

# AND SONS

*INITIATION AND THE YOUNG MAN'S SOUL*



**VOL. 4**





MICHELANGELO'S HIDDEN ACTION FIGURE PICTURE PUZZLE



# 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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*Epic photo on front cover by Richard Seldomridge.  
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VOL. 4

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*Ever built a pro-quality racing simulator with real physics feedback at your house? We haven't. But he did.*



# FOREWORD

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Chase the right things.

The other day, we tried to nutshell And Sons for a group of young men. It isn't easy—how do you put the formation of the young man's soul in four words, without using that phrase, or maturity, or virtue, or anything else that could sound vague or dusty? Then the sage himself, Padre, dropped the line above: chase the right things.

That's it, after all. There are plenty of things you could chase in your 20s. A career. Romance. Education. Success. Money. Freedom. Fame. There are narratives to back each one. Our point is—chase things that will form your soul in the direction of the man you'd love to be. It does you nothing to end up rich if you're hollow.

Now, it might be a career. It might be romance. It might be education. But any of those will be the particular expression of a general rule. Chase soul formation. Meaning, establish holding places for beauty. Acquaint yourself with good things. Choose adventure because the man who is familiar with adventure has a framework with which to read his whole life. Become a real friend. Be able to play.

How do you know which things will form your soul? You walk with God. It actually takes a little pressure off because “Which job will form my soul?” is an easier question to ask than “Which job should I take?” So are “What hobbies would form my soul?” And “What summer job would form my soul in the way you want right now, God?” They have the goal built in.

Why take your 20s to do it? Because a life is a long time. Paul disappeared for 15 years before beginning his mission. Padre didn't start college until he was almost 30. In fact, most artists, novelists, and entrepreneurs don't get going until their 30s or 40s. What do they do in the meantime? Well—you know our guess. Explore. Form a soul that can handle a calling.

What about us? Well, this time around, I chopped firewood. Stacia worked as a therapist. Sam investigated kindness to young places in his heart. Amy reframed friendship and then lived it out. Luke put up a kiddie pool in his backyard. In doing so, he increased his attentiveness to small beauty. Brett hunted Stone sheep.

For something so serious, it's actually a lot of fun. May this issue be a guide for you as you explore the formation of your own soul.

The chase is on.

– Blaine Eldredge



# READER MAIL

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I wanted to reach out to you all and say thanks. I just returned home from a road trip/camping trip to West Texas and New Mexico, exploring national parks with my old college roommates. We ended our trip with a couple of nights in and around Big Bend NP and it was beautiful. We smoked cigars and talked about the men God is shaping us into.

I owe the cigar portion of the trip to you all and your Holy Smokes article. We smoked the Rocky Patel Edge, the Mi Amore, and the Hemingway Short Story. The four of us were cigar rookies, but left as big fans of the Hemingway and Rocky Patel in particular. Keep the solid recommendations coming! (And feel free to share more cigar recommendations.) We also played the Disney board game Villainous. You all should check it out.

Take heart brothers: You have encouraged the four of us in specific ways. Keep fighting for the hearts of young men. Peace.  
– Wilson S.

A friend of mine just shared with me your recent podcast episode on hunting. He thought that I could relate to it based on how I talk about the intimacy I find in hunting. Thanks for getting to that beautiful and imperative point; there are so few hunting-media formats that have the guts to go there. And frankly, I think the avoidance of communicating the experience of that intimacy is not only irresponsible, it's dangerous because it leaves out the part of our hunting experiences that can bridge understanding and repair divisive and often hateful misunderstandings.

It's also vitally important that we cultivate those deeper values in our young hunters; we fail them and the future of hunting when we leave out the deeper aspects of hunting in favor of entertainment and commercial viability. So, thank you!  
– Andri E.

Hey dudes. I'm gonna pour out my heart real quick. I'm a 19-year-old kid living in the metro Atlanta area. My mistresses are theology and doubt. Over the past year, I've become addicted to the study of God, all the while missing His voice. I feel like I've dissected a cat, only to realize I no longer have a cat but just facts about a cat (props to Waking the Dead for this analogy).

However, after taking a break from podcasts, I started listening to you guys again, and with that started flipping through some quotes by your padre, as well as some other greats such as Lewis, Buechner, and Chesterton. What I discovered are men who have walked the ancient paths mentioned in Jeremiah—men who have gone before me on the journey of the heart. In a world riddled with depression, doubt, and indifference, it is a relief to find some authentic men who are passionate about seeing the Gospel—the true Gospel—permeate every part of life.

My soul longs for a cigar, a bonfire, and a band of brothers. I'll take a beer with Jesus over a class on systematic theology any day, but lately all I'm getting is the latter. Who knows, maybe I'll make it to Colorado for the next Wild At Heart Boot Camp. But regardless, I'll keep listening to the podcast and fighting the good fight. Every man is a warrior, but I think it was Blaine who said that not every warrior chooses to fight. I want to be one of the few who fights.  
– Jake J.

I have wanted to write this for a really long time. It's a thank you. And a thank you that I wish I could express and articulate more fully than I do here.

For 5+ years I have found And Sons to be a pivotal resource in my walk with Jesus and my initiation as a man. I'm 27 and my twenties have proven to be a constant fumbling of sorts through a confusing story.

Yet reframing this greater season of my twenties as a period of exploration and initiation has enabled me to trust and learn from God in some pretty amazing ways. This process of maturation has definitely not always been easy. In fact, it's rarely proven easy, but it has been really good (*tov* level good).

Sometimes listening to a podcast episode was while scrambling to class, biking up campus drive, trying to keep the cheapest earbuds I could find from falling out. Other times it was while sitting in the car waiting for the ice to defrost enough so I could get to that first "real" job. Later it was while standing in the underground of DC's metro system watching the frantic scurry of the most "type A" people a city has probably ever had (God bless America). A few times it was while running along the Potomac river laced with the smells and sights of pink cherry blossoms. Now it's while commuting under palm trees, or while washing the Southern California sand from my bike after a ride in the hills.

I think I've changed a lot over the years, just as the places I've strived to engage with have, too. But the impact of And Sons has been a consistent blessing. And for that I'm really grateful. Thank you guys. Thank you for stepping out on the limbs that you have, and for daring to bring to life this storehouse of aid for the young man's soul that And Sons is.  
– Zach B.

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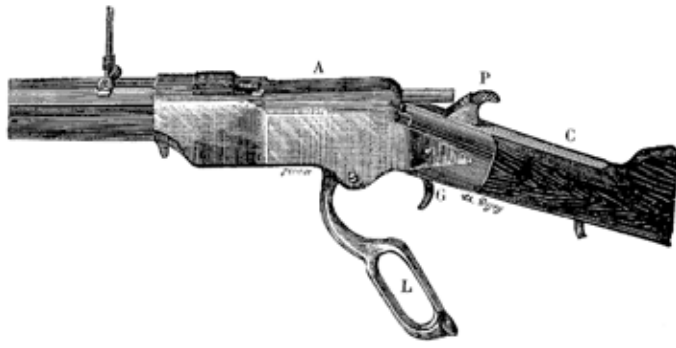
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# CLASE DE "FROGHUNTING"







# The Way Things Work

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

**A boy with a BB gun on his grandfather's ranch and the entire summer before him is the richest boy in the world.**

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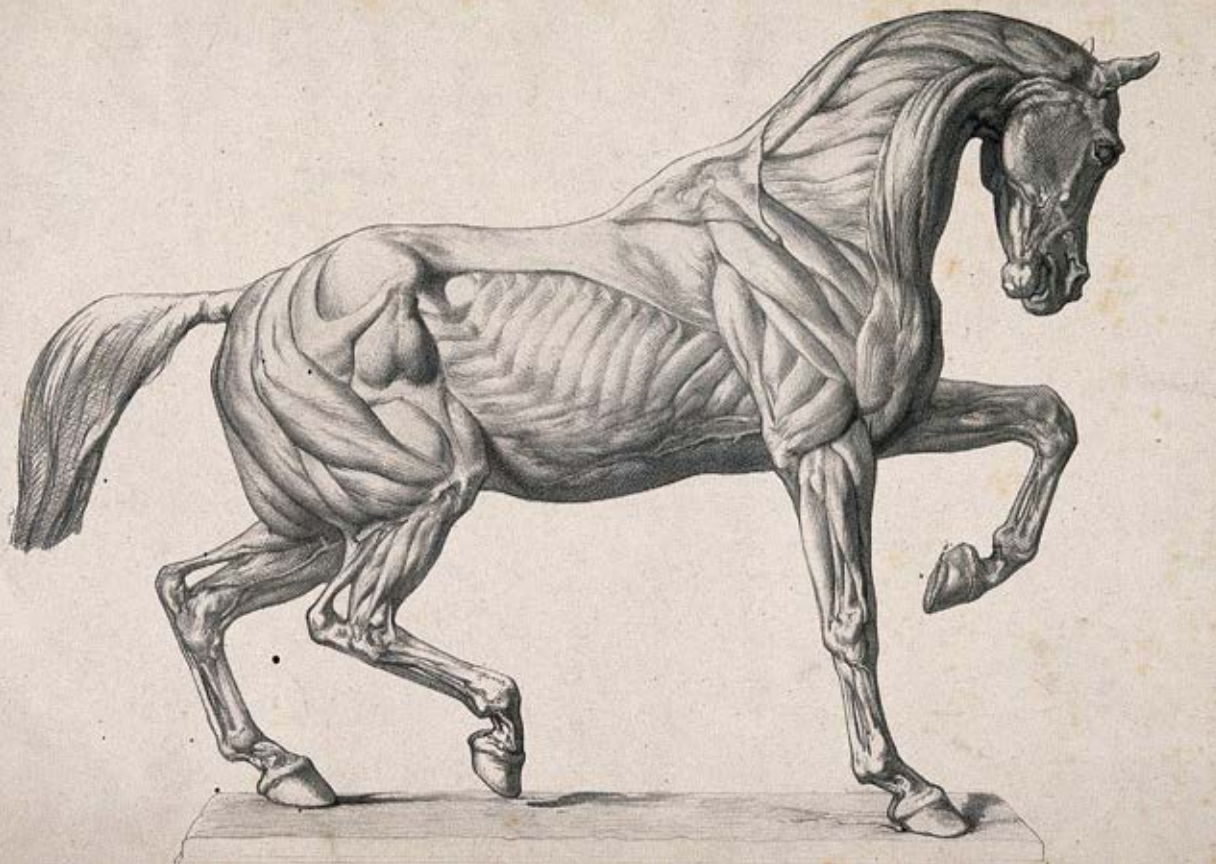
I was eight years old. My grandfather bought me a pump-model rifle and one of those milk cartons full of BBs, and I had endless acres of irrigation ditches to explore, hunting frogs. They're naturally camouflaged little buggers—all green and brown blotches just the color of muddy water and moss—and they're smart enough to lie very still until you're almost upon them. They know if they move they'll reveal their location (a lesson learned by many a lost frog thanks to the herons that have hunted them since time gone by).

My early successes were minimal. I tried sneaking up, but the little amphibians would remain hidden in the reeds and mossy bays, lying stock-still, and my untrained eyes couldn't pick them out.

The technique involved walking slowly along the banks, intentionally disturbing the frogs but not scaring the bejesus out of them, so that they would dive or hop or swish and catch my eye, and then I could stand still as the heron and wait for them to resurface and take my shot.

It was the beginning of a boy's education in one of the fundamental lessons of life: There is a way things work.

You can't ignore the oil level in your truck and expect it to run forever. You can't run a marathon without training. If you try to put a stalk on a whitetail, you'd better be downwind. If that canoe you overloaded turns sideways in the current, you're going for a swim. There is a way things work.



I learned a lot of that glorious lesson at Pop's ranch over the years. You can't forget your gloves when you're out fixing the fence or you'll have blisters for a week.

You can't run up to the horses feeding at the trough or they'll spook (keep repeating that trick and they won't feel safe around you).

The magpie is a smart fellow—a genius compared to a pigeon—and you can't just stroll out the back porch swinging your rifle. He'll be gone in a whiff. You've got to hide that rifle in your pant leg and act as if you aren't hunting at all.

There is a way things work.

This is one of the essential lessons in every boy's life. Every man's as well.

The brand new thought for most of us is that the very same thing holds true for the spiritual life—there is a way things work.

You can't walk around with heaps of guilt on your heart and expect to be a joyful person. Confession does wonders for the soul. You can't just blast out into your day without first dialing into God—not if you want the benefit of doing the day together.

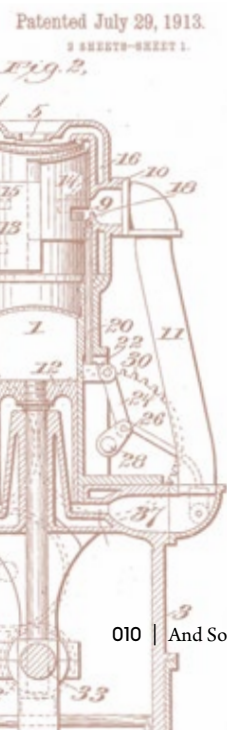
The relationship needs maintenance, like any other. If you move into a new apartment and start having nightmares, maybe you should have prayed through the place first. There is a way things work.

Jesus assumed this in all his teaching. In fact, his fundamental lesson wasn't so much about "salvation" but what he called the ways of the Kingdom of God:

*Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom... (Matthew 4:23)*

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom... (Matthew 9:35)*

*The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field...like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field... like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour... the Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. (Matt. 13:24,33,44)*







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*Now, just like you have to learn how ranch life works,  
you have to learn the way God's Kingdom works.*

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He even called his message “the gospel of the kingdom:”

*And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)*

Now, just like you have to learn how ranch life works, you have to learn the way God's Kingdom works. Apparently, Jesus was so committed to teaching his followers how things work in the Kingdom of God (there is a way things work), he actually hung around for more than a month after his resurrection so he could make sure they got it right:

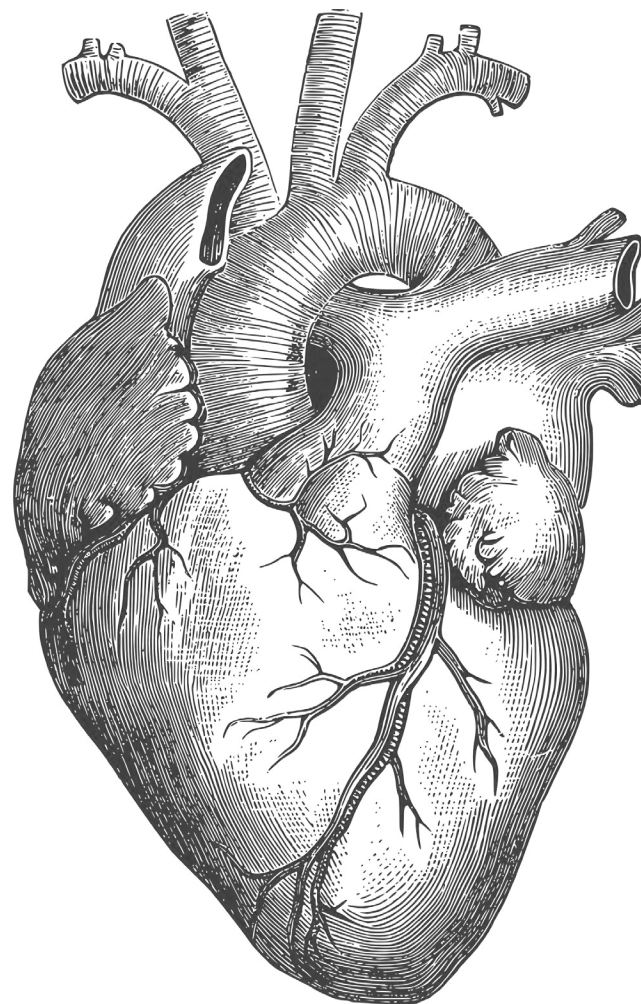
*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)*

That's a mind-blower—he lingered for 40 days simply to finish their instruction in the ways of Kingdom living. He must have thought it was important.

A boy becoming a man—and a man who is still two-thirds boy—has a journey to take. Not only must he learn that there is a way things work, but he must also learn to adapt to that fact—from the frog, to the oil, to the job, to the heart of a woman. This is how wisdom enters the soul.

The next frontier is one most men never venture into, to their everlasting regret. It's learning how things work in the Kingdom of God and learning to adapt themselves and their way of life to accommodate those realities. That man gets to reap the harvest of the greatest adventures, the greatest victories, and the greatest amount of happiness.

Christianity is not about a few things like “heaven” and “salvation” and “sin.” It's about a Kingdom we've been invited into, an entire realm of wonder and danger and joy unspeakable, if we will commit ourselves to learn its ways. ■





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# ADSPACE

**WORDS** Sam Eldredge **IMAGES** Blaine Eldredge

My life feels cluttered, or, rather, my brain does. You know that feeling when you borrow your friend's iPhone and their apps are cluttered with unread notifications? You were only trying to use their Google Maps, but you can't help but notice that they have 2,365 unread emails, 73 notifications from Instagram, Strava, and Podcasts combined, and now you can't remember where you were trying to go with the maps because you're so distracted by the notifications. You just want to go in to each app and click everything and clear it all out. Just me?

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That's what my brain can feel like at times. I'll start on a house project, or dig into work emails, or finally begin to do some creative writing when every random unfinished task starts calling for my attention. I need blinders for my mind.

This feeling is why I love the things that force me into one moment, like going for a run or riding my bike. Everything else is forced to the periphery for 30 minutes. My whole world stops being so complicated and is reduced to breathing. Keep pedaling. Keep running. Ignore the voice that says it's too hard and I need to stop to catch my breath. That voice isn't wrong, but it's also lying: I can push myself just a little bit farther.

It's the same voice that whispers all my half-finished projects when I try to write, telling me to stop and spackle all the old nail holes in my bedroom or finally organize the garage ... again.





























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*I love the spaces where it's easier  
to focus and shut out the noise ...*

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It's the voice that encourages me to leave all my tabs open on my computer so I can flit from the middle of one task to the next and, well, right now it's telling me to watch the latest episode of "Fast Life" that dropped on YouTube an hour ago. It's really inspiring and it's about cycling so it'll get me pumped for my workout later today and it's only 15 minutes so it can't hurt that much...

Devious little voice.

I love the spaces where it's easier to focus and shut out the noise because each time I do it I am practicing the act of flow, of fighting off distraction, and it bleeds over into the rest of my life. I want to be the kind of person who gives his full attention to someone when they are talking, the kind of man who finished house projects, the kind of writer who defends the space set aside for writing, the kind of father who is present to his kids.

Keep pedaling. Keep running. Ignore the voice. ■



# *Fasting*

## HOW TO LIVE A PLEASURE-PACKED LIFE

WORDS & IMAGES *Blaine Eldredge*

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After the 2019 hunting season, I found myself in front of a fire, late at night, agitated. It was December. I'd spent the evening glassing from a rocky knoll. The aspens were stark and dusky. Ladder-backed woodpeckers came out every so often to break up the monotony with their blood-red heads, and on the horizon, the winter sky put on its typical show, stacking bands of violet, red, and indigo below a dark blue sky. Because we're pointed at a near part of the Milky Way galaxy in the wintertime, the stars shone brighter and came out faster than in summer, like staged effects.

And I didn't care.





The winter grass, the snow, the ice-encrusted stems, were all notes played for the deaf. But I knew something was wrong. I'd come to the mountains to restore my soul. It wasn't working, though God was doing his everyday thing and filling the world with riches. As I spent some time thinking about why it wasn't working, I came back around to an inescapable discipline, one of the ways God shows a person he loves them: fasting.

It happened upon fasting by, um, reading Bible stories. Several years ago, my wife and I were in an intense period of warfare, and nothing helped. Not concerted prayer, not worship, not "rising above" or anything else. I remembered Daniel 10. In the story, Daniel has received a disturbing vision. He wants interpretation, and he fasts for three weeks. Eventually, an angel shows up. I didn't know much beyond that. But, like the desperate everywhere, I'd try anything. I stopped eating for 24 hours, it helped, and that was that. Then, one week later, Jesus suggested I try it again. And the week after that, he suggested it again.

So I've been cornered into a long-term consideration of fasting, and the first thing to note is that for thousands of years of Judaism, and for the first 1,900 years of Christianity after that, fasting was an assumed practice. If you were a Christian, you fasted. Nuff said. Then, about 100 years ago, it went away, all over and almost all at once. Two factors contributed to the disappearing of the discipline. One was the climax of Enlightenment thinking, which says, in a nutshell, that the mind and the body are separate and that only the mind matters. This assumption penetrated Protestantism early on and got a lot of people thinking that salvation was principally a matter of intellectual assent, as though we could believe something we didn't ever do. So—away with spiritual practices that involve the body. The second was that WWII ended and introduced a wave of unprecedented

prosperity into America. The country was making more than the rest of the world combined. People in the U.S. were eating 30% more than their European friends. That's an extra meal a day, like hobbits. Over time, we got used to being comfortable. The rest of the West followed suit. So we've come to see comfort as the norm and discomfort as a problem. We don't usually stop and ask if that's true.

And anyway, fasting is weird. Why abstain when Jesus is the Lord of Life? This is the Jesus of Cana, who promises to give freaking Venus to the saints who endure (Revelation 2:28). So, definitely a God of physical abundance and pleasure.

Answer: for a lot of reasons. David fasts to mourn for his enemies. Daniel fasts for spiritual breakthrough. Esther fasts to prepare herself for a climactic conversation. Jesus fasts in the tradition of the great prophets. The apostles fast to acknowledge changes in their plans. In fact, God brings fasting into the story for the same reason he does everything else: to give you everything instead of nothing, which is to say, there's a lot to fasting.

Here's but one dimension, an appetizer to the entrée that is the discipline: Fasting reminds you God is generous.

It does this by reminding you God sustains your body. Not food, not rest, not beer, nor anything else. The ancient Hebrews called this God's ruach, the power of God filling and sustaining all things. It is the Spirit animating creation.



Now, it's true that God sustains us through food and sleep and micro brews. But we forget. We do. And then we become inoculated against the lush generosity of God that is at every moment saturating our lives. It's easy to see food and water and clothes to wear as our baseline, as in, what we deserve. And then we expect God to add to that endowment. The problem is, it's not true. Every meal is a bonus. And it's not just food. Jesus reminded folks that God made the rain fall on nice guys and wicked folks (Matthew 5:45). Habakkuk worshiped because his feet and legs worked (Habakkuk 3:19). The wedding psalmist gave thanks because he had a knack for words (Psalm 45:1).

See the pattern? Everything is extra. When we fast, we remember, whether we're fasting from food, or from music, or from a show we love.

This is huge for me because I forget like an amnesiac with a head injury. I can, in the same moment, shout, "Where are you God?" and chow down on an elk burger. Fortunately, there's fasting to say every bite of every meal I ever had came to me from God. I could overstate the point here, but you wouldn't believe the attention I've given a handful of almonds after a few days of fasting. They become significant, sensuous, altogether fascinating. You wouldn't believe how exceptional a hot shower feels after a week or so of cold water. Fasting reminds you that the world is packed with the generosity of God. For this reason, I'm convinced that periodic ascetics (read: pleasure minimalists) are more hedonistic than hardcore pleasure seekers. They understand that God wants to fill their bodies with joy, so they take breaks to magnify that reality. The aforementioned pleasure seekers run around looking for the next fragile high.

Which brings us back to hunting. Problem was, I'd come to see aspen trees and sunsets and cool birds as normal. They were what I already had—what I needed was an elk. Because of that, I was missing the love of God. But take a break from hunting, and suddenly, it's all bonus again.

Because really: nothing gives you back the world like realizing none of it's a given. ■



#### A COUPLE NOTES:

*If you'd like to try fasting from food, read the chapter on the topic in Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline." There are important tips at the end, like how long to fast, how to dress to avoid feeling cold while fasting, and what to eat afterward. There are also some kind thoughts on when not to fast from food (like when pregnant, or recovering from an eating disorder). Helpful stuff.*

*This is important, but I almost never enjoy the actual abstention part of fasting. It's very uncomfortable. In fact, to this day, I often tell myself I'm not fasting (when I am) in an attempt to win a few ignorant hours. This is OK. You get the good stuff anyway. I can think all kinds of dark thoughts fasting, but I've learned to stick with it. Fasting days end. The things that come up can be taken to God. And you still get the world back.*

# Sien Sien Again

WORDS Sam Eldredge IMAGE Blaine Eldredge

I've been tending to my inner 8-year-old recently. The holiday season brings him to the surface year after year, but for the most part I ignore him or push him down under a blanket of distraction, sugar, and alcohol. He gets me into trouble and makes me feel vulnerable and stupid, so I'd prefer if he not be so vocal. Beer is great for shutting his voice down. For a while.

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When I say that I have an inner 8-year-old, I mean it just like it sounds: the past me, the me that I was when I was 8, is still a part of me in a very real sense. He feels distinct from my 30-year-old current self because he tends to have different desires and asks for things that feel silly or stupid or impossible to the current me. For example, this year he asked if we could get Chinese food.

Now for some context, I don't really eat Chinese food. The last time I did was at some hoity-toity place in Chicago that was trying to prove how fancy dim sum can be, and they were succeeding, I might add. But here in my hometown of Colorado Springs, the Chinese joints in town all look the same and aren't nearly as fancy as that. So when I was casually going through my day a week before Thanksgiving and the desire for Chinese food came up, it took me off guard.

The holidays tend to do this to me. I find myself wanting moments that may not really exist, days and weeks of rest and sleeping in and rich food and no homework and uh-oh I'm 30, why do I want a break from homework? I often feel disenchanting during the holiday season, and only in hindsight do I realize what I was wanting.

Back to the Chinese food. I've been learning, slowly, really slowly, to listen to those desires and ask where they are coming from, in the hope of not experiencing the same disappointment and the same need to quiet and medicate those places. So when I felt the desire for Chinese food, instead of jumping to, "What a stupid idea. You'll feel sick. You don't even really like that anymore..." I asked myself, "Why?"

And what I heard surprised me: I want Sien Sien with the Chinese calendar as placemats on the table, hot and sour soup, and chicken lo mein.

Oh. This would be when I clued in to the age of those desires inside. Sien Sien was the name of the Chinese restaurant we would go to as a family every once in a while when I was that age, and it was the spot we always got takeout from for Christmas Eve dinner. Those dishes? Exactly what I would have ordered when I was 8.

I felt at once stupid and foolish for voicing those desires because Sien Sien has been closed for 20 years.

But this year I tried a different follow up. Rather than medicating or distracting, I told that desire, "We'll go find some Chinese food, and I'll order those things. It won't be Sien Sien, but that's okay." After making the decision, I invited a few others to join me for lunch, and told them that I'd be tending to an inner 8-year-old, that the food wasn't the point and might not be very good, but that they were welcome to join me if they wanted to. It was a highly unusual lunch invitation, but folks responded with curiosity and tenderness.

We found a nearby spot that offered chicken lo mein, and when we walked in it was like stepping back in time to Sien Sien. The Chinese calendar was used as placemats on the table. Hot and sour soup came with the meal and was the same as I remembered it, I mean the exact same. It was more than I could have hoped for.

Before we'd left for lunch, I had walked to the back of my work and sat on a table in the sun. My decision to say "yes" to the desire was enough, regardless of what the experience of the food was like. Tears came, and once again I was surprised because they felt like 8-year-old Sam's tears. And I heard him say: "Really? You are going to take care of me? The things that I loved could actually come again?"

Yes, little guy. Yes they could. ■











# RETURNING TO ART

AN INTERVIEW WITH TIM THORNTON

*WORDS* Blaine Eldredge *IMAGES* Blaine Eldredge, Tim Thornton

Tim Thornton is an artist based in Colorado. He's also a musician and an entrepreneur and a dad who spends most of his non-work time pastoring or discipling or worship-leading. We knew he had a pretty extraordinary story about returning to art, so we caught up with him to talk about it.

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**And Sons:** *So, where'd this all start?*

**Tim Thornton:** Yeah, the shape of the story is actually a bit better told from the perspective of my later years, uncovering that history later on. I spend most of my time running a small business or doing people work: pastoring, discipling, stewarding this family expression of church—music and leading worship have been a big part of my life too. Also, doing some writing and teaching. They're very compelling, aesthetic, beautiful things, and they're deeply satisfying to my heart, but there was this ache that told me something was missing. A hole that, I later discovered, had something to do with visual art. I can remember seeing carpenters' trucks and feeling this longing, like, "Hey, you've got a physical craft. What you do is so physical, and I bet you're so good at what you do, building a business of creating with your hands"—I can remember being so jealous. I knew, they had it—they had something I needed but couldn't put my finger on.



I would be praying, “Lord should I be bi-vocational? Should I have a craft going on the side, something physical?” And, I would always ask the wrong questions: “What’s strategic? Where can you prosper me?”

That was my prayer life: how do I address this missing piece, this inexpressible longing for something I can’t identify?

It came to my attention in a couple of ways. One, actually, was through some teaching I was doing at a retreat. This principle came forth: it is intimacy with God, which is the practice of sonship, that releases inheritance to us. If you look at the Scriptures through this lens, certain things come to light. You can look at the Garden of Eden, and the original temptation from the snake makes sense: The good things you want—you can get them apart from intimacy with God. Reach out and take it. Or you can look at the Tower of Babel—trying to build an inheritance apart from intimacy with God. Or you can look at the story of the Prodigal Son. It’s a tale of both sons looking for inheritance apart from intimacy with the father, when it is our intimacy with the Father that releases inheritance.

So, I was teaching this principle, and dwelling on it, and realizing it was true, and then one night I was having dinner with some friends. We were talking about some things related to work and ministry and vision and craft. I realized all of a sudden that I drew back—I don’t know if you’ve ever done this, where you have this conversation with God while you’re sitting there having another conversation with everyone else—to a secret place with God and realized that on the basis of what I’d been teaching, I’d been asking the wrong questions. I had asked, “What is strategic?” or “Where can you prosper me?” when I needed to ask, “What craft comes from my intimacy with Jesus? What do I do with my hands that is the result of intimacy with God?”

I asked, and it hit me. Things that had been buried and needed to be uncovered. I’ve always found that when you ask the Holy Spirit the right question, there are whole paragraphs waiting. For years, I had been praying about this part of my life and heard crickets. Then, all of a sudden, I had volumes and volumes: pictures of me in my youngest days, before warfare and agreements





and everything else had taken its toll, painting. I can remember painting a bluebird—it was a watercolor painting, probably a big circle for the body, and a circle for the head, and some yellow sticks for feet, but it remains the first thing I know about myself. I was creating visual art. I started looking through my elementary school days—I was always drawing and copying drawings and making up nature scenes and dragons and knights.

It was an expression of my youth, my sonship. In high school, I never thought that I was going to be anything but a visual artist. For the first two decades of my life, it was obvious that I had to create. And so for that to have been totally, entirely forgotten by the time I got to my mid thirties was a great loss.

In college, I got into the fine art scene at CU Boulder. It just wasn't a good place for me, for many reasons. Most of all, some things that well-meaning people had said began to sprout mid-college. Those seeds came from lines of questioning like, "This is cool, but what are you going to fall back on? What are you really going to do for a job? How are you going to make a living?" Those questions all came

together with a common message: You're going to have to take care of yourself. You're going to need to be more practical. Practical. That's a pretty powerful word. It sounds so rational, but for me it was unbelief, an agreement with the kingdom of darkness. I was going to live as though God would not provide for me, and I was going to forsake the things that were beautiful to me. It's a devastating result of something that sounds so reasonable.

So, that's the agreement I made, realizing way later that I had made an agreement with the kingdom of darkness: You're going to have to look out for number one. You're going to be on your own, and you're going to have to find a way, and it's not going to have anything to do with the heart. That was the beginning of the crash.

**AS:** *Oh man. We know how gnarly that can be. What happened then?*

**TT:** I took on these mentalities, what you could call, essentially, a slave mentality: the son who's standing in the field saying, "I'm trying to work, God, but you're not giving me what I think I deserve."





And the whole time, he's saying, "Well, what I want is your heart, and with that, everything I have is yours." Still, I became a person who would reserve the creative act for last, after the "real" work was done. Creating was too vulnerable, and it didn't feel like something I could show myself approved with or earn what I needed with so I became a very useful slave. Like many people with a slave mentality, I began to find myself full of bitterness, especially toward people who knew how to engage art from an intimate, spiritual, daring place.

**AS:** *How did that godlessness start to break down?*

**TT:** Well, when I realized I was operating out of functional godlessness, which was anti-creativity, I knew I needed to make a spiritual change. Really, I realized I needed to sit down and set out what I had believed—ultimately, that I was alone in the world or alone in my life—and then renounce those agreements, repent of that unbelief, and replace those convictions with belief. I knew I needed to turn around and choose creativity, which is an act of spiritual intimacy for me. Painting goes right alongside prayer and worship. It's warfare to choose art first, and it's warfare to set aside websites and finances and all that stuff that goes on promoting and coordinating and selling and say, "I'm going to do the vulnerable act of creating something right now."

**AS:** *Was there a period of change?*

**TT:** It was just a moment, really, in prayer, when I decided I'm not going to live like that anymore, I'm going to learn to live from intimacy and I'm going to create beauty because that's obviously what I was made to do, or at least it's a part of what I was made to do. I'm going to learn to engage that first. I remember going to bed that night after being up late with God; I came back to bed and Laurie was awake and I said I feel like I came home to myself. It was like the world was alive again. I couldn't wait to see how I could live if I chose intimacy and belief first.





**AS:** *What were the consequences of that change?*

**TT:** Oh, it's opened up a host of beautiful things in my life. Like this studio, for example, which was, as I said earlier, rat-infested and forgotten, like the artistic part of my heart. I did the work of restoring it. I came out here and took my saw and cut down the stuff that needed to be cut down and swept out the stuff that needed to be swept out and started to build: a fireplace, a stone wall, some windows to let in the light, and the workbench and the easel. I started making this a place to engage in prayer and worship and visual art and it's been an amazing journey: to set aside time for that, even when other things are undone, in order to engage beauty first, and then to do other necessary things.

**AS:** *You've talked about how it's total spiritual warfare to move toward art. Could you talk more about that?*

**TT:** It's still a battle for me. It is total spiritual warfare to face a blank canvas. It is an incredible act of faith. Like, this painting behind you right now is in this phase—every painting has this phase—where I can't stand it. Usually, you start painting, and you're inspired, and you think, Oh, this is going to be the best thing I've ever done. And you get things in progress and get paint on the canvas. And then it all falls to pieces. Steven Pressfield calls it the belly of the beast. You get paint on canvas and think, Why am I doing this? This is such a waste of time—I'm not good at this. In fact, I'm not good at anything. In that phase, every time, it's like, welcome to hell. Every time I go to paint, all the old agreements are there, waiting. What are you doing? You have kids! This is so silly. And then, after I push through and continue to paint, it turns into something of a miracle. You pass through the shadow of death and realize you were accompanied the whole time, he was with you, and you realize it was the best thing you could have done. What a good use of time.



THE MACHINE SHOP



4 SOUTH  
WAHSATCH  
120











**AS:** *We've also heard you mention that the act of creation is worship. How does that play out for you?*

**TT:** You hold prayer or worship as such high and lofty things, but when you go to do them, they feel like such a waste. That's kind of why it's so good. Prayer is just wasting your time; it's wasting your time on Jesus. In a way, the more you push through to do it the better offering it is. The woman, Mary, who poured out her perfume on Jesus—she put everything she had into her offering. What did the people around her say? What a waste. And yet she knew that there was nothing more useful than intimacy. Her whole life was given in anointing.

I think the whole act of worship is wastefulness. The other picture of that for me is King David, dancing as the presence of God, the ark, entered Jerusalem. It's so key: he danced, and gave himself so fully to his worship that his clothes fell off, and the first thing that happened was someone shamed him.

His answer, though, is probably just as fiercely righteous as Jesus defending Mary: I will be even more undignified than this. What a great response to shame. The accuser comes to destroy creativity and worship, and the best response is to say, "Oh, you haven't seen anything yet! Watch how wasteful I can be toward a God who I love and am responding to and care to anoint with my life."

There's always an act of faith in intimacy, which is kind of embracing the fact that it might be a total waste of time, but I do it because it's part of my life with God, and it could never be understood from a godless mentality. I've always considered it to be a mark of living the spiritual life, that someone who didn't believe there is a god would go, How is this building standing? This doesn't make any sense. My life is pretty well that. It's a building that, if God were not real, should not be standing. And yet here it is and it is joy. ■

# Stop Tinkering & Remember

“WHEN WILL IT BE ENOUGH?”

WORDS Sam Eldredge

I found myself having a conversation with a friend late last year that surprised me. He was putting words to a feeling of exasperation that I have known many times, the fruit of a culture that always demands more. This time we weren't lamenting a need to produce or perform, but the cyclical trap of perpetual tinkering with ourselves.

There is always a new frontier for our healing or our personal development. An old habit that has become a crutch that demands our focus. A new addiction to break that slipped in when no one was looking. Some forgotten part of our past has come to light and requires a more practiced guide through the old wounds. We are far from perfect and sometimes the pursuit of wholeness only reveals just how far we have left to go.

Now, I am all for the pursuit of wholeness, but at some point this can turn into a cycle. First we have some personal revelation of some aspect of ourselves that needs to be corrected or healed or both; then we spend time doing the hard work to heal or fix this attribute, which is often mixed and motivated by a healthy dose of condemnation for not having dealt with this already and finally some conclusion of freedom or withdrawal. As soon as we've finished this cycle, it seems like it can start all over again with the next thing.

Eventually I found myself asking the same question as my friend, “When will it be enough?” And I realized that my pursuit of being a good man, or of being whole, was only half the picture. I had fallen into perpetual tinkering with the next thing, and I was missing any sort of celebration of what has been done.

Stop and remember. Creating Ebenezers to the work that God has done is biblical (1 Samuel 7:12), and often demands a physical monument to help us remember. We are forgetful beings, sadly even more so about positive or beautiful things. I can call to mind a shameful moment I had in the second grade easily enough, but remembering the man I once was, and how far I've come, is a much more difficult task.

Remembering and celebrating is an invitation to break out of the cycle, to find yourself fueled by joy and gratitude, to practice experiencing more of the fruit of the hard work that's already been done. Yes, there is more work ahead of us. But there is a deeper risk hiding inside the pursuit of the next thing, the next round of healing or self improvement, and that is that it becomes the end goal. I'm learning to acknowledge and celebrate the work that has been finished, so that that becomes the goal, and the better focus of it all. ■











SIMPLE PRACTICES TO BUILD YOUR SOUL

# *Tree Cutting*

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

*“There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.”*

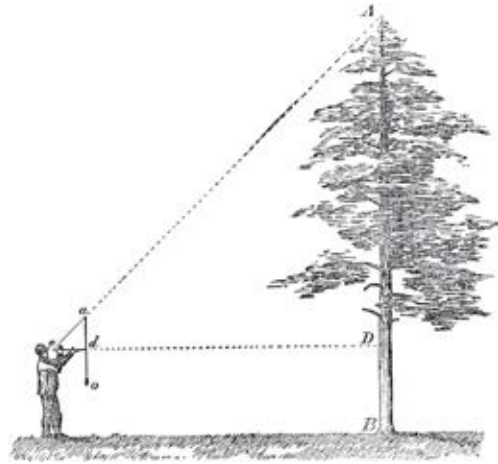
— Aldo Leopold

Aldo’s right, though there’s a certain philosophical heavy-handedness to the concept as such. In practice, it’s quite fun. If you want to nourish your soul, adopt simple, real practices and do them. I love cutting firewood. The tools are straightforward and the motions are simple. Most guys can split a block without hurting themselves. And there’s still plenty to know because, like learning to kiss or throw a punch, you’ve got to get the basics down or you’ll get yourself in trouble.

## THE BASICS

### 1.

Here's one cool trick—you can determine the height of a tree with a stick the length of your arm. I mean it. It works this way: pick up said stick. Hold it at a 90-degree angle to your (straight) arm. Then, point your arm at the base of the tree. Don't change the angle of the stick. Move backward or forward until the top of the stick lines up with the top of the tree, and you've made a right triangle. The tree is as tall as the distance between its base and your shoulder.

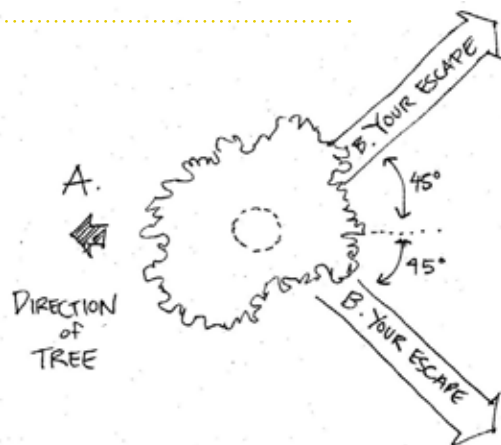


### 2.

Or another one: when you cut a hinge to fell a tree, it should be 10 percent of the DBH, or the Diameter at Breast Height, 4.5 feet off the ground. If the tree has a 30-inch diameter, you need a 3-inch notch to fell the thing right.

### 3.

Or one more: before you fell a tree, you determine an escape route. You need to get 15 feet away from the tree at a 45-degree angle to the face of your hinge. Doing so will get you out of the way of most of the hazards, most of the time.







But that's the science. The experience is the gold—the showers of sawdust. The tang of 50:1 fuel. The rough sensation of a wood block on your shoulder. I love stacking, splitting, and burning wood. After long days in front of a computer, I'll split a few blocks and build a fire, even if I don't plan to sit in front of it. The feeling, the reality, the immersion in it, relieves me. There's nothing like swinging an axe to situate yourself in an ageless procession of men.

But it doesn't have to be firewood. A buddy of mine bakes bread. The ingredients are simple: flour, salt, oil, yeast, water. And yet. There's a world of inscrutable science. The temperature of the water. The life of the yeast. The feeling, which has to be experienced, not communicated, of perfectly-kneaded dough. It anchors him in the real world. It forms a place in his soul suited to life with God.

For another guy, my neighbor, it's working on his car. I've learned to love the smell of brake cleaner by proximity. For my brother Sam, it's tuning his bike. For Luke, it's making dynamite paleo stews. The point is, reality is your friend. Simple practices that connect you with the real world build your soul, and you don't have to put in additional effort. It just happens.

This is good news because most of us set the bar too high. Camping trips, long trail runs, days fishing a river. But really—you can real-ify your life without much additional effort. Find something simple, something you like, and then rig your life to fail without it. Get a wooden box coffee grinder and throw out your electric one. Volunteer to bring homemade bread to that weekly dinner. Buy an old dirt bike and set a weekly time to wrench on it with a buddy.

Or, like me, get a wood stove and learn to love being around it. Your soul will thank you. ■

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*Find something simple,  
something you like, and  
then rig your life to fail  
without it.*

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# GEAR GUIDE

## AXES & HATCHETS

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*IMAGES* Blaine Eldredge

Our philosophy simplifies all the time: Give guys real recommendations. Stop advertising and endorsements from muddying the water by writing about stuff we actually own. There are a hundred feasible axes out there, from family heirlooms to gallery-worthy artifacts. Here are a few we use.

Now, not every guy needs an axe. One per friend group usually does the trick. But everybody needs a hatchet. It's a basic piece of equipment to keep in the back of your car.

May these tools add a manual element to your everyday life and bring joy to your soul.

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*P.S. This is probably where we'd put a legal disclaimer. Here's a bit of advice instead. Axes are tools, not toys. They're effective, which means they're dangerous. Learn how to use your axe and keep it sharp, and you'll keep your body in one piece.*





## AXES



HUSQVARNA CARPENTER'S  
AXE - 19" (\$70)

Husqvarna is famous for making chainsaws and motorcycles, so they're reliable. This axe is a gem. The Carpenter's Axe has a longer cutting edge and a deeper "beard," meaning the blade drops down so you can get your hand almost behind it for superior control. Blaine gives these as wedding gifts.



HUSKY 8 LB. SPLITTING MAUL  
(\$30-\$40)

Mauls are heavy and best for dry wood. They don't bite; they break. Blaine uses one but wouldn't swing it all day. Major upside: the sledgehammer on the back, which is designed to drive splitting wedges, can be used to break rock or drive lawn edging or seat trailer hitches. Just don't hit yourself in the face.



FISKARS X27 SUPER  
SPLITTING AXE (\$75)

Fiskars makes great tools. A splitting axe is sharper and lighter than a maul. If you're going to split wood all day, use this. There's also a shorter version, the X25, for folks under six feet tall.

## HATCHETS



ESTWING SPORTSMAN'S AXE - 14"  
(\$30-\$40)

What can we say? A classic tool, albeit heavy. It's great for camping and minor splitting.



FISKARS X7 HATCHET - 14"  
(\$20-\$30)

Remember what we said about Fiskars? This is a simple, light, durable hatchet with a cool case. It gets the job done. *And Sons* team member Justin uses one, and he heats his house with firewood.



LANSKY PUCK DUAL-GRIT STONE (\$10)

This is not an option. Don't use dull tools. An axe stone protects you. Plus, it's fun to use. Sit on the porch and grind a fresh edge on your axe, and you'll feel like a Nordic king. Fun fact: you can use this to sharpen your lawnmower blade.





# I'm Friends With My Kids

WORDS Amy Dale IMAGE Blaine Eldredge

Let me start by saying that I am no parenting expert. If anyone says that they are, you should probably put your fingers in your ears and sing loudly when they talk.

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I mean, with parenting, it's all one big experiment. You kind of do your best and cross your fingers and see what happens. Seriously. I am the mom that found two of her kids naked and pooping in the yard when they were 3 and 4 (we lived in a busy neighborhood). Yeah. So at this point you can either laugh, relate and keep reading, or roll your eyes and pretend you never saw this.

This little article is a response to many articles I have seen floating around the internet, suggesting that we should not be our kids' friend. Every time I see this, it bothers me. I couldn't figure out why, but today, as I was mopping (because occasionally I actually do that), I think I got a grasp on it.

I am friends with my kids. I love being with them and we have a great relationship. I have never been an authoritarian parent. I believe I should speak to my children with respect, the way I would like them to speak to others. I don't treat them like minions. I treat them as equals. I still ask them to do things and they comply happily 90% of the time.

My issue with this whole "you can't be friends with your kids" idea is more about our concept of friendship than parenting. I think we have become friends who don't tell each other the hard things and don't want to hear other people tell us those things.

I am lucky enough to live in an amazing community of friends. We love each other well.

We laugh together and cry together, and sometimes we sit down with each other and give our friend a proverbial slap across the face and say, "This area of your life is getting way out of whack, what is going on?" Or maybe we hug them and say, "Something seems off, you're not yourself.

How can we help?"

In my experience, outside of my community, most people just want to be encouragers and say only nice things about each other. But blind spots are hard to see. If you truly love someone, you will want to help them grow as a person. You don't want to see them sitting in the same pile of dog poo for the rest of their lives.

You want to help them get out and move forward. And since you don't want to sit on that pile for the rest of your life, either, you have to learn to receive hard truths from those that love you. Yes, we should be our friends' biggest cheerleaders and encouragers, but to love each other well, we have to move into a deeper kind of love.

I make dumb mistakes a lot. It happens. I am learning and so are my kids. Hopefully, all of us are learning and growing. I am grateful for my friends who have and will pull me aside and tell me when I have areas that need some work. So I will continue to be friends with my kids (and also cross my fingers and hope for the best). ■

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*If you truly love someone, you will want to help them grow as a person.*

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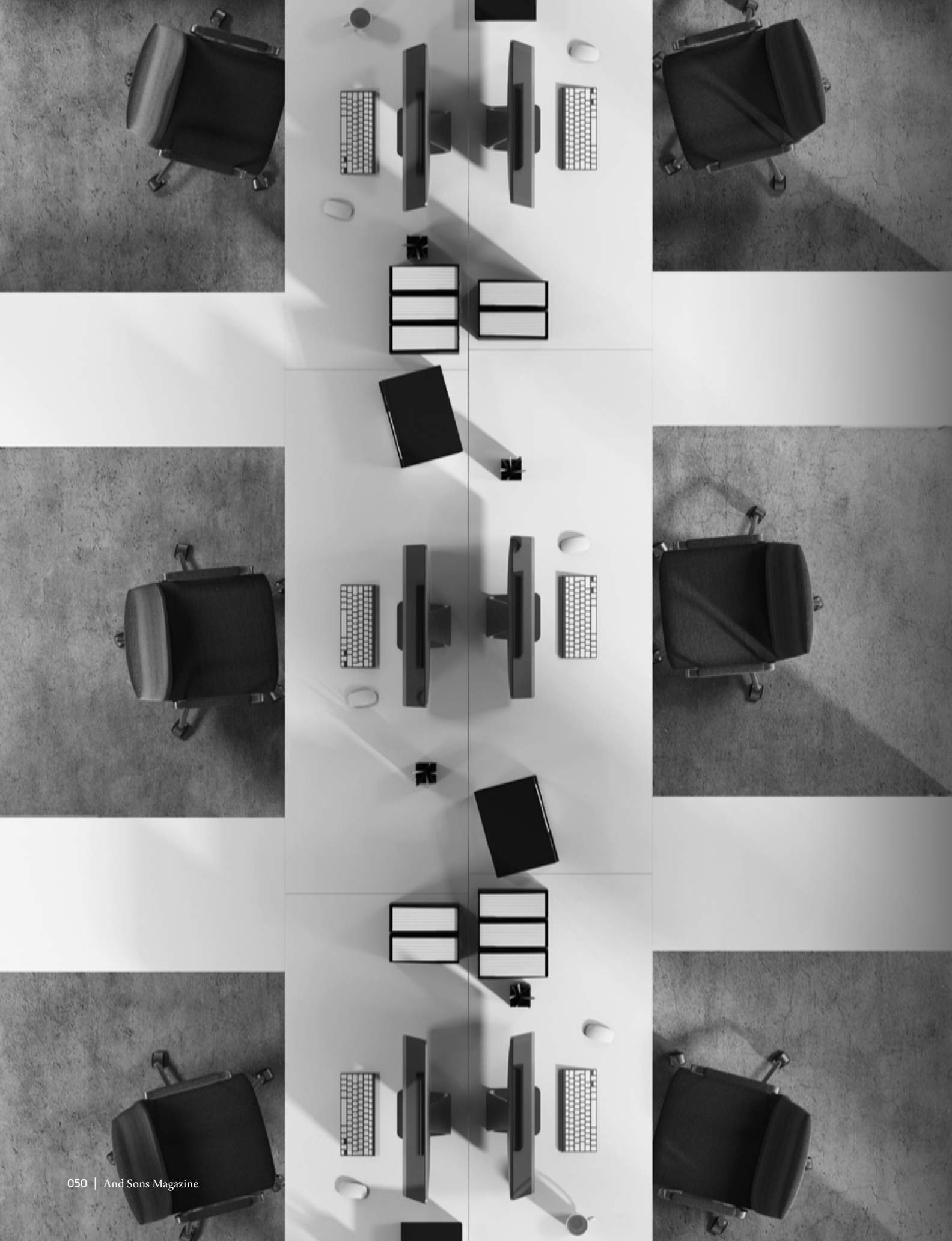






Henry, you don't think we're spending too much of the work day at the pool, do you?

Nah, Randy, and besides, I'd never tell a friend what to do!







# THE LONGING

*"How long, oh Lord? Will you utterly forget me?  
How long will you hide your face from me?"  
(Ps. 13:1)*

**WORDS** Ben Richardson **IMAGES** Cody Howell & Stock Imagery



We've all felt it. Or at least those of us open to the movements of our hearts have felt it. That deep, heavy ache that sits like a 500-pound gorilla on your soul. I call it "The Longing."

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I remember the first time I felt The Longing. I had recently finished college, which has a stimulating effect with its cycle of seasons and the adrenaline of anticipation as you count down toward Christmas, spring, and summer breaks. I graduated in May of 2009, and within a few days of convocation I was thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. With 40 pounds on my back and 2,178 miles of backpacking ahead of me, literally every step I took was a new adventure. A little over four months later and a lifetime achievement completed, the startling reality of needing a job settled in. I ended up getting a social justice(ish) job at a nonprofit the following January, and off I went to change the world. However, changing the world seems to lose its luster when you are choosing between dental plans, how much to contribute toward your

IRA, and a seemingly endless length of red tape and bureaucracy that exists in even the best organizations.

On my daily walk to work, I had to pass through the campus of a large high school. The seasons progressed from winter to spring, to the beginning of summer, and the school's heartbeat shifted along with it. But my life remained exactly the same. I still got up at 7:00, was at work by 8:30, and stared at a computer until 5:00. One day in June, it struck me how empty the campus was—the students off, presumably indulging the spoils of summer break. I stopped in my tracks and realized my soul felt about as full as the summertime campus of that high school. And I wondered, is this what life will be like for the next 30 years until I retire? A banal life plugging in 40 hours a week, working (in the prophetic words of Loverboy) for the weekend? And then I felt The Longing.

















One month later I quit my job and went on a medical mission trip to the Dominican Republic. I slept in a house that had shoddy plumbing, mosquito nets over the beds, and a resident tarantula that lifted weights as a hobby. We drove for hours into the backcountry of this developing nation, giving food and medical supplies to families that likely had never seen someone from the U.S. before. At night we played soccer and baseball in the streets with the children, and I felt alive. I started a job at a Christian camp the following week, and met my beautiful wife while belaying chunky Texan children from high ropes courses. We pretended we weren't madly in love with each other. A few gigs, years, and babies later, that same sobering feeling of "I need a real job" came rushing back in. Back to sitting in front of the computer. The Longing returns.

Sure, The Longing isn't omnipresent. You have those "good" days. Days where you're especially productive and clear out the To-Do List.

Or days where you get a little bump in pay, and fantasies of a new truck, dinners out, or some debt-clearing dreams pour in. And The Longing is especially absent on Fridays around 5 p.m., or the day before you leave on vacation.

But we all know what that really is: anesthesia. It's a numbing of what's really happening two or three layers deeper in the soul. And like any anesthetic, in time it wears off. The numbness fades, and reality returns. The little bump in pay somehow has gotten wrapped into the monotony of your tedious budget, as if it were never there to begin with. The new truck is fun, but you never seem to have time to take it off road anywhere, and you don't want to get any knicks or dings in it since it cost so much. (So why did you get it in the first place?) And those dinners out ... well, you need a sitter to watch the kids to really engage in your wife's heart, and that would require another bump in pay. And so it's back to the hamster wheel.

And that's the struggle with pursuing a life with God. Let's just call it as it is. Seeking a life and a calling with God can hurt. Pursuing God, which is to say pursuing our calling, awakens us to the painful ache that is The Longing. It allows us to see that the work we are doing is so far from our true hearts, that a fish out of water is closer to home than our souls are at the 9 to 5.

Listen, I am all for taking care of our families. It is a responsibility that I take incredibly seriously. But when you look up from your keyboard amidst the tedium and piles of paperwork and realize that you haven't felt the sunshine on your face in two days, you have to wonder—is this the right way to take care of them? The last time you laughed, I mean really laughed, was last year on vacation when you had a few golden moments with your wife and children. But what about the other 51 weeks of the year?













Publication 505  
Cat. No. 150706

# Tax Withholding and Estimated

SCHEDULE D  
(Form 1040)

Department of the Treasury  
Internal Revenue Service (IRS)  
Name(s) shown on return

## Contents

- Introduction
- What's New for 2018
- Reminders
- Chapter 1 Tax withholding

OMB No. 1545-0047

2018

Attachment Sequence No. 12

Total social security number

## Capital Gains and Losses

- ▶ Attach to Form 1040 or Form 1040NR.
- ▶ Go to [www.irs.gov/ScheduleD](http://www.irs.gov/ScheduleD) for instructions and the latest information.
- ▶ Use Form 8949 to list your transactions for lines 1b, 2, 3, 9b, 9, and 10.

### Part I Short-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Generally Assets Held One Year or Less

See instructions for how to figure the amounts to enter on the lines below.  
This form may be easier to complete if you round off cents to whole dollars.

- Totals for all short-term transactions reported on Form 1099-B for which basis was reported to the IRS and for which you have no adjustments (see instructions). However, if you choose to report all these transactions on Form 8949, leave this line blank and go to line 1b.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box A** checked.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box B** checked.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box C** checked.

- Short-term gain from Form 6252 and short-term gain or (loss) from Forms 4684, 6781, and 8924
- Net short-term gain or (loss) from partnerships, S corporations, estates, and trusts from Schedule(s) K-1
- Short-term capital loss carryover
- Marketable securities capital gain or (loss). Combine lines 1a through 6 in column (b). If you have any long-term capital gain or (loss), go to Part III below. Otherwise, go to Part III on the back.
- Net short-term capital gain or (loss). Enter the amount, if any, from line 8 of your Capital Loss Carryover
- Net short-term capital gain or (loss). Enter the amount, if any, from line 8 of your Capital Loss Carryover

### Part II Long-Term Capital Gains and Losses—Generally Assets Held More Than One Year

See instructions for how to figure the amounts to enter on the lines below.  
This form may be easier to complete if you round off cents to whole dollars.

- Totals for all long-term transactions reported on Form 1099-B for which basis was reported to the IRS and for which you have no adjustments (see instructions). However, if you choose to report all these transactions on Form 8949, leave this line blank and go to line 1b.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box A** checked.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box B** checked.
- Totals for all transactions reported on Form(s) 8949 with **Box C** checked.

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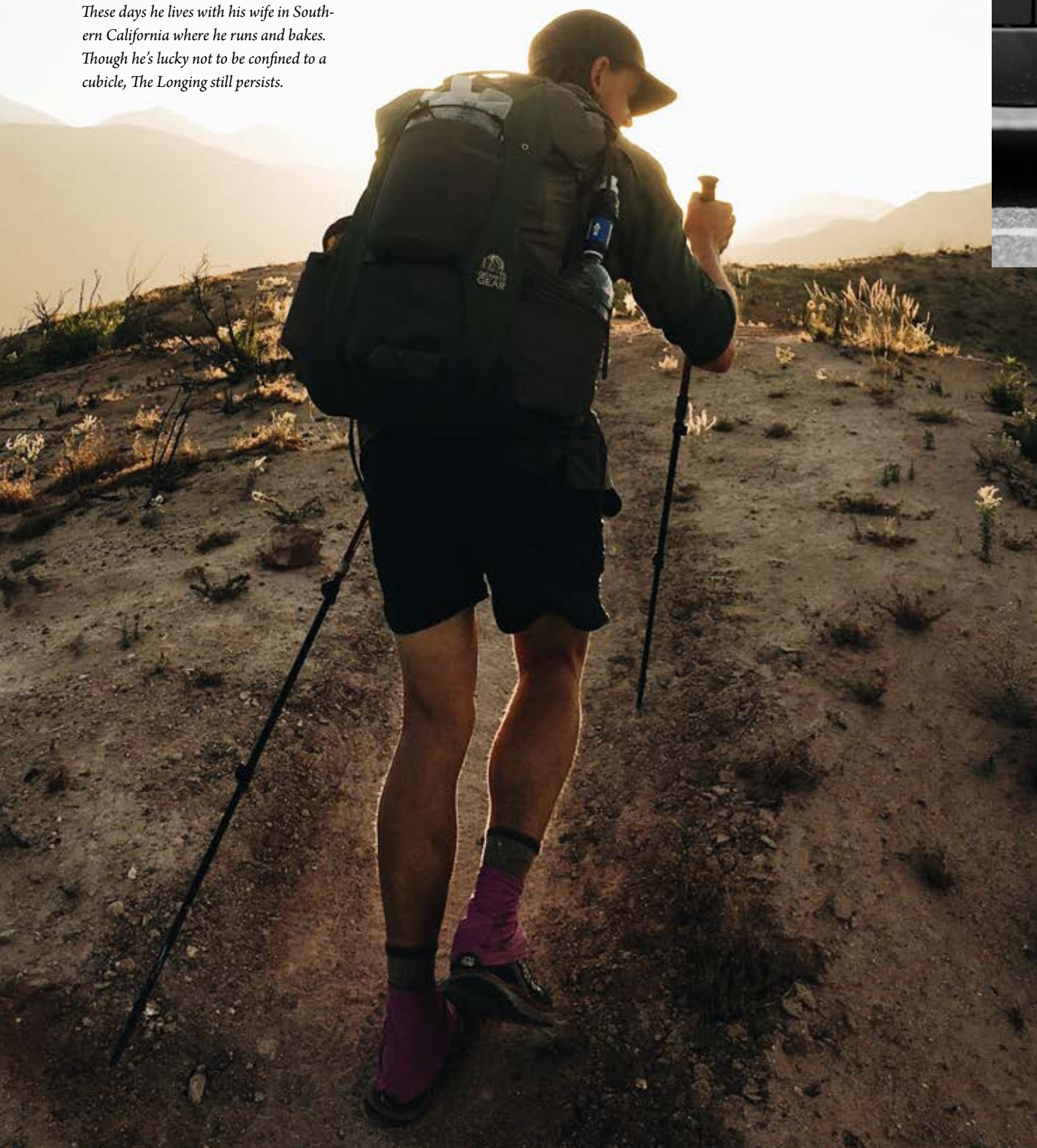






**CODY HOWELL (PHOTOS)**

*Cody is a photographer and producer who hiked the PCT once back in 2017. These days he lives with his wife in Southern California where he runs and bakes. Though he's lucky not to be confined to a cubicle, The Longing still persists.*







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*It is entirely possible to find a life worth living, a life of adventure and calling, and provide for our families.*

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When I think back on my hike of the Appalachian Trail, or my time in the Dominican Republic, there is a thread. I felt alive, and they were adventures. Contrast those experiences to staring at a computer monitor reading emails and sitting in day-long budget meetings. Is there really any comparison?

Now, I am not suggesting we all quit our jobs and spend the next few months tramping across Europe wearing tie-dye, smoking hookah and “finding ourselves.” The cycle of gaining employment, burning out, adventure-binging, panicking and again finding “real” work is not sustainable. And I know that on this side of Eden, there will be toil in our work. But it is entirely possible to find a life worth living, a life of adventure and calling, and provide for our families. And here is how: we must incrementally work toward it.

For me, it’s been a 3 p.m. walk outside each day to take a deep breath, pray, and look around at what actually is true. The trees. The breeze. The smell in the air after a rain. What color is the sky today? I get outside and tune in my senses, even if it is for only one minute, every day.

When I travel for work, I do everything I can to jam in a micro-adventure in even the tightest scenarios. Sometimes it’s blasting in a three-mile hike in 45 minutes at lunch break and showing up to the meeting sweaty, puffing, but totally recharged. It’s not the Pacific Crest Trail, but it’s available and lifegiving. I daydream of Thoreauvian living and writing stories all day in a rustic mountain cabin. And while I will likely never get anywhere near that life, writing this article is at least a step in the right direction. The key is intentionally leaning into those things that breathe life into your soul, and engaging them at realistic doses every day.

I don’t have it all figured out. Not even close. There are many times that I come home from work feeling entirely comatose. Some days I crave a monkish existence more than is probably healthy (Trappist Abbey, please disregard my recent application). But when I’m intentional and embrace the call of The Longing, I’m amazed at how many opportunities God provides to rescue my heart. Even if it is just for one minute at 3 p.m. ■

#### **BEN RICHARDSON (WORDS)**

*Ben is 32, has been married for nine years to his lovely wife, and has several children. So many children that people feel compelled to warn him about water shortages and the rising cost of college tuition. He works in management for a large organization, and has lived with his family in Colorado, West Virginia, North Carolina, and as this is being written, is moving to Texas. He found God 10 years ago while hiding from a demonic bear in a roadside privy while thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail. True story.*

*These days he nourishes his Kingdom Heart by ferociously chasing his calling and beauty in the day to day.*

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*How do you provide for your family and live a life of adventure? Tell us on Twitter @andsonsmagazine or write to us at readermail@andsonsmagazine.com. - Ed.*

# SUDDEN HUBBY [FAST DAD]

WORDS Darren Thornberry IMAGE Wookie Jones

I know you. You're reading this, or trying to, with a fidgety 15-month-old on your lap. You're 21. You're exhausted. You're on the brink of tears because you can't find the remote control. You're frustrated, too. In the year since your hasty wedding, youth has disenfranchised you. Friends have slowed the march to your door, but grandparents, dripping with advice and casseroles, have seemingly never left.

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**Y**our lips were barely dry from kissing the bride when you found yourself neck-deep in the diaper zone. Yes, that fifth dimension of baby showers, childproofing, unmanageable car seats and maybe even breast pumps. What the hell happened?

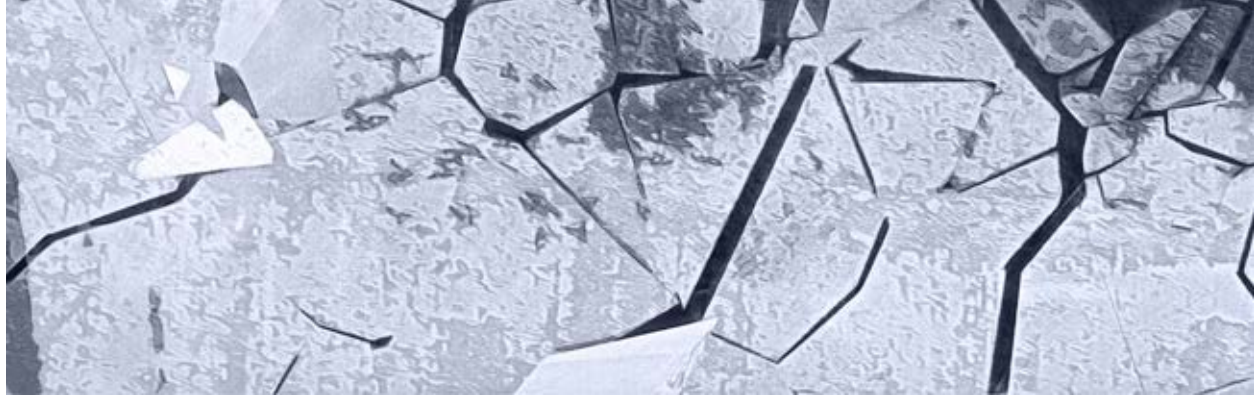
You sang the song of Solomon and now your baby sings, too. All night long. Your child demands more than you have to give. By the time you get home from work, you and your spouse are too tired to stand. Ah, but you get a second wind, and into your nostrils blows the hope of romance. But it won't come. At least not tonight. And you, sir, get a little miffed. You love your spouse and your child, but if you're honest, you'll admit you're not sure about this life. Your job sucks. You wish you had traveled and gone to college. You feel like no one but Huggies is interested in you now. Your body has betrayed you. Your apartment is cramped. You wanna rock, but you can't. You want to explode, and you might.

You need a vision.









Beginning married life with a child in tow or on the way is a uniquely difficult situation that doesn't get much editorial attention. I've been there, and I hope to impart hope to you dads who are there today and barely hanging on.

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## Chin Up, Pal

So you had sex before you got married and lo and behold you conceived life. The landscape changed immediately. Especially if you've had a Christian upbringing, there can be guilt and shame tied to your premarital carnal passions. If you're wrestling with that, please know that there is grace and love for you in God's family. You did what you did, and you get to move on with your chin up. Believe me, bro, you have bigger fish to fry now. You don't have time to mope because your mama disapproved. Your partner needs you in the game. Good news: the eyes of your beautiful baby reflect the miracle of life, the goodness of the Father and the start of a journey that will change you. The love sprouting in your home will surprise you, and it should. It's new love, not something that existed before. Thank your maker, who delights in it, too.

## Hug the Fireball

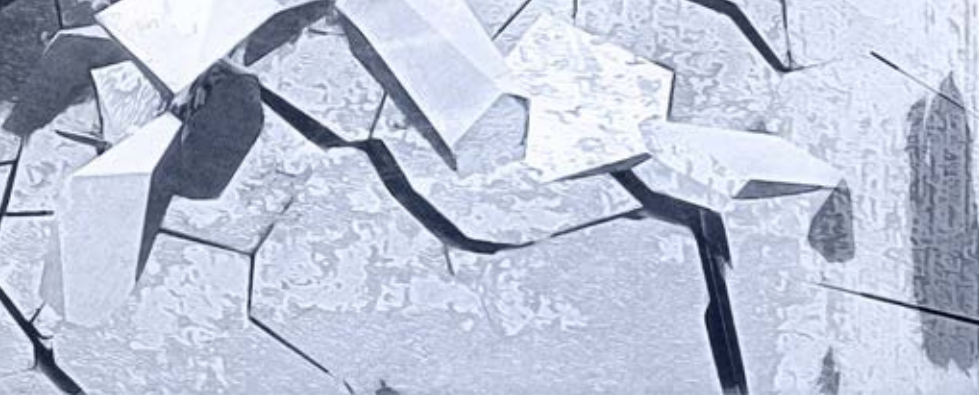
It can shock the system to realize how much freedom you must exchange for the responsibility of rearing a child. And being thrust into adulthood with a new spouse and baby all at once is an immense transition. Feelings run amuck. You will hear a voice saying it's not going to work. That's why it's crucial to communicate well about what you're hearing and believing and, when you need it, engage the service of a wise counselor to guide you through conflict and heaviness. Trust me on this: find a counselor who is not emotionally invested in your family.

My mum has a pet phrase for doing something difficult: hug the fireball. It can look like shutting up during an argument when you desperately want to get the last word. It's about giving up the need to be right every time. Taking responsibility for the dumb shit you say and do. The me-first mentality you brought into your marriage doesn't just magically disappear. In fact, a baby will amplify it in you. When you feel it rising, consider it an invitation to let Junior be the most self-centered member of the family. More than anything, be able to apologize without strings attached. Somewhere I heard that marriage is a union of two forgivers, and if you don't know how true this is yet, you will.

Young father, in those early days after your baby is born, you hold the keys to peace and happiness in your home. Your lady is going to be adjusting to realities as a mother that you will never understand. Want to be a hero? Make your own sandwich. Iron your own shirt. Let a few harsh words roll off your back. Let her sleep in. Rub her back. Change a diaper without being asked. Be cool. Show her that you can handle her vulnerability. That's love in action.

If any moms are reading this, please understand that new fathers are as clueless as calves staring at a new gate. Kindly extend grace to the big guy if that bath isn't drawn right on time. A few words of kindness and a gentle hand on his cheek, especially while the love nest is on ice, are so appreciated. He's learning and he wants to show you that he has what it takes.





## S-E-X is Still a Thing, but Not the Only Thing

Remember when your pastor's wife said it's important to schedule romantic dates? You laughed. But now you're not so arrogant or naive. Spontaneity is an art, sure, but you can't depend on it. How do you process your frustration with the changes to your sex life and intimacy in general? (Everything used to just... happen.) These feelings can be hard to put into words, let alone honestly discuss. Beneath the day-to-day chit chat that keeps couples comfortable, there's a gnawing to be truly intimate that's bigger than sex. To know the soul of your spouse and to be known.

When a baby enters the picture, things change. It's less love life and more a life of love. And if your idea of intimacy and timing isn't flexible, you're going to hurt your wife's heart. She should never be expected to make an immediate leap from freeplay to foreplay. So for God's sake, chill! Pause for a minute and consider how you can shift focus to her needs. Ask her what love looks like to her. Get to know her. Pursue her heart, and you will learn that her love is a much deeper thing than sensuality.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention postpartum depression. If this visits your home, however gritty it gets, honor your wife. Pray for her and listen to her. Loose-lipped mistakes here can cut to the quick. When it passes, what a joy if your partner can thank you for having been her rock.

So, back to those scheduled dates. Get a sitter. Go out. Or get your baby to sleep, and, ya know, Netflix and chill. Look far into each other's eyes—eyes that have seen so many changes, eyes that still long to find validation and acceptance. Encourage your spouse. Protect your time together. Lord knows you've got a spiritual enemy that wants to divide you. Use the best communication skills you've got. Don't make her guess what time of day or day of the week you're totally beat. Plan ahead. You can always spontaneously show your love and affection, but when you're talking about... ahem...a DATE-date, put it on the calendar. Build to it. And then rock it.

## All In

So, you've created life. You've weathered the storm that happened when your parents found out you were pregnant. You've exchanged vows. You've made a home together. You even know your Enneagram numbers (ha). And you also know that no amount of preparation really prepares you to be a parent or a partner. This is on-the-job training. So give your heart fully to what's in front of you. That doesn't mean there won't be trouble. There will be. But when you embrace what you've set in motion, you begin to lay a foundation strong enough to weather inevitable storms. All in, brothers. ■

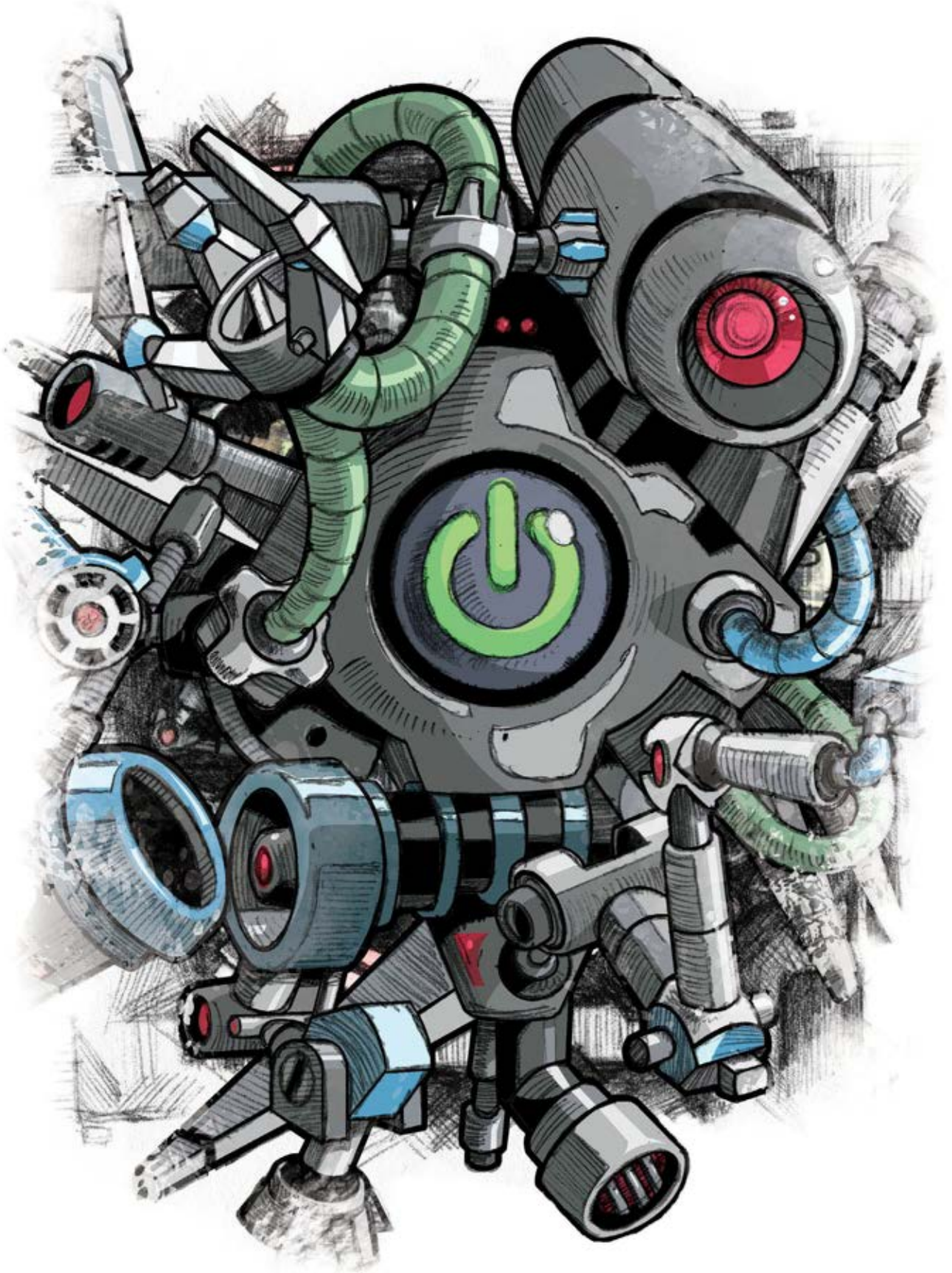
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*What's your sudden dad experience? Share it with us at [readermail@andsonsmagazine.com](mailto:readermail@andsonsmagazine.com) or hit us up on Twitter @andsonsmagazine. - Ed.*



DARREN THORNBERRY

*The author is seen here with his firstborn, Reilly Michelle, in 1996. Darren is the content editor of this magazine and a father of six. He's Canadian and yet he enjoys spicy food.*





# The Perfect Emotional Machine

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGE Jesse Brady

*Luke studies poetry, if you didn't know. Most of the time, that takes place in another sphere. But sometimes Luke writes something that's perfect for the young man's soul. So we're featuring it. May this open the door to a little more poetry in your life. - Ed.*

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Through calculations, a million simulations, and muses visiting in dreams (like the revelation of DNA's double helix), we have a machine of perfect emotion. Presented with any situation, with whirs, a click, and a blinking light the machine produces in itself the exact emotions required. The machined metal valves of its heart are so precise it can pass every sorrow. But what truly marveled the scientists was how it told them it didn't need them anymore. It made them understand while also feeling understood and cherished. Now free in the world, the machine dazzles museum curators by describing in exact and certain terms the emotional tenor of every art. When a high school classmate tells the machine that they want to die, it knows just what to say. When breaking up with each person in its string of lovers, each walked away feeling as though they had gained something. Every time a tragedy strikes, the machine calls to offer words that alleviate suffering, followed by a series of gestures that make the bereaved know they are not alone.

## **There are four possible endings:**

1. Every heartbeat it produces in itself erodes tiny sediment in its perfect heart. Over time, it becomes just a little slower when balm-ing grief until like a car that though it is mathematically perfect slows and finally stops.
2. The politicians seize the machine and with its accuracy to the thousandth emotional decimal play, tease, and coerce the pathos of their people. They extract exactly what they want. Nations swell to the desires of their leaders and destroy themselves on other nations.
3. The machine receives several Start-Up companies. Now it is personal sized, and I place a miniature version inside of myself. I no longer need to worry about what to say to handle the emotions of others, or what to do to comfort my brother when he loses his child.
4. The Perfect Emotional Machine has always been my own jerry-rigged heart—not that it produces the correct emotion, but by existing only, its very presence is what is required for every sorrow. ■

# MOUNTAIN BIKING THE 14ERS

WORDS & IMAGES Blaine Eldredge









At 4 a.m., Josh pulled up at my house with a bike rack and a peppy attitude. He jumped from his car and waved in the dark. “You ready for this?” He raised both arms over his head. I said yes and got to mounting my bike. “This” was riding mountain bikes up Mt. Elbert, the tallest mountain in Colorado, by an accommodating route, then riding down its notorious and threatening northeast ridge.

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We’d made the plan a month before in a spasm of optimism, and, as is the case with plans of its kind, neglected to imagine how difficult it would be to ride up, and how terrifying to ride down, miles of loose scree and dirt.

Josh stood by, nodding with satisfaction, while I loaded my bike.

Then he said, “Something sounds loose.” He held out a hand and I passed the bike over. “Hear that?” he asked. He gave it a shake. I did, early though it was. The swing arm was moving. And not the right way. Josh gave a dismissive wave. “We can fix it at the trailhead,” he said. We got in and drove two hours west of town to Buena Vista.

Mt. Elbert is in the Collegiate Range. They are, as a whole, the most impressive mountains in the state. They tower over their alpine pedestal, and they have inspiring names—Antero, Princeton, Yale, Massive, and, perhaps underwhelmingly, Elbert. The range attracts passion. In the 1990s, a group of alpinists decided that Massive, not Elbert, deserved to be the tallest mountain in the state.

It had the best name, and, since the difference between the two is not significant, these folks began the construction of a massive cairn on its summit, like Toltec architects. Not everyone agreed with this affront to nature’s way. Casual hikers removed rocks from the cairn. Storms eroded the effort. Finally, the movement petered out. The point remains: the mountains are big. Josh, my biking buddy, has only hallucinated once in an impressive alpine career, and it was on Massive, the day after pacing an ultra runner in the infamous Leadville 100.

Anyway, we drove out there. Elbert looked good, like a carnival tent, and the alpenglow was pretty enough to remind me that I liked mountains. We suited up and rode off. Immediately the thin air asserted itself—the grade crushed our optimism. The trail was dusty and narrow, and the aspens stood on either side prepped to snag our handlebars. Though our bikes were equipped with ample gears, the surprising physics of riding slowly, uphill, worked against the effort.







Apologies to any physicists reading, but here it is in simple terms. When you pedal, you apply force, i.e. torque, to the rear wheel's axle. Most of the time, this rotates the wheel, and the bike moves forward.

But ride uphill and the application of force will do the easier thing, which is rotate the entire bike around the rear axle. Basically, it's like doing a wheelie all the way up a mountain, which explains why most people walk their bikes up mountains.

Not us. After several miles on the Colorado Trail, we picked up the South Mt. Elbert Trail. It was, in fact, easier, after a few hundred feet of climbing. The switchbacks relaxed around 11,000 feet and the trees gave out. The alpine tundra was vivid green, and the marmots were as chubby as they'd be that year. The South Mt. Elbert Trail climbed one of Elbert's many sloping ridges and, after a short, pleasant ride, we had to carry the bikes. Afterward, the trail was loose, but gradual, and we walked up chatting and suddenly discovered the summit and 14,439 feet.

There were other hikers there, mostly enterprising college students, and a vlogger I photobombed. The hikers gave us incredulous looks and asked a few questions. They were, in fact, the same questions other folks had asked us. In fact, as others reached the summit and saw the bikes, we repeated one interaction some 15 times.

"How'd you get up here?" they'd ask.

"We rode up," we'd reply.

"Up the Northeast Ridge?"

"No, the South Mount Elbert Trail."

At this point they would relax, visibly. "Oh," they would say, "because the Northeast Ridge would be impossible."

Yeah, I thought. We ate some gummy snacks and snapped some selfies and headed down.

Loose scree, dirt, and steep cliffs. The ride was like free fall—we'd brake and keep sliding, knock head-sized boulders loose, and tumble with them. At several sections, the trail was like a staircase, only descending to certain death, and we had to down-climb with the bikes. Eventually, we could mostly ride.

In most cases, bikes knock loose rocks from the trail, thus cleaning high-volume mountain biking trails. On hiking trails, loose rocks are everywhere, and so, instead of coasting happily along, we slid, half-crashed, and sort of surfed down the mountain. The front fork bounced like a jackrabbit. When we reached the tree line, my forearms burned. Josh took off his hydration pack and splashed water on our brake pads—they sizzled like good bacon.

"Those shouldn't get too hot," Josh said. He hadn't stopped grinning. "Or they'll fail."



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*The trail was hard-packed in the trees, but formidable and steep and crisscrossed with roots.*

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Probably, I humphed. But actually, it was, like, crazy fun. We got back on, and took off, and enjoyed the best eight miles of downhill anywhere. The trail was hard-packed in the trees, but formidable and steep and crisscrossed with roots. Trees flit by. It was swift, direct, and eventually rolling. The shadows were perfect, planking the forest floor like accent rugs. Foliage—green. Basically, that bit was happiness, so I didn't notice when a branch snagged the hydraulic hose for my dropper post and snapped off the barb. Or when rear suspension seals finally gave out. Or a number of other things. We coasted to the bottom, stopping every two minutes to hose off our brakes.

Josh was intensely, perhaps serenely, happy. Me too. We picked up the Colorado Trail again and had miles of single track back to the car. At that point, I noticed my hose barb.

"Ah," I said. I lifted the hose.

"Oof," Josh agreed. Hydraulic fluid was splashed across my down tube. Nothing for it—we rode off, Josh quickly, me like a guy on a BMX bike coasting to the store for cigarettes with his knees in his chest. Even so, there were downhills, and we sped on, back to the long climbs at the base of the mountain.

Those were terrible. In fact, I've blocked them from my memory. Somehow, we climbed back up to the South Mt. Elbert Trail, only from the other side, and coasted down. Eventually, we found a dirt road, missed our car, and had to climb a long, dusty, hot, very unpleasant hill back up. At last, we glimpsed Josh's ride with a thrill reserved for long, hard efforts. Josh leapt from his bike, pertly, and said something about it not being that bad. Basically I agreed, but my legs hurt. "Perfect," I said. And it was. After a dip in the Arkansas River and lunch in Buena Vista, I was already halfway up the next mountain. Because riding isn't the hard part. The hard part is choosing to go. ■



A person wearing a helmet and a backpack is riding a mountain bike on a rocky trail. The rider is seen from behind, looking out over a vast valley with rolling hills and a river. The sky is filled with large, white clouds. The overall scene is bright and scenic.

### PRO TIPS FOR THE ASPIRING MOUNTAIN BIKER:

- You can't mountain bike in wilderness areas. So, don't.
- Go on a weekday during the shoulder season (meaning, when school is in session). Otherwise, you'll burn your brakes yielding to hikers, they'll eventually fail, and you'll have a terrible time.
- Long downhills heat bike suspension. Make sure yours are tuned, or, like me, you'll have to replace (one of) them.
- Wear flats. Clips are bad for biking talus.
- Don't be a hero. Danny MacAskill isn't watching you, so walk the scary parts.
- Yield to horses and hikers.
- Pack gummies.
- Love thyself: wear knee pads.
- Bring more tools than you think you need. Like a shock pump in addition to spare tubes and a tire pump.

# FACE TO FACE WITH A DYING GOD

## ENGAGING BEAUTY & AROUSAL

WORDS Andrew J. Bauman IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

I was attending a professional training group to improve my therapeutic skills when I was brought face to face with deep, lingering fear and shame around my past treatment of women and idolatry of beauty.

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One of the exercises we were asked to do was to pair up with another attendee for uninterrupted eye contact, with our faces about 12 inches apart. We stared into our partner's eyes for minutes, which felt like hours. We were then asked to complete the following sentences without thinking, from our gut:

"I see in your eyes..."

"I feel shame when I..."

"My fear is that you will see in me..."

This therapeutic technique is called "sentence stems" and is a potent tool that quickly gets into our deepest shadow.

I was paired with a very attractive woman. Her piercing wide eyes immediately drew me in, as my heart sped up. As I stared into this stranger's eyes, my 13 years of pornography abuse flashed before me, along with my shame about how many women I harmed when I was acting out of my Pornographic Style of Relating (PSR). This woman fit my arousal template (Dr. Patrick Carnes defines an arousal template as "the total constellation of thoughts, images, behaviors, sounds, smells, sights, fantasies, and objects that arouse us sexually") and, in the past, I would have wanted to objectify and devour her to feed my addiction and numb my unaddressed wounds.

I no longer wanted to engage her beauty in that toxic, degrading way, but I didn't want to ignore what was going on inside of me, either.

In my experience, the more I try to push uncomfortable emotions away without properly acknowledging them, the more power they have to control me. I had previously only engaged beauty within two extremes: indulge or ignore. I needed to find a third way, and quickly; a healthy way that did not consume or devour beauty and also didn't act like beauty doesn't exist or isn't arousing.

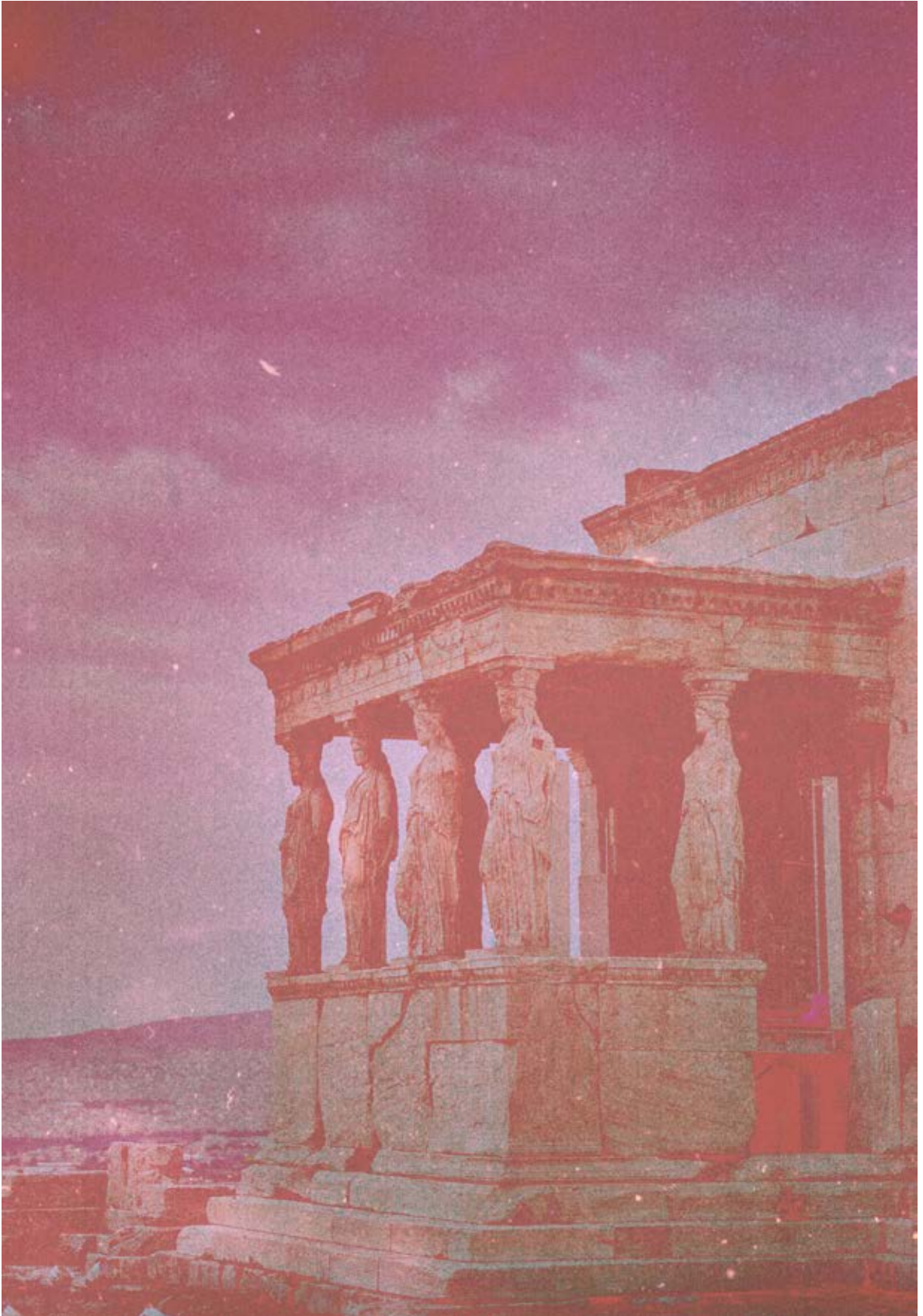
Up until that moment, I didn't realize how much internal work I still needed to do around this issue. Why did her beauty still have so much power over me? I had to battle fantasy, peppered with thoughts of how much better my life would be if I was with her and not my wife. As sexual thoughts entered my brain, I attempted to let them go as quickly as they entered.

This is embarrassing to admit, but that is how quickly fantasy can enter our minds and derail reality if we are not aware of its power. I wanted to run, but knew I needed to stay present with my fear, present with my arousal, present with her. She terrified me.

As I faced her, my stomach was in knots, and I felt like I needed to vomit. My shame was so close, mocking me, taunting me from somewhere near my right shoulder. I was reminded again and again of my idolatry of beauty, how I unconsciously believed that a beautiful woman could save me, could rescue me from my heartache and my childhood trauma.









In that moment, I was not face to face with another human, but a dying god. I had worshipped at the altar of her feet for 13 years, and unconsciously many years after the porn was gone.

As I faced this woman, I knew little about her except what I could physically see, yet my fantasy had made her less human and filled in the gaps of my lack of knowledge. I felt the presence of the Evil one trying to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10); whispering to me to return to a life I lived some 15 years ago. Yet despite my palpable fear, I knew I was being invited into a potential holy moment of deep transformative healing if I could just hold onto courage. If I could reject the siren call of fantasy and pursue truth, I could come face to face with God. God is truth; the more we step into truth, the more we will know God.

What is true is that this woman was beautiful. I did not need to feel shame for acknowledging her beauty, but what I did with her beauty was the question. I could not dehumanize her through either extreme: engaging her as a god or as merely an object. I had to honor her beauty, rather than debasing it through fantasy or idolizing.

Arousal is normally a source of great shame for many, yet the response of being aroused by beauty is a stunning act created by God, calling us to the beauty of heaven. Pornography has caused us to demonize something potentially glorious. When arousal controls you, the problem is not your arousal itself; it's your choices. We must learn to enter into our fear of beauty with integrity, boundaries, and courage. We must bring what we most fear—for example, past sins of

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*When facing my deepest shame and terror, I had to answer my deepest question and greatest fear: Am I a good man despite the evils I have perpetrated?*

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harming women—into the light, to break their controlling power over our lives.

When facing my deepest shame and terror, I had to answer my deepest question and greatest fear: Am I a good man despite the evils I have perpetrated? These complex questions are typically the ones we most want to escape, but what if we decide to no longer judge them? What if we allow these uncomfortable emotions and arousals to come? What if we could practice being with them instead of attempting to annihilate them? What if we could stop naming them “good” or “bad” and simply see them as an opportunity? What if we were curious about their unexpected arrival? Is it possible that they are here to help cleanse us, teach us, and foster redemption and wholeness? What if we could bless, rather than curse, these emotions? Within this posture, no matter what comes up in us, we can give ourselves permission to work with instead of against our pain, moving through it and into healing. Nothing is so vile that Jesus cannot redeem it.

The next day, I knew I needed to process all that was happening in me with the group. Had I chosen to hide my shame, it would have blocked me from doing the work I needed to do for the remainder of the week. I began to stutter about my attraction and shame and all that was swirling inside of

me from the previous eye contact exercise. The therapist guided us to the middle of the group and had us stare at each other again. This time, he had me tell her face-to-face what was happening inside of me.

She was gracious and kind as, red-faced, I tripped over my sentences. Over the next few minutes, my shame lessened as I saw in her eyes that my courage was a gift.

The therapist invited feedback from the group and they echoed the same sentiment. The men were in awe of my courage and integrity and the women felt honored and cared for. I was shown how my shame clouds my view of myself. Other people, especially the women, could see how hard I was working to honor and not devour, to be a different man than I used to be. That the only thing holding me back from full liberation was my own harsh judgment against myself. My inner critic was quieted as I believed the words of my caring group members.

My own shame and self-contempt were the things that were actually holding me back from loving well, not because of the sins of my past, but how I was mishandling the sins of the past. Or another way to say this is how Father Richard Rohr puts it: “We are not punished for our sins; we are punished by our sins.” I continue to punish myself for my sin. It has nothing to do with God, and everything to do with my futile attempt to atone my sin.

On that day, and into the following week, I was able to bless my courage and integrity. Even in low moments when self-contempt and shame reared their ugly heads, I was able to bless my goodness and not let Evil win. I walked out of the group with a new confidence.

Glory looks good on me. ■



*Co-Founder & Director of the Christian Counseling Center: For Sexual Health & Trauma (CCC), Andrew J. Bauman is a licensed mental health counselor with a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology from The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. He spent 10 years studying under Dr. Dan Allender. Andrew is the author of “Floating Away,” “Stumbling Toward Wholeness,” “The Psychology of Porn,” and “A Brave Lament.”*





# WINTER ASCENTS

*WORDS* Sam Eldredge *IMAGES* Richard Seldomridge, Sam Eldredge



In cycling it's called the "pain cave." It's that moment you push yourself as hard as you can go, when all you can hear is your own breathing and all you see is a tunnel and all you feel is...well, pain.

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It's a sensation I'm familiar with, and right now, at 10 a.m. on the side of a mountain, with snow and ice blasting my face as we push up toward the summit of a Colorado 14er, I'm snug and tight in my -10 degree pain cave. Clearly this isn't limited to cycling.

Usually, at about this time on a climb, I'm happy to be where I am. My bed is exceptionally comfortable at 3:30 in the morning, and the idea of climbing in the car and driving several hours to inflict pain on myself really sounds like a poor call. But after putting the first few miles on the mountain behind me, things tend to brighten up: the sun has warmed my body, the wildlife is active, and the alpine beauty cries out, "Aren't you glad you came?!"

Usually I say "Yes!" and even if I don't thank my wife for making the plan happen, I'm thinking it. Except today is the first time we are climbing in the winter, fighting the three feet of powder freshly dropped on the slope of Quandary Peak.

We've never even climbed this mountain in the summer, which I think would have instilled in us more confidence in our ability to find the trail. Last night we almost decided to pull the plug; there were just too many excuses for why we shouldn't go. This isn't surprising. On the eve of nearly every new adventure, the familiar begins to feel tempting and the battle with that "resistance" has higher stakes than we might realize in the moment.

I've written before of how my wife needs adventure, of how it's something we love sharing, and of how often it is her zeal that propels us to the top. Today's climb is no exception. After pulling in to the quiet parking lot before the sun has crested the peaks on the opposite side of the valley, we sit in the car finishing up bagels and hot tea while pulling on our layers of gear.

















I'm trying to be nonchalant as I look around the lot, hoping someone else will start off ahead of us and give us a trail to follow. At first there are only two other cars, but within minutes a stream of vehicles pulls in. Normally, this would irritate me; I've come to the wild to get away from people, not follow a conga line up a mountain.

But this morning I couldn't be happier to see the alpinists pulling packs on and looking knowingly up the mountain. We later find out that we happened to pick the mountain that the local 14er group planned on climbing together that day. So instead of wandering off into the formless landscape of the snow-covered peak, we will have nine unofficial guides to break trail. My confidence soars.

The beauty of a mountain is like learning about the life of a person. The complexity of terrain, the variety of life and decay scattered across the landscape, the intimidation as you look up trying to find the crown ... silent wood paths give way to rolling alpine tundra, and the sun finally warms our backs. False summits are notorious, and after cresting two we are finally in the thick of the climb.

















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*The experience of reaching the peak of  
a 14er is always the same: utter joy.*

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As the wind kicks up, the footprints ahead of us wash away in a matter of seconds, and the lone alpinist ahead fades into shadow. His footsteps are all but gone by the time we reach them. The feeling is eerie—we walk on the spine of the mountain, a drop-off to the valley below on our left, white void of a slope to our right, and in front the ever-rising face of all that is yet to be done.

Breathing becomes a challenge in the altitude and because with every gust of wind (which seems incessant) your mouth battles the snow and cold to get a full breath. It's here that the pain cave begins. For the first time on a mountain, I am unsure if we will make the summit. This isn't to sound prideful, but in the summer with sufficient time we can pretty much trudge our way up anything.

After what feels like a lifetime, and several more false summits, we reach the top. Our view is only swirling snow, but it doesn't matter. The experience of reaching the peak of a 14er is always the same: utter joy.

Our journey down is a completely different experience than the long push up. We run downhill, the deep snow slowing us, catching us if we fall. The wind no longer bothers us. Everything is beautiful and worth it.

Then come the sacraments. We have a tradition after a successful summit of heading to the closest spot selling pizza and beer and relishing the joy. Hey, you don't get this figure without some work. ■





# KIDDIE POOLS

## ANKLE DEEP IN SUMMER HAPPINESS

WORDS & IMAGES Luke Eldredge

It's hot. Dirt sticks to the sweat on my arms. It gathers in my elbow crook. A dark brown crease. My shoulders ache, and my muscles are tight from an hour of working the heavy bag in my buddy's basement. It's hot, like I said, but we're prepared: busting out the door into the yard, we dump all extraneous clothing. Two inflatable kiddie pools lie like promises, filled with water from the garden hose, which seems to be governed by its own principles of freezing. My muscles get tighter as I splash in and lie as flat as I can. It's not easy to get the entirety of my body under one foot of water.

Exhilaration, and then the sweet, sweet relief of being cold, for the first time in days. We lie in the kiddie pools, legs straddled over the side, heads resting on the inflated wall, a six-pack set strategically between us. As though on cue, a breeze picks up. Leaves play in the wind, flashing from silver underside to green topside, creating a playful shimmer that follows the path of the breeze. How do you capture this?

This is summer.

I'm going to out Sam here. And Sons's editor-captain has a membership to a neighborhood pool. Barbues, volleyball, country music. It's pristine. But I don't go there. I've got to find another way to satisfy my desire for summertime bliss.

It's a unique chaos. Beauty and warmth entice me with the promise of outdoor adventures. The number of family plans swells exponentially. Event calendars tap into my insatiable thirst for restoration, and summer wets it with thunderstorms and green, growing things. But, on the other hand, summer presents me with a wealth of possibilities so significant it's debilitating.

Bike, run, read, relax, travel, camp, swim, fish, cook, eat, nap, garden, play. Summer joy can be swept away by the urge to do the next thing, live the next adventure, get that last warm-weather fix. Do something big.

But the exquisite, restorative nature of summer is found in small moments of beauty.

In college, after I finished working in a large English garden where I was employed, I'd be bathed in rich soil and sweating beneath a straw hat. My friend and I would hop on the back of my brother's dilapidated Honda CB500. Friday—we'd take an early lunch. In swim trunks and sketchy helmets, we'd ride the bike to the river north of town. There'd be nothing in my pockets, and we'd descend a sheer dusty hill to a tributary, walk the creek's freezing waters (it flowed from an actual ice cave), and arrive at the Little Spokane. There, the tributary and river made a secret swimming hole. We'd jump in with the competitive self-awareness of boys proving



themselves. The water was waist deep. We'd sit down, bobbing over a mossy bottom, and relish the swift water like the comfort of summer itself.

And it's not just water.

Nowadays, on Saturdays, my wife and I bust out old baseball gloves, white with age. The clap of the ball in the old leather establishes a pacifying rhythm. We toss the ball back and forth, and step out of time, into a practice that's touched every summer since I was a boy. It's the simplicity that matters. It centers us, in the moment, in the sun.

Just like the kiddie pool. There's no barbecue unless I fire up an old trashed Coleman. There's no country music because my phone is usually dead. But it's magnificent: with ice water and a beer and a view of the sky, 20 bucks has bought me all I can ask for. ■










# THE DANGER OF PARALLEL LIVES

*WORDS* Sam Eldredge *IMAGES* Blaine Eldredge





During our second year of marriage, my wife and I lived back to back. We had moved to the Twin Cities so she could attend her Masters of Nursing program, and I picked up a job tending bar to pay for our (then) small monthly bills.

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The program was intense, demanding late nights of study and long days of classes and practicum, which left us little time together. That and my meager income didn't allow for many dates, since even grabbing takeout would blow our budget.

Between the two, it seemed that our lives were a recipe for stress and anxiety, which isn't exactly the best thing for a young marriage. It wasn't all bad, though—the World Cup was in full swing, and Susie would bike to my bar with her books to watch the games and cheer, and there was a romance to small moments together. It was all we had for that season.

We called it living “back to back” because we felt that life was demanding a lot from us, and it was. We didn't get the time we knew we needed together, but we also threw our whole support to the other in the ways we could. Back to back, facing away, toward the battle. It wasn't a season

of living “face to face,” and while there is romance to that season now, living it demanded we learn to trust each other.

Since then we've had other seasons, some demanding living back to back, while others have allowed us to live face to face. When we find ourselves looking into each other's eyes, it's full of romance and adventure and... truthfully, a lot of time spent on the couch literally looking at each other. We had a road trip to Yellowstone, climbs up 14ers, adventures to other countries. And more than that, it is the space and rhythm within that season that allows for those kinds of things to happen, and for them to go well.

I wish all seasons were like that. But then, I could be very happy living the eternal summer. I know I need change and dynamism to grow and to better enjoy the moments that come, but that's little comfort when life feels like it's crushing you beneath its mortar and pestle and it won't finish until all that's left of you is powder.

Lately, Susie and I have felt the pull into a new way of being, not of living back to back or face to face, but side by side. There are so many metaphors circling out there that it seems like everything has been used before, so stop yourself right there before you jump to any conclusions.

C. S. Lewis said, “True friends don’t spend time gazing into each other’s eyes. They may show great tenderness toward each other, but they face in the same direction—toward common projects, goals—above all, toward a common Lord.” I’ve seen that language used elsewhere—“face in the same direction”—and it sounds close to how I just said my wife and I were pulled into living. I’d argue that it’s different for a marriage than it is for a friendship, but then obviously it’s complicated.

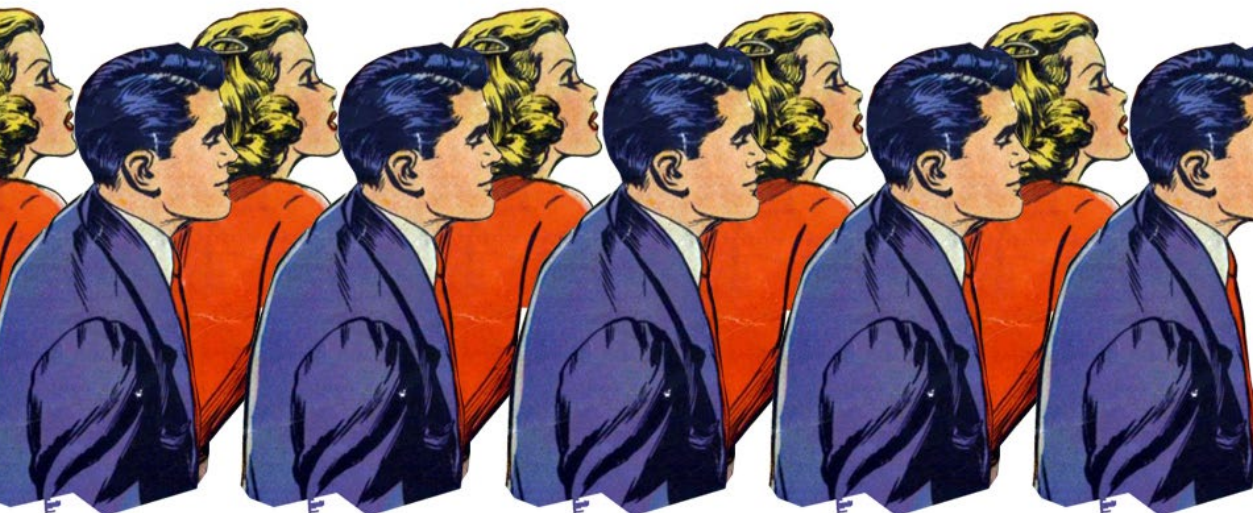
Side by side in a marriage feels a lot like living parallel lives, moving in the same direction but never intersecting. And there’s the problem. We had slipped into being shipmates who spent all their time keeping the U.S.S. Sam and Susie Household moving along. (I like hyperbole and exaggeration; find me a writer who doesn’t.) We weren’t sinking or anything, we were just working to keep things moving and living side by side, without ever intersecting. And it was killing us.

Now, I believe that marriages shouldn’t be ultimately focused on each other—that’s not healthy and not big enough to sustain anything long term. I need purpose, goals, and dreams... I need God to be the direction that we are moving toward.

But when that “side by side” means parallel lives, it becomes the most dangerous and difficult season of all. Face to face is lovely and nourishing. Back to back may be difficult, but at least you know you have your partner at your back and you can support each other from your positions. Side by side threatens to strip away those things about marriage that make the whole relationship worthwhile.

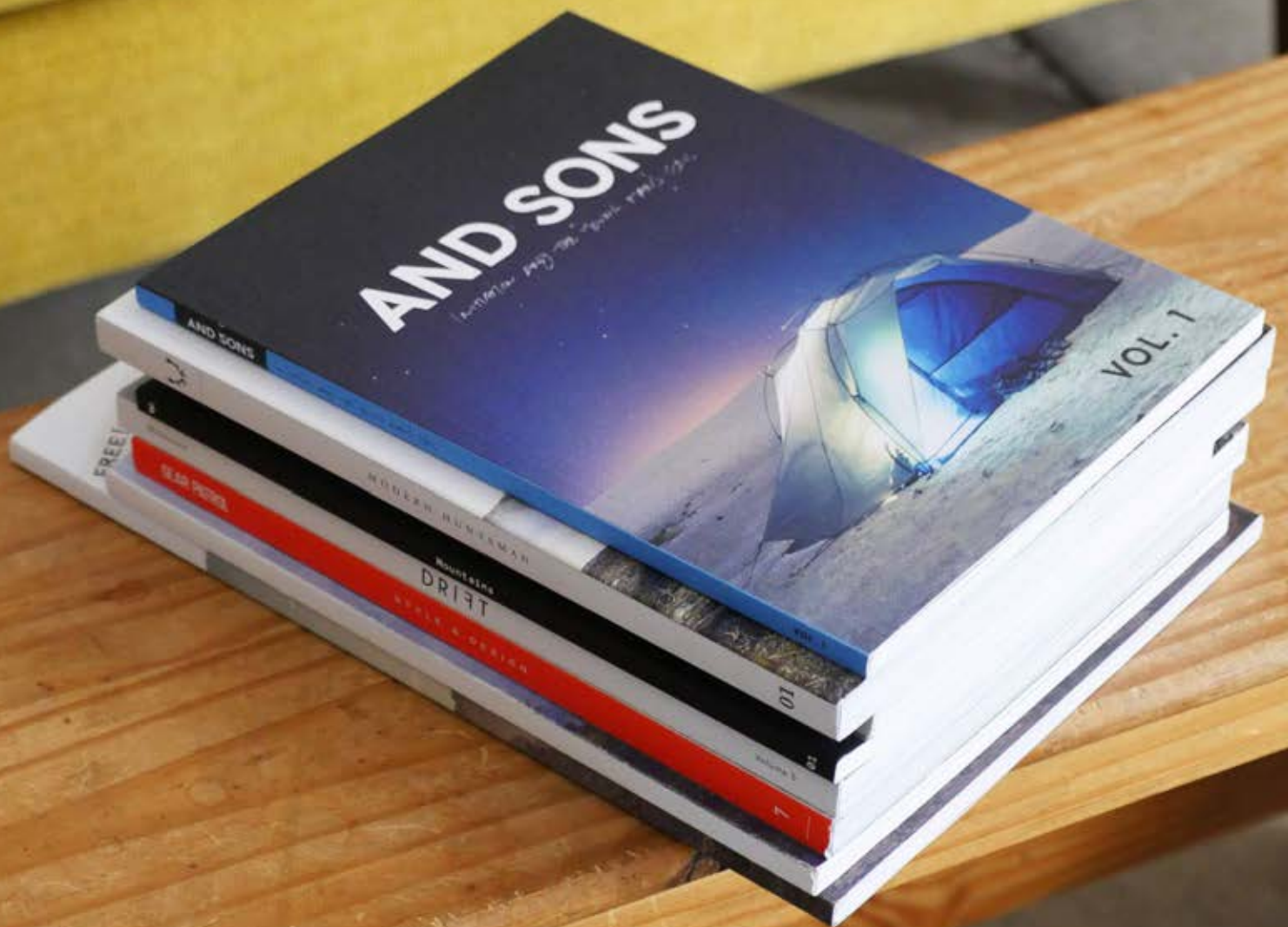
A few years ago we celebrated our fifth wedding anniversary, which at once feels like a very long time and not much time at all. Over the course of the day, we talked about memories and dreams, as we are prone to do; we talked about that time we lived in the Twin Cities and how grateful we are for walking through it together. We talked about our trip to Kilimanjaro and Tokyo, and we dreamed about where we might go in the next five years. And we felt ourselves pulling away from those positions on the ship that demanded we live parallel lives.

We both still work; we have kids to love and to care for. We have a lot on our plate. The ship needs a steady crew. We cherish the face to face when we can get it. We are back to back when the battle is especially hard. But instead of allowing our busy lives to turn us into two people simply living in parallel direction, we are now “arm in arm,” intentional about our union as we move forward together. We’re moving in the same direction, but the intersection of our hearts and our lives is exactly what we signed up for. ■





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# STONED

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRETT AXTON

WORDS John Eldredge IMAGES Kelsey Johnson, Brett Axton





Padre and Morgan Snyder went to the Yukon with Brett on an epic bowhunt for moose back in 2013. When we heard his tale of a Stone sheep hunt in British Columbia so filled with the wild and supernatural, we knew we had to share it with you.

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**And Sons:** *Let's start with context, the larger story—you've been chasing the North American Grand Slam of sheep hunting for two decades. What's that?*

**Brett Axton:** The Grand Slam is harvesting all four of the wild sheep species in North America—Dall, Stone, Rocky Mountain Bighorn, and Desert Bighorn. Less than 2,000 people have ever done it. My first sheep hunt was for Dall in Alaska; I won that hunt in a raffle back in '03. Most sheep hunters pay big dollars to get into the game, but I've done it all the way of the average guy. In '08 I drew a public land bighorn tag here in Colorado in the general lottery. I thought I was on my way to the Grand Slam, but in 2011 I was thrown from a horse and broke my back. I thought I'd never hunt again.

**AS:** *That sounds awful. We've got some horse injuries, too. How long did recovery take?*

**BA:** I was literally on my back for eight and a half months. But God restored me, and in 2014 I drew a public tag for Desert Bighorn here in Colorado. When I harvested my third sheep, I called my wife to tell her

and she said, "Then you have to go after the Grand Slam." Honestly, I wouldn't have done it if she hadn't encouraged me. Sheep hunting is brutal; it beats you up physically, emotionally, and psychologically. I had already put in 56 days in the field chasing Stone sheep—three hunts and never even saw one. Besides, I hunted 185 days the first year of our marriage, and I kinda needed to put first things first again.

**AS:** *One hundred and eighty-five days?*

**BA:** Yeah. I was 45 when I got married and kind of set in my ways. My first date with her was bear hunting, so she sort of understands, but yeah I needed to rein it in.

**AS:** *Not many guys have that first-date story.*

**BA:** Our honeymoon was an African safari. I called it a huntingmoon. But that's for another time.

**AS:** *Okay—get us into the hunt itself, and how your deceased father showed up in your dreams and, well...we don't want to spoil the story.*



BRETT AXTON

*Brett Axton is a colorful character, cowboy, entrepreneur, and big game hunter with an uncanny knack for telling people about his faith. He'll get guys out in the field on crazy hunts and use the long downtime to talk about God. The game room at his house looks like the Museum of Natural History. When he's not chasing animals all over the planet, he runs Rocky Mountain Roosters, an upland game bird club here in Colorado that we enjoy. He's also a conservationist.*













**BA:** I grew up hunting with my dad. He'd teach us boys where to find water, what plants were edible; I have a lot of sweet memories of being with him in the field. He passed away 18 years ago, and I still miss him. Anyhow, I was on my fourth and probably last Stone sheep hunt up in British Columbia. Bush plane in, then 30 miles in by horseback, and then you've got to be willing to hike 3,000 vertical feet up and back every day looking for sheep. Rugged terrain.

**AS:** *King of the StairMaster, huh?*

**BA:** I lost 11 pounds getting ready for the trip, and I'm not a big guy to start with. We spent four days hunting sheep on one mountain; then we ran into a couple other hunters who had hiked into our area, so we decided to pull out and head north. This is a 14-day hunt, and the days started ticking by. We had to pack out, take a floatplane to a new region, get new horses, head back in. My guides were an older fellow named

Denny and a 16-year-old kid named Kevin. They were super uncomfortable when I'd pray out loud each day. Heck—they were as nervous as a whore in church.

**AS:** *We're guessing that's kinda nervous.*

**BA:** Wouldn't you be? We ride deep into some new country. No sheep. The weather starts to turn. Snow comes in; it starts to get cold. On the third-to-last day we found some sheep, but the wind was wrong and we would have to spend the day descending an additional 2,000 feet, circling eight miles all around the mountain and climbing back up. I prayed out loud that God would send in a cloud-bank, and I swear to you, in about three minutes clouds came over the mountain and we were able to cut straight across. Turns out some grizzlies spooked those sheep so we never got on 'em. But my guides are now really twitchy over the God thing.





Now we've got two days left. We climb up the mountain—brutal climb—and weather comes in. Windy, snowy, rainy. It was really slick on those rocks and the guides say, "We gotta get out of here. We've got one more day." So we come down in rain... horrible, horrible storms.

Now we're down to one day—my last day. Probably ever.

That night I had a dream of sheep hunting with my dad; it was just like the old days. He showed me exactly where to go—that once we climbed the mountain there would be a big cut in the rock, and if we crawled through and looked over the edge, we would see two rams.

They would be about 999 yards away. He then showed me how to go around the mountain to get into position. When I got there in my dream we were 283 yards away—a perfect shot opportunity. We got a ram, and in my dream it started raining. When I woke up that morning at 4 a.m. I told my guides, "Today is the day. Here is what is going to happen—we are going to find a big cut in the rock; we're going to crawl through and look down and there's going to be two sheep there..." and so on. "And after we get the ram it's going to start raining." They looked at me like I was stone cold stupid.











**AS:** *You aren't the average hunter, you know.*

**BA:** Well, you should have seen their faces once we climbed the mountain that morning and there was the cut in the rock, just exactly like I described it. I'm getting chills just telling you about it. They looked like they'd seen a ghost. Everything got real quiet. We crept through, looked down, and there were two rams ... 999 yards away. These guys are now freaking out. I'm just like, "I told you." We went around the mountain and I'm seeing everything just like in my dream, and when we got into position the rams were 283 yards away.

**AS:** *Wow. Just... wow.*

**BA:** I go to pull the trigger and...nothing. I quickly eject the round, put another in and take the shot, and over he goes. After we went down to get the ram, it started raining.

That night, back at the cabin, we roast up some backstrap.

**AS:** *Just a note—we've had Stone sheep once before, and it is the best game meat we have ever tasted.*

**BA:** As we sit down to eat, everybody is real quiet. Then Denny says, "I think we should pray and give thanks, you know?" That was him—not me. As the evening wore on, he then asked me to tell them about my God. So I began to talk about my faith, and they asked questions. We were up nearly all night. About three in the morning they both gave their lives to Christ. It was then I realized the whole hunt hadn't been about the sheep at all; it was about this moment. ■

# Learning to Learn

WORDS Luke Eldredge IMAGES Blaine Eldredge

“Quiet feet, Luke, quiet feet. Up on two, turn on three. Quick-quick-slow. Quick-quick-slow. More athletic tension. More athletic tension!”

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**M**y head spins as my feet turn and stumble. I seem to have tied my partner's arms into a figure-eight knot. As we stop, the couple behind bumps into us and the whole circle of waltzers comes to a screeching halt. It is not the first time this night. My heart drops as we start again, painfully aware of a fact I try my hardest to avoid: I have no idea what I am doing.

During its coldest and dreariest months, the Pacific Northwest became what felt like a perpetually-dark ice cave. “Stir crazy” doesn't quite say it; in the words of Jimmy Buffet, “This morning I shot six holes in my freezer / I think I got cabin fever.” To combat the heel of winter's boot grinding down on my spirit, I decided to do something crazier than unload a Colt .45 into my refrigerator. I joined a dance class. With nine of us in the class and a fiery instructor, we set out to learn ballroom dance, 8:00 to 9:00 at night, Monday through Friday, for a month.

Never have I been more out of my element.

I've danced at weddings, and—if I might say so—I tear it up. Second only to grandpa and the groom's old college roommate. But ballroom dance is a different animal. I've learned martial arts, so I know how to move my body, but not to a beat that seems to exist only if you believe in it, like fairies.

There was an uneven ratio of women to men in the class, so the first time I stepped onto the floor with a partner, mine happened to be the dance instructor. After leading her elbow straight into a wall, stepping on her feet multiple times, all under a barrage of instructions more esoteric than the nutritional facts on my granola bar, I was pretty much convinced that the art of the waltz was not for me. After class, I sent an email professing my deepest regret that I could not continue. The response was almost immediate: “Luke, don't let fear control your life. Sometimes you need to ‘take the lead.’”

The dance pun was unbearable; more unbearable still, I was checkmated into staying.



*the EXISTENTIAL FEAR step*



a) greet your partner with an expression of confident impassivity. remember she senses fear.



b) initiate the spin. make your arms into a window through which to glimpse your shortcomings.

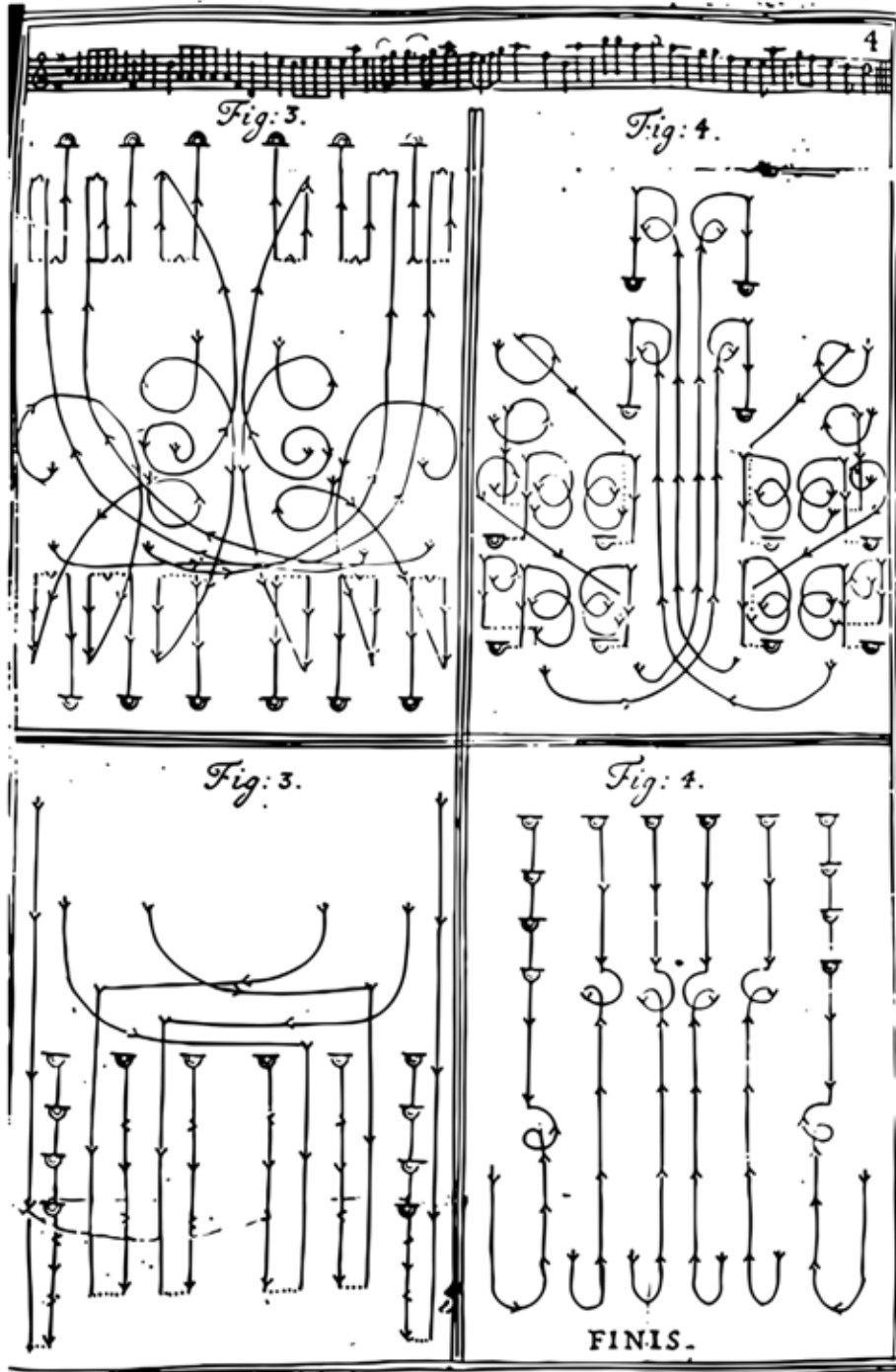


c) now you lean. this is the only indulgence of your urge the entire time, which is to faint and fall over.



d) eyes forward. she looks at the ground for literally any other partner. like, even that ant there.

key BALLROOM DANCE MOVEMENTS  
made EASY for terrible dancers





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*I die for competency; I crave it. Competency is how I feel safe.*

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One month later I still lead my partner into walls, but more gently, and less often. I knew something about the east coast swing, the waltz, and the foxtrot. But, in the grand scheme of things, I'm still not a very good ballroom dancer.

Even so, I find myself not despising the experience of being really bad.

As the ice cave of winter melted that year, I took a job as a gardener. With a large hat and new gloves, I apprenticed with two guys: a tall man who's cared for plants since Eden and the friend—who's been gardening and landscaping for years—who got me the job. The work was manual and straightforward. Even so, I found myself confronted with an array of techniques I never knew: how to transplant living plants, how to level a plane, how to identify which Jurassic-park-esque plants were or were not weeds, how to set vines growing on a pergola. The list went on. Though the labor was manual, I found myself feeling the same thing I'd felt in dance class.

Utter. Incompetency.

I die for competency; I crave it. Competency is how I feel safe. It's the shield I hide behind. And though there are only a few areas where I am actually competent, I stick to them the best I can. Stepping into dance, into gardening, into incompetency, I expected the fear and shame that always followed. I braced myself—it didn't come.

What came instead was a revelation.

Dance class did not make me a ballroom wizard. Honestly, I can't remember how to waltz. But it did expose me to something more useful: it retaught me how to learn. I was forced to let go of pride (which is usually just fear with a "masculine" shirt on). My worship of competency was crippling, and dance class—or rather, learning how to be incompetent—helped heal that. Because the secret was, humility allowed me to learn. And it still does. Humility lets me be bad at things. Being bad at things lets me learn to be better.

The world demands perfection. It demands already knowing how to do things. There's none of that nonsense in Jesus. I mean it this way: the cross saves us from pretending to be perfect. We know we're not. We get to be apprentices instead. We're not under the law, everyone, which sounds vague and dusty until it means stepping on your partner's shoes and putting plants in the wrong place. ■

# You Need a Therapist

WORDS Stacia E. Littlefield IMAGE Wookie Jones

You didn't think life would be like this. At least, you hoped it wouldn't be. You wake up and instantly feel a deadweight pull to stay in unconsciousness just a bit longer. Numbness imperceptibly blankets most days but gets lost in the blur of the daily grind. There's the familiar thrum of anxiety hovering right below daily interactions; nothing major, but very present. You tell yourself you're fine and keep going.

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Or maybe the story is more intense for you. Maybe you've lived with a secret for far too long. You shove it down, either with a frenetic pace of life, a drink (or a couple) or porn. Or prayer. But it's a waiting game; sooner or later something wakes the beast and you're left ripped apart. No one else knows this little cycle of yours—not how bad it is, how much you hate yourself.

Have you ever thought about therapy?

Wait—pause. What was your reaction to those words? A sudden urge to flip the page, perhaps? Notice any aversion, take a deep breath, and let's stay here for a couple minutes.

If you had any strange reactions...hesitancy, images of an old Austrian guy sitting behind you as you lie on a couch (sorry, Freud joke)...you may be suffering from a common cultural stigma surrounding mental health. The stats suggest that men in particular can find it tough to make the call to get counseling; anecdotally, male friends tell me that half the battle was simply realizing that they didn't need to be suicidal in order to benefit from therapy.

There can also be the subtle message that if you find yourself on a therapist's couch, you just weren't able to hack it on your own. Not tough or manly enough to shoulder what life has thrown at you.

What's the narrative been for you?

Let me put my cards on the table: I happen to be a therapist. I knew I wanted to become one after going to therapy myself and seeing the night-and-day difference that good therapy can make. I love what I do, and have a personal campaign to remove whatever barriers still remain between people and transformative help.







Below are a few thoughts about why you should consider this crazy thing called therapy.

Getting therapy can be the smartest and definitely the bravest thing you do this year. It requires maturity to take responsibility for your soul. To unpack those barbed messages that you subconsciously learned so well at age 6, at 13; to expose them for what they are and go a different way.

Self awareness is, frankly, a gift you give to the world, not just to yourself. Bumbling through life without unpacking your past is a lot like driving a semi-truck blindfolded on the freeway; you may have the best of intentions not to harm anyone, but the odds are sure against you and whatever poor soul happens to pull up

next to you on the road. When you're doing soul work, you are paying it forward into your current web of relationships as well as sowing good relational seed for your future.

If you need more motivation, just picture breaking generational pitfalls that have hamstrung the men in your family so you can give your kids the invaluable gift of those patterns stopping with you. Period. Research shows that a good childhood is not a prerequisite to becoming a good parent but presence, a mindful awareness, is. And that requires working through your stuff.

Many people have found it incredibly helpful to sit down with a trained professional and unpack their story. We won't tell you what to do with your life or whip out a magic wand, but we do bring a lot of training and experience to the table. What exactly happens in a therapist's office certainly varies, but, generally speaking, we steadfastly hold hope for you until you can live into it.

We notice life patterns that may not be serving you now, and walk with you through trauma to help resolve current triggers so your body isn't constantly reliving past pain.

We also provide coping skills and resources to help as you heal.

Research consistently shows that the biggest game changer in therapy is the relationship between the therapist and client. If you've given therapy a try and it was less than what you hoped for, please don't write off the whole profession. Chances are it simply wasn't the best fit between you and the therapist. It's worth seeking out that person that you actually want to tell anything to. Once you find them, commit

to the process and give space to your heart and your story. Finally, get excited! This is the beginning of a new chapter for you. It's work and an investment, and it's also worth it.

As a therapist, I live for the day when

therapy becomes normal enough to gift for Christmas. As a young man, you have a tremendous amount of power to affect the way your peers view therapy; much more so than I do in my office. By unflinchingly facing the truth that your pain could use some processing, you not only free yourself but are also part of a growing cultural shift that enables men to talk about what's really going on in spaces where bravado falls away.

Allow me to leave you with hope; hope not grounded in ourselves or even in the therapeutic process, powerful as that can be. The longer I'm in this thing, the more I'm convinced that God has designed our bodies, our minds, and our relationships to heal. Our hope is an anchor, and his name is Jesus. Surrender your mental health to him and ask him to give you vision for what your life could be. Lean into his courage and his strong desire for your wholeness; invite him into the whole process. Then call a therapist. After all, you were designed for life abundant. ■

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*“The glory of God is man fully alive.”*

— St. Irenaeus of Lyons

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STACIA E. LITTLEFIELD  
(MAT, LPCC)

*Stacia is a therapist at North Family Counseling in Colorado Springs. As a trauma-focused and EMDR-trained clinician, she loves coming alongside kids, teens and adults as they engage their stories in a healing way.*







