt that it's time for me to leave the wilderness. ■

Author's Note: A heartfelt thanks to And Sons, the Daily Audio Bible, Yosher Tours, Sar-El Tours and everyone I traveled with for making it such a special journey.

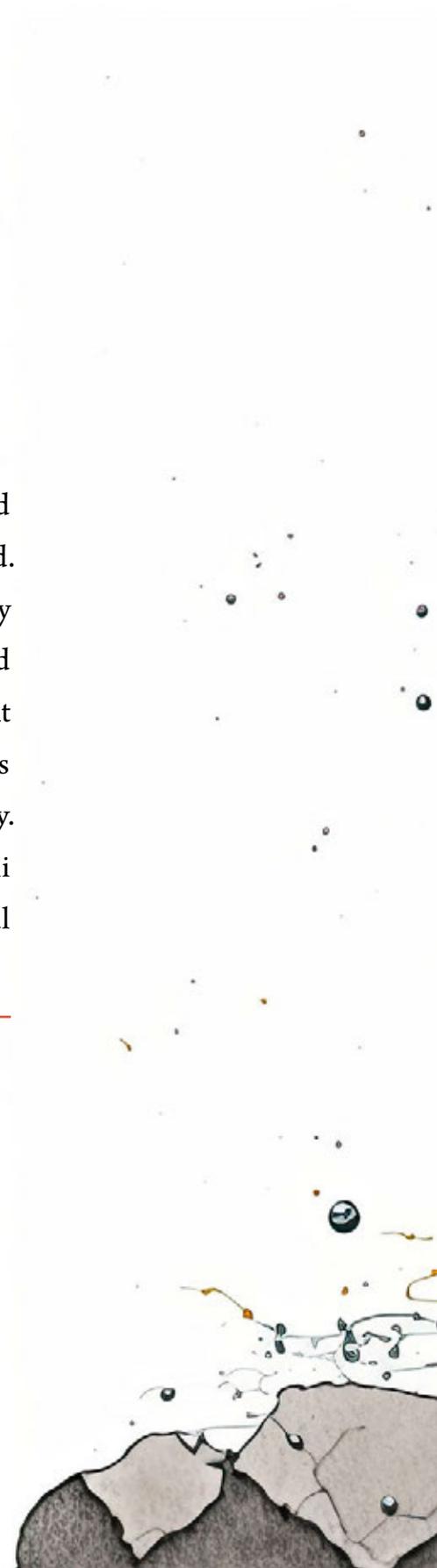


Charles

Words Nic Bovee

Images Nic Bovee & Wookie Jones

In the fall of 2018, my wife, Dani, and I found out that she was pregnant with our first child. Frankly, I didn't feel ready to be a father. We'd only been married two years and for me being a good husband and dealing with life in my early 20s felt like more than enough without the added stress of everything that goes into caring for a baby. All of my feelings changed when I helped Dani into the emergency room of a Denver hospital just 19 weeks into the pregnancy.





After triage and testing, the medical staff let us know Dani was going into labor, and our baby—a son—was not developed enough to survive if he was born that early in the pregnancy.

Our doctors were trying everything they could to slow the labor down, and Dani fought as hard as she could to keep her body from doing what it naturally wanted to do. Suddenly, I heard a loud “popping” and a splash as Dani’s water broke.

“That’s it. You’re having this baby, and that means he’s not going to live. I’m sorry.”

Even hearing those words, I still held onto hope that it was going to be okay. But after a few more minutes, Dani squeezed my hand and screamed as her body violently ejected our son onto the delivery table with a thud. My heart shattered into pieces. The last sliver of hope disappeared along with the hope I had for anything good in this world.

I’d never wept harder about anything in my life and I haven’t since.

It wasn’t a wail, but an uncontrollable, panicked heaving. The dreams of a future with this child were gone. It was at that moment that I realized the innocence within me that bolstered hope and hadn’t experienced this kind of loss or trauma was gone.

My son Charles Thomas Bovee was born at 8:05 p.m. on February 1, 2019.

For the first time, I finally felt like I wanted to be a father. I felt the feet that had been kicking me through Dani just a few hours earlier. We could see his heart steadily beating. He couldn’t cry or make any noise, but we could see him try to breathe with undeveloped lungs. We spent three hours with him, thankful for every moment, until his heartbeat slowed to a stop. The medical staff had the hospital chaplain baptize Charles, and then they dressed him in a small knitted hat to take photos. They took footprints and handprints and gave us a care package with all of these treasures to take home with us.

Dani felt like her body failed her. We felt guilty thinking about all the “what ifs.” What if we had gone to the hospital sooner? What if we had demanded that our doctor treat Dani as a high risk pregnancy until our first son was safely delivered?

It was easy to feel anger toward ourselves and others. Why couldn’t the doctors do more for him after he was born?

As our family arrived to visit the body of our son in the hospital, my dad asked me what we thought the meaning of our son’s life was. Despite how shitty the situation was, I felt God tell me his life means, “There is good in all things.” My pain was still there, but I thought about how much any father would give to spend three hours with his child even if it’s on their deathbed. I wasn’t supposed to be in Denver that day but a last minute change in plans meant I was able to be there with Dani for the whole experience. This could have happened at our rural hospital where they wouldn’t have been equipped to help us process the situation the way we did. The pain didn’t go away, but we were overwhelmed with gratitude when we thought about the goodness in the situation.

When Dani and I got home, in between holding each other and crying we wrote our stories from this experience and published them on a website where we could easily go back to them. We reached out to everyone we knew and invited them to a “celebration of life” for Charles. People we hadn’t seen in years came to stand with us, pray for us and love us in that moment. For many the memorial was an opportunity to re-engage with their own grief in a way that they hadn’t before. For some, it felt like for the first time they had permission to grieve a loss they had otherwise considered “too small.”

Dear reader, our stories and pain are different and I’ll never fully understand your human experience the way you can. But if I could offer one thing from a father who lost his son, it’s this: Give yourself permission to engage with and honor your grief. Love and forgive yourself for the way that you do so.

It might be years later and out of nowhere you feel overwhelmed with the memory of what’s lost. Step out of the meeting, take the next exit and park, do whatever it takes to engage in that moment. If it’s helpful for you, invite Jesus to meet you in a safe place and ask him to care for and heal the trauma.

The grief in your story is completely unique to you and it matters. The recovery of your heart and the redemption of your story is worth every tear. ■



Background photo by Jeremy Bishop

It's Only Weird If It Doesn't Work

Words Morgan Snyder





I am a yoga junkie. There. I said it.

Picture me at my first class—in a sea of women in black, stretchy pants. I had never been more uncomfortable in my life. It took years of Cherie gently prodding for me to see a counselor. And it had taken her far longer to bring me to this moment. Over the years, when she suggested I consider coming to a class with her, I maintained a gracious and benevolent veneer. But internally, my response went something like this:

Yoga!?! Are you kidding me?!? What a waste of time. Especially when I could get a REAL workout. Besides, at best, all those women will think I'm a pervert. At worst, they might think I'm a predator. No, thanks!

Years later, I finally yielded my pride, cynicism, paranoia, and disbelief long enough to slip into the back of a yoga class in the gym of our local YMCA, wading awkwardly past foam rollers and spongy blocks and overly strong perfume, under what I suspected to be offended and incriminating gazes. The only other man in the class was an old guy in the front row with a headband and very short shorts, quite possibly from his high school track team in '74.

And it was in that space that Heaven came to earth for me, and something profoundly good happened in my soul.

That was over a decade ago, and I still can't find adequate words to describe the conversion.

After an hour of holding my breath and feebly attempting to stretch muscles that had long since fossilized, I found myself in what these yogis apparently call "final relaxation." Pretty standard in nearly any yoga class, but unknown to me, the hour of mindful movement builds up to a closing time of rest and surrender—lying supine in total stillness on the floor, breathing and receiving.

And it was the first moment in my adult life that I

gave myself full permission to simply receive.

The best way I can describe it is that I was utterly disoriented... by Love.

With each inhale, I could feel the Ruach—the very breath of God (Genesis 1:2)—breathing both dormant and dead places back to life. I was among the desiccated bones of the defeated army in the book of Ezekiel, and God's breath was uniting bone to bone and then enlivening muscle and sinew and skin. Dry bones, enlivened, then raised to life.

Somehow, the hour of integrating my body with my mind and spirit, the hard physical work, the awkward but consistent attempts to breathe deeply, and then the final surrender ushered in the deep waters of the Kingdom that unlocked in my masculine soul a door long obscured into a room long abandoned.

The driven and intense man I was opened the door for the needy, isolated boy within to receive nurture in a way I can describe in no other terms.

Here, in the back of a gym at the YMCA, breath was entering me, immersing me in the reality of the triune God, and making me whole through nurturing, engulfing love.

It undid me, and I've never been the same.

It would be weeks of regular practice before I glimpsed the layers of benefit yoga could offer me, especially that stretching and strengthening my core would potentially increase my capacity in other pursuits I love, like chasing wild with my bow or climbing single track high along Colorado's Front Range.

It would be months before I painstakingly learned to breathe more deeply, slowing down and inhaling fully with holy awareness of the very life of God.

It would be years before I began to understand how to be kind to myself, how to "try easy" and embrace the



wisdom of Kingdom rhythms, accepting that there is a time to go full throttle and there is a time to back off.

It would be a decade before I understood how much God was desiring to harness this spiritual practice in my life to mother me, to heal my self-hatred, and to apprentice me in the Kingdom art of receiving love and so much more.

It would be beyond a decade before I would slowly become the kind of person who regularly tastes the depth and breadth of the Kingdom of God and the deep integration of my soul through the consistent practice of Kingdom-centered yoga.

If we shall know it by its fruit, I'm compelled to name the significance of the fruit I have experienced through Kingdom-centered yoga.

Not as a prescription, but rather as an example laden with possibility.

Of all the spiritual disciplines I pursue, Kingdom-centered yoga is one of the top in regard to bearing the most prolific deepest fruit in my masculine journey. Who would've thought? Not me, that's for sure. Looking back, I had put such limits on who God could be and

what He could do even through an hour of intentional movement and deep breathing.

Now, if you are hesitant about or uninterested in this practice, that is fine.

But I would like to ask you some questions.

Where is it you are practicing regularly to receive love, mercy, kindness and nurturing from the heart of the Trinity? For most of us, to say that receiving love doesn't come easily is like saying the Pope doesn't date much. It is actually deeply challenging to become the kind of person who can receive with an open and true heart, liberated from either habitual protest or the compulsion to try to merit the gift after it is bestowed.

Where are you learning to be still, to habitually dwell in the present moment in awareness of the enveloping life and presence of God? Where are you practicing taking in the breath of Heaven as your most sustaining source?

Where are you learning to accept God's acceptance of who you are, just as you are, not because of your gifting or productivity, but simply because He believes you are worthy of love and belonging in your essence?

Test the fruit.

*If it's the fruit that Jesus
points to in the Gospels,
then we must have come
into proximity to some
portion of His Kingdom
on earth as it is
in heaven.*

Where are you maturing to understand wellness in its depth and breadth rather than simply chasing fitness as another place of achievement and outcomes-based living?

Where is it that you are growing in your soul's experience of "bursting with joy and feeling ten feet tall" from regularly receiving God's intimate and feminine nourishment that God suggests is available to all of His people? (See Isaiah 66 in *The Message*.)

Where is your soul regularly in a safe space to further the integration of all the younger parts of you?

Where are you deepening in your union with God and your ability to listen in contemplative connection, receiving His words of affection as the fuel for obedience and casting off performance-based living?

Where are you learning to play for the sake of play?

Married guys, where are you tending to your body and soul in a regular practice that is bringing ever-deepening sexual intimacy to your marriage bed?

Where are you regularly facing your addictions with grace, kindness, and a growing capacity and desire to address them with courage and cunning?

Where are you growing in the belief that self-care is not selfish, but rather it is heroic stewardship?

How do you practice prioritizing union with God in order that the overflow of His life can be what you bring to this world?

Where are you engaging pockets of shame and fear and, in love, resolving to receive healing and see their influence ever diminish in your life?

Where do you participate in contemplative liturgy that is not dependent upon you but flows to you from generations of elders who have traveled the ancient path, reaching back to the Christian mystical Fathers and Mothers of our faith in the first few centuries and beyond?

Where are you regularly having exposed and dismantled the deep agreements you have made with the limits you have placed on who God can be, what He can do, and how He can do it in your body, soul, spirit, heart, mind, and will?

There are many ways these important questions and needs can be met and answered.

And for me, a regular practice of Kingdom-centered yoga over a decade has been one of the most powerful.

Let me just pause and borrow some credibility from Bud Light and Jesus.

I can't help but recall the brilliant Bud Light commercial from a recent Super Bowl. You might remember: scene after scene of sold out fans doing the most odd sort of things, living out their bizarre superstitions in the hopes of vaulting their team to victory. Wearing their random but oh-so-lucky shirts, rubbing the rabbit's foot dyed in their team's colors, chanting with their Bud Lights raised in homage, stacking their beer cans in the shape of their team's emblem to frame the spread of nacho supremes and chicken wings.

Sure enough, their team wins. Then comes this brilliant line:

It's only weird if it doesn't work.

If-It-Doesn't-Work.

While depicting colossal superstition, there is an ironic resonance in this commercial with Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Jesus has a remarkably simple test to discern, particularly over time, the active presence of God and His Kingdom.

"You will recognize them from their fruit."
(Matthew 7:20)

God is too wild to be tamed and hemmed in by our painful limits and feeble constraints. And as Jesus Himself points out, religious bullies through the ages have been brilliant at straining gnats and swallowing camels (Matthew 23:24). Therefore, we often can't know if something is beneficial or harmful by habitual assumption. But we can know with confidence the nature of something if we test its fruit.

Test the fruit. If it's the fruit that Jesus points to in the Gospels, then we must have come into proximity to some portion of His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

This is not intended to be a *carte blanche* endorsement of yoga.

It is an invitation to find your deeper way with God and to become, even more, a student and a son.

It's about actively experimenting with and cultivating regular spiritual practices that nourish, strengthen, and integrate our souls, increase our experience of God, and restore us as men. ■

Words: Jon Dale Images: Eli Dale, Wookie Jones & Novō Adventures

ESCAPE

FROM

POTOSI



“It’s the miners. They’ve gone on strike and they’ve blocked every way out of the city.”

What struck me was the matter-of-fact way our guide made the statement. My 20-year-old son Eli and I were sitting on motorcycles, trying to get out of Potosi, Bolivia. The setting was more like a scene from a Jason Bourne movie than anything I’d experienced back home in Colorado. Dozens of people were milling around trying to figure out if there was a way to get around the roadblock ahead. The local police, which somehow managed to make us feel more unsettled than safe, had arrived, but didn’t seem interested in clearing the roadblock.

This wasn’t the type of obstacle I’d imagined when we’d accepted the invitation to go on an adventure trip to Bolivia. All I knew of Bolivia was what I’d seen during an episode of the Apple TV show *Long Way Up*, where Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman went flying across the largest salt flats in the world on their electric Harley Davidsons. The invite had come in from the founder of Novō Communities, an addiction recovery center in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. “We guide motorcycle adventures as a way to help support the work we do here and to show people what Bolivia has to offer. Would you like to come?” After a long back and forth via email and a multi-year delay because of Covid, my friends Nic and Wookie, Eli and I finally touched down in Santa Cruz.

From the moment we arrived, it was clear Bolivia was unlike anywhere I’d been. I’ve spent a little time in Mexico and South Africa, but never in a truly developing nation. By every measure, Bolivia is the poorest country in South America and this means that many things don’t work the way I, as an English American, have come to expect. After getting through customs and being reunited with our gear, a taxi driver somehow crammed the four of us and our large bags of motorcycle gear into a very old and very small Toyota hatchback. As our driver started speeding us through the city, I looked down and realized I could see the road passing by through a rusty hole in the floorboard. The car no longer had any suspension and the driver did his best to avoid the potholes but wasn’t always successful. Thankfully we and the car made it to the hotel in one piece.









We'd heard that the central plaza was close by, so we decided to see if we could find it without using our phones for directions. One of the many things that is very different about how large cities are set up in Bolivia is that all the same types of stores are localized to one area. If you're looking for tires, you go to the tire district where all the tire shops in the city are right next to each other. The same for dentists or eyewear, clothing, printing, or electronics. We ended up walking through several of these areas before finding a park, declaring ourselves lost, and deciding to pull out our phones and see where we were. Once we did, we realized that we'd managed to end up on the other side of the city. A taxi took us to the central plaza which was, of course, just a couple blocks from our hotel.

Our accommodations throughout the trip were often what our guides described as "rustic" and our first hotel was no exception. We came to realize pretty quickly that "rustic" would sometimes mean simple and quaint and other times more like "roughing it." One thing almost all our accommodations had in common was a bathroom containing what our guides called a "widowmaker" — a shower head with a 220-volt electric heater built in. We came down from a shower that evening and Nic told us he was pretty sure he'd been shocked trying to move the showerhead. We later found out that the cardinal rule with these electric showerheads was never to touch them with the water running.

After dinner, we met up with three other international guests that were joining us on the trip: Pete, the owner of a leather business from England; Eric, an American educator living in Nicaragua; and Jeff, an Englishman now living in Denver. Eric had lots of experience riding motorcycles all over the world but Jeff and Pete were both brand new to riding and had only recently got their motorcycle licenses. After sharing the stories of how we'd all ended up on this trip, we headed to bed. This was going to be interesting.

The next morning we were up early to meet our guides in the hotel lobby: Andy, an Englishman who had founded Novō Communities, and Lewis, a Canadian who runs Novō Adventures. We threw our bags into the back of a passenger van for the ride across town to the Novō compound. Andy informed us that on the way we would stop to get our money changed. I assumed that meant we would be going to a bank, but instead we pulled up to a busy intersection and a man appeared at the window. Lewis talked to the man in Spanish and then handed him several thousand American dollars in exchange for rolls of local Bolivianos. Nic and I exchanged sideways glances. We're not in Colorado anymore, I thought.

The transaction completed, we continued to the Novō compound. Once safely inside the gate, we pulled up to the Novō Adventures shop where Mark, a Bolivian who grew up in the United States and would be driving our support vehicle and acting as our mechanic, met us with a beaming smile. With clear pride, he led us to a row of shiny Royal Enfield Himalayan motorcycles. Alright! This is what we're here for.







After a brief safety talk (which was mostly about the importance of having your cash hidden in multiple places on your body in case you had to pay a bribe), we changed into our motorcycle gear and loaded our bags into the red Nissan 4X4 that would serve as our support vehicle for the week. We circled up as a team to pray for the trip. And then we were off.

As we rode through the outskirts of Santa Cruz, it became clear that this wasn't going to be some sort of tame adventure. Lewis was leading the way. Lead is perhaps a kinder word than is appropriate. He took off like a bat out of hell, weaving through side streets like James Bond trying to escape from a villain. As I tried to keep up with Eli, who was finding it much easier than I was to hang with Lewis, I looked in my side mirror hoping that Jeff and Pete would somehow be able to keep up. I soon lost sight of them, but, remarkably, each time we came to a stop in traffic, they would catch up with huge smiles on their faces. What a way to start. This was going to be baptism by fire for them as new riders.

We quickly realized that the Royal Enfield Himalayan was a well chosen bike for this trip. While powerful enough to be fun on a tight and windy road, the 405cc engines didn't have enough power to really get any of us in trouble. And once out of town with the open road before us, we all hummed along at pretty much the same speed. Since we weren't able to go that fast, we quickly settled in to enjoy the unfamiliar and beautiful terrain around us. Bolivia is a gorgeous country. In the days ahead we would ride through desert, mountains, tropical jungle, and wild canyons. But I enjoyed the variety of people we met just as much.

Day three of the trip found us in La Higuera, the remote mountain town where Che Guevara made his last stand. Here we met Myriam and David, a couple from Luxembourg who had been driving their Land Rover around South America since the start of Covid. We swapped stories around a campfire before heading into the rustic dining room where our host Juan Lebras sat at the bar and enthralled us with stories from the area.











We quickly learned that while riding we had to be ready for anything. As we rode through the hills from La Higuera to Villa Serrano, we started smelling smoke. We rounded a bend and realized the hillside in front of us was on fire. There was no one around, and no cell service, so after stopping to discuss whether we needed to let anyone know, we just kept riding.

A few hours later, we dropped down out of the hills and found ourselves at a huge suspension bridge in the middle of what felt much more like desert than jungle. As we looked down at the river far below, I asked Mark if there was any reason we shouldn't hike down and get closer to the river. Next thing you know we'd all stripped down to our underwear and were cooling off in one of the most breathtaking locations I'd ever seen.

The next day we arrived in Sucre, a larger and more developed city than the other towns we'd visited. It reminded me of a town you might find in Greece. Here we moved from "rustic" accommodations to a nice European-style hotel. We walked down into town and had dinner at a craft brewery owned by a man from Colorado. It was pretty surreal to be sitting in a brewery in Bolivia surrounded by a bunch of stickers from breweries back home.

A day later, we headed to Uyuni and the famous salt flats. But to get to Uyuni, we had to pass through Potosi. And Potosi is where we got stuck at a roadblock. Our lunch stop meant that we were in town when the striking miners blocked every way out of town. After several unsuccessful attempts to bribe the miners to let us through, a taxi driver approached our guides.



NOVŌ COMMUNITIES

Novō Adventures is an adventure company with a calling. As a social enterprise, all profits go to support the life-changing work of Novō Communities. Established in 2015, Novō Communities' vision is to bring new life to individuals, peace to families, and hope to communities gripped by addiction by empowering local teams in developing nations to create transformational communities that offer healing, wholeness, and hope. In 2016, Novō's first community—in Santa Cruz, Bolivia—opened its doors, offering a Christ-centered rehabilitation program for men in addiction. With Novō Bolivia well-established, the work is at an exciting turning point. In response to the global addiction problem, the team is using a community franchise approach to genuinely empower national leaders to create recovery communities where the addicted, homeless, isolated, and unemployed can find freedom and new life in Christ.

To learn more and support Novō Communities, go to NOVOCOMMUNITIES.ORG.



Next thing we knew we were following this taxi through a maze of dirt roads up onto a hillside. The one way out of town that the taxi driver didn't think would be blocked was to follow the train tracks along the side of a mountain. We followed the taxi for a couple of miles until he pulled off to the side of the tracks, worried that he was going to get stuck. He gave us directions to go a few more miles and look for a dirt road down off the mountains. We paid him and thanked him and as a last thought asked him when the train would be coming. He said sometime this afternoon (it was 2 o'clock). After several very close calls (one involving barely missing a deep ravine next to the track), we found a dirt road leading back down to a very empty highway in the valley.

Hours later, exhausted and dirtier than we'd been the whole trip, we finally pulled into Uyuni, on the edge of the largest salt flats in the world. We were staying at the Tonito Hotel, right next to the main gate of the local military base. After showering, and trying not to get electrocuted, we met up in Minuteman Pizza, a restaurant at the back of the hotel run by Chris, an American expat who'd married a Bolivian lady whose family owned the hotel. The result is some of the best spicy llama pizza you'll find anywhere—especially delicious after escaping from a town held hostage by striking miners.

Early the next morning, a few of us left the hotel in search of souvenirs. Eli and I acquired traditional alpaca ponchos and Wookiee purchased a leather cowboy hat that made him look like Indiana Jones. We then headed to the Cementerio de Trenes (the Train Cemetery). Uyuni already feels like the set of a post-apocalyptic movie, but the Train Cemetery is a completely surreal experience. The trains originally came from England in the early 20th century when Uyuni was thought to become the center of transportation with tracks leading to many other countries. But the tracks were never built and as a result the dozens of rusting steam locomotives and train cars have been weathered by a century of the elements. Over the years, local graffiti artists have turned this into a massive scale art installation, a testament to both human engineering and the power of nature.

After exploring the Train Cemetery, we rode onto the salt flats, had a delicious picnic lunch, and set up some drag races. After the races, we decided it was time to get some epic photos of us riding on the salt flats. Until then, Eli (whose mission on the trip was to capture pictures for this article) had been staying mostly in the background and had avoided being too assertive in telling this group of older men what he needed from them.

However, out there on the salt flats, something suddenly changed. Eli grabbed Wookie's cowboy hat, climbed on top of the 4x4 and started giving everyone directions. Next thing I knew, the 4x4 was flying across the salt flats at 50 miles per hour with Eli strapped to the back wearing a helmet and the rest of us on motorcycles fanned out while he shot pictures. The pictures he captured were epic, but what made me even more proud was that many of the guys pointed out to Eli the transition they'd seen in him that day.

Next we headed southeast to the Bolivian wine country and the beautiful town of Tarija close to the Argentinian border.

Over 13 days we explored much of the Bolivian countryside. We saw ancient ruins, remote villages, mile upon mile of hand-laid brick roads. At one boarding stop, I was attacked by a stray dog. Thankfully I was wearing a heavy motorcycle jacket, which now has a great story to the rip in the back of it. "Oh, that? That was the time I was attacked by a pitbull in Bolivia."

We all fell in love with the Bolivian people and the countryside and met many other travelers along the way.

The capstone of the trip was the last day, back in Santa Cruz. Novō Communities, the residential treatment program that Novō Adventures supports (see sidebar), hosted us for dinner, and many of the men whose lives have been saved by this remarkable outreach shared their stories with us. While the trip itself was a once-in-a-lifetime father-and-son experience, the most impactful part was hearing those stories. ■



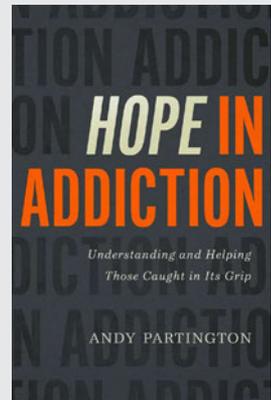
Watch a video of some of the trip highlights.

To start planning your Bolivian motorcycle adventure, go to NOVOADVENTURES.COM.

HOPE IN ADDICTION

Hope in Addiction is a powerful look at the gospel for the addicted. Andy Partington, Novō's international director, explores what it means to be the church in the age of addiction. How did we get here? Why is addiction so powerful? How can we find lasting freedom from addiction? *Hope in Addiction* explores these questions with clarity and compassion.

Hope in Addiction isn't just about drug and alcohol addictions. It's about gambling addictions, porn dependencies, workaholism, and internet addictions. This is a book about how slaves to addiction become children of the Living God and family in the community of God. Wherever they are. Whatever has enslaved them. *Hope in Addiction* is available wherever books are sold.



If you want to understand addiction, I'd read this book. If you want something more—if you want HOPE—read it slowly and carefully. You will not be disappointed!

– John Eldredge

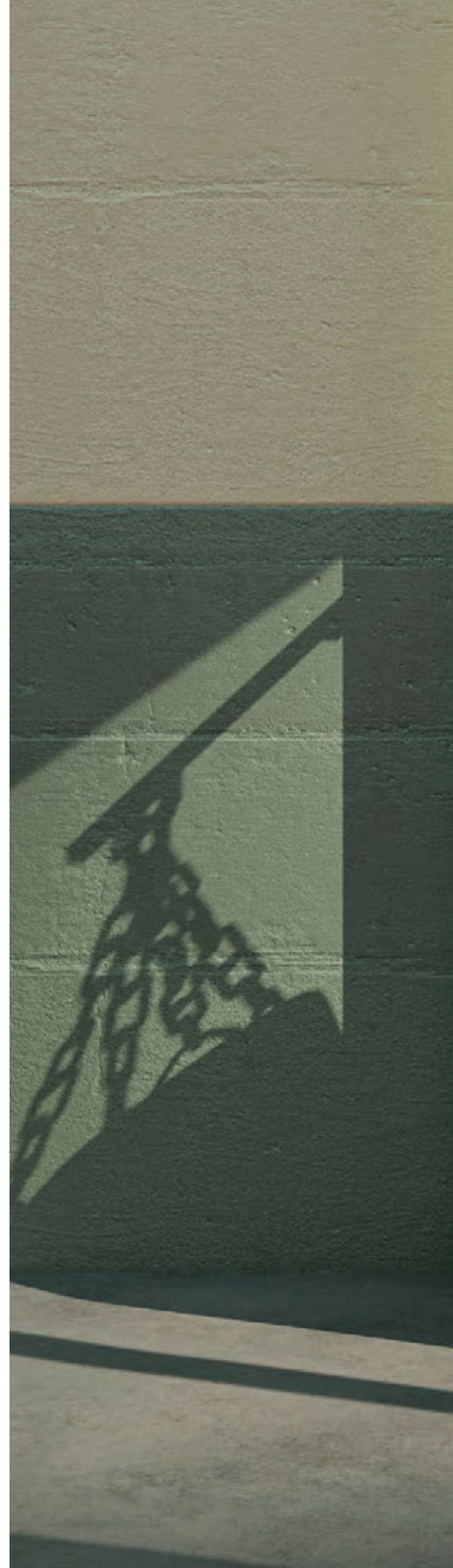
This is a brilliant gift from a man called to the margins whose passion offers us all a taste of the One whose presence is what we truly desire.

– Dan Allender

Ten years ago, I was a dynamite climber working out in the loft of the gym where I taught four-year-olds to stave off panic on short walls. The floors were dusty up there, and the equipment was old, salvaged from a high school circa 1980, so it had that punk rock blue vinyl flair. I loved being up there, watching the sun go down on the river, thinking about the future. After work, I was falling in love, raising goats, running from the cops on the back roads on a motorcycle. I do not exaggerate—those were good years.

The Territory Ahead

Words Blaine Eldredge





These are good, too. But something has changed that needs to be named. At 32, I'm fighting back pain, sleep deprived, still working out, but now in the unfinished basement of my house. Down there, I'm surrounded by hand-me-down chairs, scooters, a waffle iron or two, and the innumerable boxes of toddler clothes all families with young kids possess. 2T Boys, one box says. 3T-4T Girls/Winter, says another. I still own the motorcycle, but it's gathering dust—I started a carb rebuild but did not finish, and that was a year ago. I don't spend my time luxuriating in adolescent freedom; I spend it trying to love a wife, raise kids, care for families in our church, manage grief, follow Jesus, steward my own soul. These are good years, but not in a way I would have recognized a decade ago.

Truly, something has changed.

That something has a name.

In the tradition of Jesus, it's part of an idea called "Stage Theory," and it gives language to the otherwise baffling changes a man undergoes in his life with God. The basic idea, stretching back to Origen of Alexandria (if not further), is that when a person agrees to follow Jesus, they say yes to a series of stages. Those stages are variously defined, but one framework I like, derived from St. John of the Cross, goes like this: Essential Discipleship, General Discipleship, and Radical Discipleship.

Here at *And Sons*, we've talked mostly about Essential Discipleship.

Catholic priest Ronald Rolheiser, summarizing St. John of the Cross, puts it this way: "In essence, this is the struggle to get our lives together. This struggle really begins at birth but becomes more our own individual struggle when we reach puberty and begin to be driven by powerful internal forces to separate ourselves from our families so as to create a life and a home of our own. During this time, we struggle to find ourselves, to get our lives together, to create a new home for ourselves."

Perhaps that sounds familiar. Those were, in fact, the major questions of my 20s. As Rolheiser puts it, the questions of Essential Discipleship are:

- *Who am I?*
- *What will I do with my life?*
- *Who loves me?*
- *Who will marry me?*
- *Where should I live?*
- *What should I do?*

Indeed, yes.

Honestly, most of us are still asking at least one of the above, and some of them will never be answered. But, for the most part, by the end of the first decade of a man's life with God, he's gotten proficient at the basics. He can get himself out of bed in the morning; he can name some of his feelings; he knows what conflict skills are and he's interested in acquiring them; he knows that God is available, and, at least, where to look.

If you've been following *And Sons* for the last 10 years, that's you.

Probably you feel behind. That feeling, we know, does not go away. But I'm guessing that if we sat down together you could give me good answers to the questions above, even if they were somewhat abstract. Finding a home is more about an interior architecture than a mortgage; being a father or a mother is less about having children than realizing you're no longer the admired child and that it's your turn to admire.

The writer David Brooks argued that the transition from adolescence and young adulthood to maturity is defined by four commitments: the commitment to a spouse (or a sense of peace without one), the commitment to a community, the commitment to a faith or a story, and the commitment to a vocation. Again, I'm guessing that most of us who have been around since the beginning could define those commitments, even if the answers are not straightforward.

And because that's true, most of us have slowly made the transition to a stage that St. John of the Cross called "proficiency." We feel like beginners, and in one sense, we are. Teresa of Avila said that no one becomes so advanced in their discipleship that they do not have to return to the beginning, though she put it rather more simply: "Begin again."

But, in another sense, we're not beginners anymore, simply because we have a life and a self to give away. Rolheiser calls this stage General Discipleship. The main questions are:

- *How do I give myself over more generously and more purely?*
- *How do I remain faithful?*
- *How do I sustain myself in my commitments?*
- *How do I give my life away?*

Now, the reason I'm saying all this is because in my experience, the transition can be bewildering; all I want to do in the rest of our time together is name four characteristics of General Discipleship and make a few

“We do something with our 20s. Our lives take on a definite character. Idealism does not easily survive the transition from fantasy to reality.”

recommendations about how we could live if we wanted to thrive in our early maturity. I did not make these up. I read and identified with them. Though some of these may not sound like good news, I assure you, they are. The process of discipleship is the restoration of our humanity. As we progress, our capacity to love, and therefore, to be loved, can grow, and so the overall joy of the human experience is meant to increase greatly, not diminish, over time.

Anyway, here they are:

1. THE TRANSITION FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

Essential Discipleship is largely defined by possibility; novelty adds much shine to life. Our experiences with God have a swashbuckling quality. All that’s good. We should cheer on the idealism of our younger friends but not mistake that energy for other than it is—a power designed by God to get a person in motion. Because of course, over time, something happens.

We do something with our 20s. Our lives take on a definite character. Idealism does not easily survive the transition from fantasy to reality.

I remember how surprised I was when I got engaged. I kept thinking: “It’s you. One person.” Up ‘til that time, I could, in possibility, be married to every single woman I met. When I finished college, I thought, “Well—I guess that was my college experience.” I wrote my first novel and thought the same thing. Not only that—it wasn’t very good. It wasn’t that I thought I’d win the Pulitzer Prize, but, also, I did.

The main thing here is that reality is better than fantasy, but it takes a greater strength and emotional resolve to handle. T.S. Eliot famously observed that mankind cannot take very much reality, and to that I would add, at first. The more capacity we have for reality, the better. God’s universe is a good place to be, and it is defined by the particular, not the abstract.

Nevertheless, I’ve found this to be pretty disruptive. Thoreau wrote that “The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace of a temple on the earth, and, at length,

the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them.” I actually like that line but we’ve got to be careful what we do with it. It doesn’t mean that we don’t do great things; it means that the great things we do are born from the realities—which turn out to be less than most of us imagined—of our life. God did not save the world by becoming incarnate, in some abstract way, in every person. He came in one place, a humble place, incarnate in Jesus, and so saved the world.

2. THE TRANSITION FROM EROS TO ANGER

I found this in Rolheiser; it’s very helpful. The basic idea is this: God fills a young man with fiery passion to get that man out of his home place, and that young man sets out to build a new home. This is the design of the kingdom: to increase.

And so young guys have to find good containers into which to channel their effusive energies. They can also carry wounds with an impressive amount of emotional resiliency. Young men are, in Rolheiser’s term, “pre-neurotic.”

Into the 30s and beyond, this slows down, on purpose, because the interior journey begins. God does not want people bouncing around forever. He wants an expanded kingdom with deep roots. The slow down is good. The hard thing is that our wounds begin to assert themselves. Many of us who thought we were loving realize we were mostly energetic. The danger here is resentment. It’s far too easy to hold anger at people who seem to have had it easier, who got away with it, who were unfair.

Of this transition, St. John of the Cross made a helpful observation. Namely, that while young men try to learn to do what Jesus did, older men learn to feel what he felt, to imitate, in other words, his motivations. This is hard. We can advocate for justice and still be full of rage; we can make great art or earn a degree or love our friends and still be primarily self-interested. Freedom—I am told—comes from the ability to spontaneously embody Jesus’s emotions and motives.

To forgive people who have done truly bad things. To love because we have a deepening sense of how much we are loved.

In this stage, we start a long project. Dealing with our wounds, for one thing. Really forgiving, for another. And experiencing God's love, which is the main point. Our capacity to love is derivative; it is a copy of the love we have experienced. A major point of this part of discipleship is to descend into the quiet with God to experience His affection in our restless hearts. This is not easy to do, but is worth all the effort it takes.

3. THE TRANSITION FROM SUCCESS TO FAILURE

Have I already said these transitions are hard? Because they are. Robert L. Moore wrote that men no longer want to be elders, carrying the weight of the community. They want to be admired children, doted on by the community. I cringed when I read that, because, man, would I love to earn another degree or win another award or get more compliments.

In the beginning of a man's apprenticeship to Jesus, success teaches him a lot. It helps him develop a sense of self; it helps him find his vocation; it helps him feel the Father's validation. Now, some of us did not experience the success we need, and the good thing is, we did not lose our chance. God will still bring it along. He is not bound by time; He can fill in the blanks.

Or another one: an old acquaintance of mine is a rising star in the world of business. In my opinion—which is a dangerous thing already—he made some bad decisions over the past couple years. That was fine so long as I surrendered my judgments, but I found that hard to do. When I sat with God with my frustrations, I finally heard, “You're mad because you actually want that life, somewhat.”

Ouch.

That was true. I want virtue. But I also want money and fast cars and dinners out and praise. The old saints called this the “envy of the amoral” and issued a kind invitation: if you find yourself jealous of people who seem to be getting it easier—like me—you may want to evaluate your motivations in following Jesus. Is it because it is the only way that really leads to life, or because you want to win a monetary prize? I've had to sit with that one, too.

Failure is an invaluable teacher, and it is, many think, the main teacher in the season of General Discipleship.

Don't get me wrong—I still love to succeed. But the new territory that has opened in my heart in the past several years has been opened by failure. Failure to love; failure to get a business to take off; failure to play the hero. That's been hard, but again, it confronts us with reality. If we are willing to invite God into it, we can find our way to freedom. It comes off as a cliché, but truly, I would not trade the spaces of my heart that have been opened by failure for anything.

“It comes off as a cliché, but truly, I would not trade the spaces of my heart that have been opened by failure for anything.”

But let's say there have been some successes, even the personal successes of forgiving people and leaving home (or going back!) and learning to talk straight and learning to handle ourselves. Eventually, the script flips. We learn, not from success, but from failure. As our capacity for reality grows, we will, invariably, see parts of ourselves we do not like. I have but lately been confronted, for example, with how much I want people to validate me before I'll enjoy my life. I want them to say, “Wow! Your humility and character are amazing, Blaine!” before I'll love my hidden life with God.

Now.

What does all this mean?

It means that in front of us there is an invitation.

The masculine journey has a definite shape, and so the next stage comes not when we are ready but when it is time.

But the masculine journey is also driven by our willing participation, and so we get the good stuff not when we are ready nor when it is time but when we say yes. Our own Morgan Snyder has written about this extensively, and his material is well worth your time.



The main invitation is this one: There is life available. The old writers agree that General Discipleship is better and that the final stages are best of all, though also the hardest.

What remains for us is first to acknowledge that something has happened. We celebrate our teens, our 20s, our Essential Discipleship, but we do not try to make them extend forever. Instead, we try to learn the rules of our new stage, and to learn what it is for, and to enter into it.

There's a lot to know, but the basic parts are simple: slow down. Begin the interior journey. Prefer reality to fantasy. Treat the impostor, as Kipling called them, of success and failure the same, not as the real feedback of who you are becoming, but as teachers to take you deeper into God.

And what about Radical Discipleship? For most of us, that's far away, but even so, we need to know that eventually our question will be not "How do I give my life away?" but "How do I give my death away?" In other words, how do we live so that blessing flows from our death as much as—or perhaps more than—it did from our life? I'm certainly not there and I'm not qualified to talk about it, so I'll share one insight from Rolheiser instead: We prepare to die not by withdrawing from the world, but by entering into it more fully. We love more widely.

We embrace more wholeheartedly. We become people who, like Jesus, can share a table with anyone. Eventually, that will be our task, and it must be added that the hardest parts of the spiritual life come at the end. It is good that they do. Jesus was not, as it is too often said, at his weakest after 40 days of fasting. Spiritually, he was at his strongest, and thus he was prepared. So we will be, given a few decades of time.

But now.

For where we are. General Discipleship. Slowing down. Going inward. There is a good season ahead for us who have come this far, and though we may not pace together in the next season, I still pray for you a prayer my dad prayed for us:

*May the Son of God
who is formed in you
grow strong*

*and immense in you
and become for you*

*great gladness
and exultation
and perfect joy.*

— Isaac of Stella ■

A photograph of a child in a green shirt looking out a window with vertical blinds. The blinds are partially open, and the child's face is partially obscured by one of the slats. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

BLIND DAYS

THINGS I'VE LEARNED SELLING
WINDOW COVERINGS

Words Garat Grant

“When I grow up, I want to sell window coverings,”
said no young boy ever.

Think back to when you were young. What did you hope you would spend your best days doing? Most likely you had glorious, over-the-top, one-in-a-million dreams for your career. Careers involving buttloads of cash, a great adventure, or death-defying odds on a regular basis. “I want to be a professional baseball player” or “I want to be an astronaut” or “I want to be a firefighter.” This is so core to a young boy’s heart. When I was growing up, my best friends and I had a plan that we would each become professional athletes in a different sport and be the best group of friends who ever lived. Today, two of them have business degrees, one went into the Marines and me...well... I sell window coverings for a living.

What happened to us? I don’t just mean the four of us. I mean any man working hard each day to scrape a living together. Me? Well, when your height maxes out at 5’9” (on a good day) as a sophomore in college, you weigh 165 pounds soaking wet and your vertical jump is slightly higher than a dachshund, professional basketball is an unlikely career path. Here is the reality: most men end up in jobs very different from the ones we hoped we would have as kids. In fact a decent number of men end up in jobs that have nothing to do with their college degrees. It would appear that, for most of us, the biggest dream for our career is that it pays the mortgage. So, we end up in these careers that are either weird and off target or we’re completely lifeless in them.

I took a job selling blinds thinking it would be a couple years of my life. Absolutely no more than five. I’m at the dawn of my seventh year in the industry. God and I have had it out multiple times. Especially after I hear stories of the lucky few who have in fact caught lightning in a bottle (professional athletes and YouTube stars). How many nights have I called out, “Why not me? When’s my chance to make a great living doing something I love? How long will you keep me here?” No doubt you have had similar nights as well. The interesting part is that your answers to those questions hinge most heavily on whether you think God is on your side.

If you believe God is against you, then every failure and unexpected road bump in your career will reinforce what you believe. You will spend (or likely have spent) most days feeling like God does not want you to succeed and is not working on your behalf. If that is where you find yourself, I can offer only this: Make it your first and greatest priority to change that belief. God is for you, not against you, and uses hard situations for the benefit and initiation of his children—especially the ones that leave us feeling like we are beating our head against a wall.

*Every day I'm forced to decide what my integrity is worth.
In some ways I'm forced to decide even what my soul is worth.*

If you believe that God is for you, then hope abounds because you know that your Father is setting things up (easy and hard) for your benefit, growth, and maturation. During my most recent skirmish with God (don't worry, He won), He asked me a question: "If you had everything that your career could provide for you, would you still share your dreams with me?"

Honestly, probably not. Why would I? They would all be satisfied. And even more honestly, if I had gotten my dream job right out of college and could provide everything for myself that I wanted when I was 23, I'd be a wreck. How many stories do we have to hear about young men who get handed the world because of their talent (not their maturity) and consequently blow it up? Think with me for just a second here about the celebrities you know. Stories of affairs, sexual abuse, face tattoos and DUIs. Sometimes we get so blinded by the life we don't have that we cannot see the deep character lessons God is building in us. And that's a real kick in the head because these lessons will ultimately become the foundation for the future life that God has in store for us.

The next question God asked me was, "Would you share with me what you've learned while selling blinds?" Three statements immediately rushed to my mind. 1. Short cuts cost more in the end. 2. The mental gymnastics it takes to avoid accountability aren't worth the hassle. 3. People are the priority, not the sale. And let me just say I learned all these lessons as slowly and as painfully as possible ('cause I'm smart...and humble). There is something about working in sales that puts your integrity on a very short leash. We've all had to buy a car or a couch from a slimy salesman. I once bought a Jeep from one of these jokers. Needless to say, I overpaid.

Every day I'm forced to decide what my integrity is worth. In some ways I'm forced to decide even what my soul is worth. Allow me to share what I've learned more deeply.

1. Short cuts cost more in the end.

The phrase "It will probably be fine" is the bane of my existence. We all do this, but what are we trying to save when we do? A couple minutes, a little inconvenience? Whatever it is we are looking to avoid, it usually comes back tenfold down the road. If I decide I don't want to double check a measurement, I could potentially end up having to pay for a new blind out of pocket for the customer if it comes wrong. Apply this lesson to whatever subject or situation you want: Your walk with God, parenting, work, finances, etc. If we want our life to be full of substance, we need to stop looking for shortcuts.



Photo by Cody Doherty

2. The mental gymnastics it takes to avoid accountability are not worth the hassle.

This plays off lesson number one. It is embarrassing to admit how quickly one's mind can create an excuse. Most of us can get pretty flexible with morals and accountability when the chips are down. On occasion I have forgotten to place an order or accidentally ordered the same shade twice. Every man has two options the moment a mistake is noticed. We can take accountability and the following consequences, which are never as bad as we make them out to be. Or we duck, dip, dive and dodge our way through. You may come up smelling like roses on the outside, but guaranteed you'll feel like shit on the inside.

3. People are the priority, not the sale.

Commercialism has a way of dehumanizing humans. They quickly become units or cogs—nothing more than a nameless face with a pocketbook just waiting to be tapped. Living, breathing, bleeding ATMs. I cannot tell you the number of times I won a bid versus another company simply because I listened to the customer. This is another one of those high-pressure areas, however. You need sales to make commission and it's the commission that provides the paycheck. The reality is, and it almost seems unfair, that if you forget you're dealing with people and only focus on the goal, the sale, the deadline, etc., you most likely will not accomplish anything of great value.

And what a grace that is. Let that be a splash of cold water to your face. Please feel permission to be human and to relate freely and genuinely with people.

Wherever it is that you find yourself "selling blinds" these days, know that your Father in Heaven has not abandoned you. You are not on your own. The very circumstances that you have come to disdain may in fact be the forging fire God is using to take you one step closer into the true man you were meant to be. Secondly, don't give up dreaming for those big, hairy, audacious goals. The deepest parts of us are often shaped by those dreams. But remember, seeing those dreams come to fruition will not be the thing that brings you the life you're after. That honor is reserved for Christ alone. ■

WILD SPACES

Words Ben Cockrell

My crusty eyes winced open and I mustered the strength to flop onto my side. In the dry darkness of an Albuquerque morning, the red glowing light of the bedside clock read 5:07 AM. In true form, my grandpa had already been up for half an hour. He started cooking breakfast and turned on his “breakfast music,” which was an old CD with 27 tracks. Each track was the same, and each one seemed louder than the one before. Waylon Jennings’ “Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way” repeated and repeated as I tried to roll back to sleep.

The smell of bacon and green chiles wafted in the air, and my mouth started to water. Beneath the covers I heard the brief silence of one track switching to the next, and the soft twanging guitar began once again. I sighed, smiled, and pulled the covers off while sleepily mumbling the all-too-familiar intro: “Lord it’s the same old tune, fiddle and guitar. Where do we take it from here?”



Photo by Rob Mulally



Years removed from a grade school summer with my grandparents, I'm married now and we have our first kid on the way. And as many men before me have found, life easily falls into routine. It's within that gray sameness that the painful chasm in my heart begins to widen. The need for stability, safety, ease, comfort and responsibility war against a spontaneous heart with space for fun, adventure, adrenaline, and creativity. And for the life of me, this fissure will not allow both parts of my heart to live harmoniously. I've heard it can be done. The adventure of the mundane, the spontaneity of a life lived closely with God. The quiet moments in the morning or the meditative drive home.

Small, fulfilling portions of time that fill immeasurable holes in your heart. And I believe it. Dear Lord, I believe it. Yet these warring feelings puzzle my soul so deeply that it doesn't know what to do with itself.

For context, I work in the outdoors industry. Strange echoes of this dilemma surface every day through stories of fresh adventures thousands of miles away. Ones that you train for and save up for over years of planning. There's a lure toward those types of stories. They're big, glamorous, and challenging. But behind the illustrious, Instagram-worthy trips, there are specks of potential all around us. I see them every day. There remains a searing ache within me to explore the greenery of highway medians and the abandoned lot behind the carpet store that went out of business years ago. Within my soul is an insatiable urge to see these forgotten places up close. To hear the quiet chirp of an American Goldfinch. The sudden goose bumps-inducing chill of frosted pine needles on your palm. The oases in our modern world that pass us by when we turn our brains on autopilot during a morning commute. They're easy to miss when we live life in a bubble. Every day the same old tune, fiddle and guitar.

One day, I decided I would sit in one of these "wild spaces" after I got off work. No agenda. I finished up a project, waved goodbye to my coworkers, and walked out the door.

The sun had just begun to think about setting, and I felt a cool breeze set in among the trees. The engine of my 2012 Honda Fit squeaked to life. I kept my windows down and drove for a few miles until I pulled into a small dirt circle 50 feet from the main road. I was giddy by this point. What an adventure. Grabbing a sweatshirt and closing my car door, I walked 20 paces from my car and sat down criss-cross applesauce in between two trees. Feeling the sandy dirt between my fingers, I took a deep breath. The road noise seemed to disappear, and I started to cry.

Slow, quiet, joyful tears.

*A laugh seemed to burst from
my mouth as my brain tried to
comprehend what I was doing.
A grown man sitting behind a
pine tree next to a busy road,
playing with dirt and
crying to himself.*

A laugh seemed to burst from my mouth as my brain tried to comprehend what I was doing. A grown man sitting behind a pine tree next to a busy road, playing with dirt and crying to himself. Normal...that's what that sounds like. Right? Right. This is good, this is healing, this is weird and uncomfortable and yet I feel so at home. And it was in that moment where Jesus met me. Like a whisper in the wind I heard him say, "There is my son."

I spent 20 minutes there, singing whatever songs came to my mind, praying, and throwing rocks at a tree stump. Peace washed over me, and the sun finished setting. Rising to my feet, I brushed the dust off my pants and strolled back to my car as I tried to rub pine sap off my thumb. I sat down quietly in the driver's seat, leaving the door ajar. Exhaling slowly, I said out loud to myself, "That's all I needed. It was that easy...That was all I needed?" I paused and spoke again: "Life is confusing."

So as Waylon Jennings asked, "Where do we take it from here?" Well, I've never gone back to that spot, and I'm unsure if I ever will. But I did write it down in a notebook that I almost always have with me. On the last page I wrote "Wild Spaces," and beneath it I already have a few more entries. They have all been vastly different, and I don't go out searching for a feeling or a special experience. I find wild spaces because my heart longs for them. ■

Photo by Andreas Dress







Campfires

Words Sam Eldredge Images Isaac Smith



It's early June and the Colorado sunset is painted across the sky, clinging there for minutes upon minutes like it just doesn't want to surrender the sky to the night's stars. The smell of warm pine, dust, and granite float on the warm breeze. Cracks and pops from the fire compete with the crickets to be the background music for the conversations and laughter after the long day.

This is almost exactly the cover and title that we chose for the *Killing Lions* curriculum years ago, something we called "campfires" and designed to be used for small groups walking through the book. There is something primal, communal, and oh-so-inviting to men about sitting around a fire together. The walls come down, the posing stops, the competition gets left behind for a while, and we can just be ourselves seated around the dancing flames.

Interestingly, it was only after this weekend event that each guy confessed to me that he felt like the odd one out, like he was a boy among men, hoping to not be discovered.

I'm not kidding: Every single guy said the same thing to me. We want so desperately to belong, and we fear that we don't. It is that feeling that set us on the course to create *And Sons* almost a decade ago, when we coined our mission: initiation and the young man's soul.

And *Sons* has been a lot of things: a YouTube vlog (you can't find that anymore, so don't waste your time looking), a monthly online magazine, a podcast, a motorcycle film, a sticker on a water bottle, a camo hat, and a biannual print magazine. But before all that, it was simply a dream shared between father and sons. It was a dream that there might be content that would speak to the areas of a young man's soul that cried out for more. Where were the blogs on learning to hear the voice of God while living in a dorm? Where was the article on what makes for a good hatchet or a good jacket or a good adventure? Whose list of books felt crafted for our stage in life and not just snagged from the high school AP English guide?

We felt that same nagging sense of longing, and of not being where we wanted to be yet. So we set out to create and curate some of that content ourselves in order to offer it to other young men like us who wanted more.









What followed over a decade was not only a library of writing and podcast content, but some convictions as well. Convictions like: you are not behind, you are not alone, and the Father is there if you will look for him.

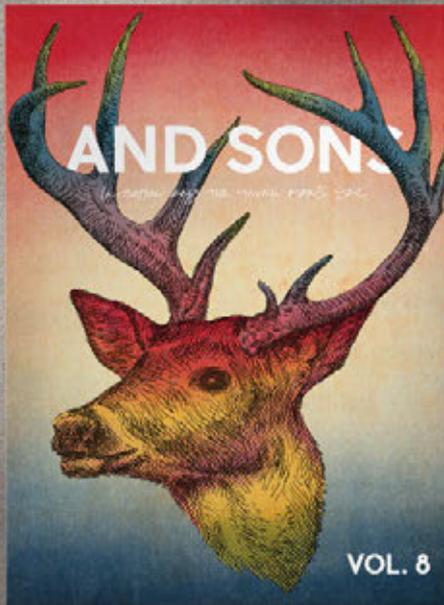
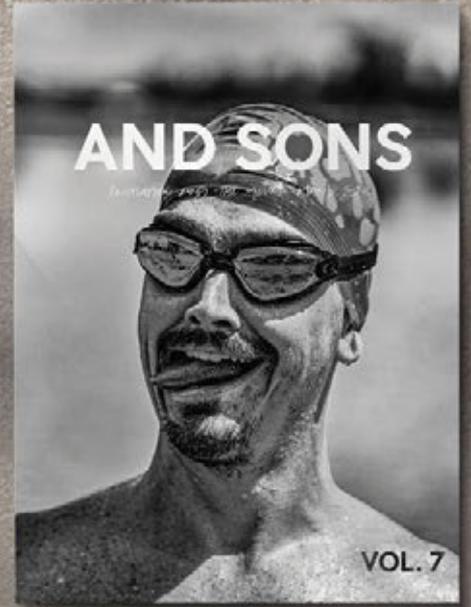
We decided early on that we needed to be real with ourselves and with our audience. People have a pretty keen sense of when they are being sold something, and young folks have always disliked being talked down to or made to feel sub-human. What was left before us was to follow our own invitation and to share from our own lives. I called it swapping notes, since I doubt I'll ever be the expert on anything. But I figured we could still offer from our own lives.

It turns out that the Father had invited us into a sacred place; I can tell you there is a unique relief and security that comes from living and offering

from a wholly vulnerable space. Learning when to let others in, and to what, was a big part of the journey. I encourage you to start your own fire, invite like-hearted men to sit with you, be real, be vulnerable, and journey together.

With And Sons behind us, and me still not being an expert, I would offer a few things to my younger self had he been sitting around the fire that night. I would tell him to slow down and let the initiation take its time. There is much ahead that you will not have the strength for, but you won't have to because it isn't all up to you. I would tell him that the only person he can be is himself, his true self, and the sooner he starts chasing after being that man, the better. I would tell him that the Father has much in store in the years to come. And, once more, that he is not alone. ■





AND SONS