

PERSPECTIVE

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BIBLICAL MASCULINITY

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20
25

TABLE OF CONTENTS



01 ARTICLE

Biblical Masculinity

Matt Williams

06 BOOK HIGHLIGHT

Disciplines of a Godly Man

Written by Kent Hughes | Recommended by Trent Roberts

07 BOOK HIGHLIGHT

The Shepherd Leader at Home

Written by Timothy Z. Witmer | Recommended by Chad Ireland

08 BIBLE READING PLAN

Take Up & Read

November

09 NEW MEMBERS

Matt Cox, Marisa Cox, Clay Vedder, & Abigail Vedder

BIBLICAL MACULINITY



Let's cut right to the point: we need help clarifying and cultivating biblical masculinity. Just look at the world around us. If you were to walk on the street and ask someone, "What does it mean to be a man?" or "Why is masculinity so important for the flourishing of society?" you would likely not receive a consistent or compelling answer. Responses like "We don't need men today," or "Masculinity is entirely toxic," stem from several decades of society promoting a modern feminist ideal, reflected in our media and culture. At the same time, people are asking, "Where have the real men gone?" At least this question recognizes God's design for men to be active agents for good in the world, but its irony is obvious. It's like telling someone repeatedly to break a precious vase, and then when they actually do it, being surprised to find the pieces scattered on the ground. Our culture's sinful approach to masculinity (and femininity) is promoting a kind of confusion and chaos that is breaking homes and society at large. People have taken God's good design for masculinity and said, "No, we can do better," and the ramifications are devastating.

There are more questions we could ask of the culture, but for you, reader, the real question is, how do we cultivate biblical masculinity? How do we have men who are masculine, godly, courageous, strong, kind, who love the Lord, their families, churches, and society well, so that things start to flourish? Well, God's word has the answer to these questions and many more. By God's good design, masculinity can still flourish even on hard or "earthy" soil, and by his grace, we can have

godly masculine men who live up to (though imperfectly) what the Lord has called men to be. In the same way that a garden will flourish at the tender yet strong hand of a great gardener, when men embrace their God-given roles, everything around them can flourish.

STARTING WITH FOUNDATION

Before we get into the meat of this article, it is essential to point out a few things. First, biblical masculinity is best understood and grown in the context of discipleship in a local church. My temptation is to try and "lone wolf" the Christian life, but that's not how it's designed to work. Taking that approach is like choosing to take a hike through dense woods without a trail or compass, instead of taking the well-trodden path with an experienced guide. The second thing is that there is only one Person who lived out biblical masculinity perfectly, and that person wasn't me. So, this article is not coming from someone who has summited the mountain of masculinity but is rather from someone who is just trying to climb faithfully with others.

Let's start at the beginning and work to get a biblical understanding of masculinity. First, we need to answer an important question, "What is a man?"

Defining what a man is, is not difficult (even though today many will argue it is!). A man is an adult biological male human being. As Christians, we add another important distinction: Man is an adult biological male human being, made in the image of God. You see this

truth in the opening pages of the Bible, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

If you are a man, the Lord has designed you this way, and how the Lord made you was not a mistake. Your distinctly male characteristics—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—are good gifts from God. Even though society has said so, let's not pretend that what the Lord has written into our biology can be erased and replaced with something else. Being masculine, though, isn't just about biology; it is rooted in the mandate that the Lord has placed on men.

THE MASCULINE MANDATE: TO WORK AND KEEP

This brings us to our second question: “What is his mandate?” Or in other words, “What has the Lord commanded men to do and be?” Let's look at Genesis 2:5 and 15.

“When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground.”

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

Here in these verses, you find what others have rightly called the “masculine mandate.” At the beginning of creation, the Lord gave a mandate to men to “work and keep.” Work means to “labor to make things grow,” and keep means to “protect and sustain progress already achieved” (Phillips 2010, 10). A few other helpful ways I have heard it put is that to be masculine is to be a “provider and protector” both spiritually and physically (Piper, “Lionhearted and Lamblike”), or to be a “gardener and guardian,” (ESV Study Bible, note on Gen. 2:15) or to care for and cultivate what the Lord has entrusted to you. According to Genesis 2, men, as image bearers of God, are called to work in the world to labor to make good things grow and to strive to keep that progress by protecting and sustaining it.

Now, at this point, you are probably saying, “That sounds great, but what does that mean, and what does that look like?” Well, to put more of the puzzle pieces together, let's look at a few other places in Scripture that help show us a fuller picture of this mandate in action.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANDATE IN ACTION

Picking up in Genesis right where we left off, we see one of those masculine puzzle pieces in the verses that follow:

Servant Leadership and Responsibility: Genesis 2:16–17 says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Adam and all men are to have a servant leadership role, enabling them to fulfill the call to work and keep. You see this clearly in the New Testament in Ephesians 5, with the call for husbands to love their wives and give themselves up for her, and in other places that call out the qualifications of deacons and elders (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9). This sacrificial love and leadership is rooted in the garden commands, and ultimately, it finds its perfect example in Christ, who laid down his life for his bride.

Praise God for many examples of masculine servant leadership and responsibility in the Bible. Joseph used his leadership position to honor the Lord by providing for others (even his family, who wronged him deeply). Abraham led his family to follow where God had called them and to trust him amidst uncertainty and discomfort. Think about 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 that calls men, regardless of title, to be a source of reliable strength, wisdom, and encouragement for the whole church. And think of our chief example: Christ. Though he was God, “he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,” (Phil. 2:7) and demonstrated this by washing his disciples' feet and ultimately by laying down his “life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Provision and Diligence: First Timothy 5:8 says, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Here, the weight of provision for the family falls squarely on the man of the family. We want to be like the ants in Proverbs 6:6–11, doing our work with diligence to provide well. This provision is not just physical but is also spiritual, as you can see in places like Ephesians 6:4, where fathers have the distinct responsibility to bring up their children in the “instruction of the Lord.”

This is exemplified well in the lives of Boaz and Job. Boaz provided for those in his immediate care and was known as a worthy man. When the responsibility of being a kinsman redeemer came to him, he provided generously for the physical needs of Ruth and Naomi

in their great need. In this way, he serves to bring them under the wings of the Lord, of whom they came to take refuge through his provision (Ruth 2:12). Job, was actively engaged with the spiritual well-being of his family (Job 1:5). This should be all men, striving with diligence to put physical and spiritual bread on the table, so those in our circle of responsibility can come, sit, be nourished and “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Self-Controlled and Disciplined: Titus 2:2, 6–8 says, “Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.” It continues, “Likewise, urge younger men to be self-controlled.” There is a type of godly discipline and self-control that should mark godly masculine men. The call to work and keep requires discipline; it requires self-control in our lives. No one sculpts a beautiful, complex statue without having the discipline to show up and work each day and the self-control to direct where and when the hammer swings.

Other fruits from the masculine mandate tree:

- **Strength:** Using your strength to hold yourself and others to the faith (1 Cor. 16:13).
- **Courage:** Being courageously faithful to trust and not fear during trials or the unknown because the Lord is in control (Josh. 1:9).
- **Wisdom:** Striving in all your life, plans, and decisions to live with godly wisdom. Walking down the path of wisdom the Lord has paved, and not trying to pave a way according to your own wisdom (Prov. 3).
- **Integrity:** Being someone whose speech, actions, and heart all align together in blameless consistency, no matter where you are or what you are doing (Prov. 10:9; Psalm 15).
- **Love:** A heart and actions that are shaped with and filled by the love of Christ and a love for others (1 Cor. 13:4–7; 16:14).
- **Maturity:** Putting away childish things—things that lead you to sin, dull your affections for the Lord, or help you hide from the responsibility the Lord has placed on you (1 Cor. 13:11).

It is worth pointing out that you may look at this list and think that many of these overlap with the general call of Christians to have good Christian character, and you would be right! Much of what it means to be masculine is to be obedient to the commands of Scripture, striving with grace-fueled effort toward holiness (Col. 1:29).

THE GARDENS OF A MAN'S LIFE

In general, God places all men in a few “gardens” of life to live out their masculine mandate to work and keep. Below, I want to help us consider a handful— your individual life, family, church, work, and the world.

Individual: As an individual, living out masculinity looks like working and keeping yourself holy and happy in the Lord, honoring the Lord with what you do. How are you laboring with good effort towards these things in your life, and in what ways are you striving to protect the progress (by the Lord's grace) already gained? The man trying to live out his mandate will strive to honor the Lord by serving others with his gifts, rather than devoting all his time to individual hobbies. He will be self-controlled and disciplined when it comes to the means of grace and his spiritual health, and he will work diligently to provide for himself, not to be a burden on others, and use his extra provisions to provide for others.

In Genesis 3, Adam gave in to the temptation of passivity. Instead of leading his wife the way the Lord commanded him, he chose to stand by and be passive. All men can be tempted to be passive, thinking that the calling of God on men only applies when others are around. However, the exact opposite is true. The training men do individually matters. It is, in fact, what helps prepare them to run the race well in the other areas of their lives. Let your individual personal life be the place you work and keep first; that sets the rock-solid foundation for the other gardens you are to cultivate.

Family: John Piper describes the role of the husband in the family as working and keeping by “providing and protecting your family, both spiritually and physically” (Piper, “Marriage, Christ, and Covenant”). So, husbands live out your mandate by working to do those things— labor to make your wife a “fruitful vine within your house” and your children “like olive shoots around your table” (Psalm 128:2–4). Do this by washing your family in the word of God, being strong and faithful to the truths of Scripture in hard times, being gentle and kind, living with your wife in an understanding way, and being ready to die to self to serve them. There is no more important garden the Lord will place you in than the family garden he has given you. Work it and keep it with diligence.

The mandate here looks like a husband who seeks to be engaged in the spiritual life of his family by faithfully leading in family worship, initiating spiritual conversations, and making space in the family calendar to prioritize church and spiritual life over other less

important activities. It looks like working hard to provide for your family physically, exercising self-control when anger flares up, laying down your preferences for the good of your family, and using your strength to be a strong support for your family and others in your area of responsibility.

This work is hard. You will be tempted at times to wonder what the point is when you feel like you don't see growth in your family. But don't believe the lie that just because you can't see the shore yet, you aren't getting closer to land. Know that day by day, week by week, year by year, with the wind of grace in our sails, the Lord is using your work for the good of your family and for his glory.

Church: Working and keeping looks like using your gifts to make the church grow in depth and maturity, and to help protect it from the “flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph. 6:16). Help drive unity in the church, love the body, prioritize the church, be on the watch for false doctrine, take discipleship seriously, sing loudly, serve selflessly, and encourage others in the Lord intentionally. Be a billboard that displays the wisdom of God in the church for all to see.

The mandate in this garden is to use your time and gifts to serve the body. This can be through discipleship, teaching, leading, serving, opening up your home for others, providing wisdom and counsel, and sometimes it can even mean serving in the nursery. A godly man will rightly recognize that, in the Lord's wisdom and kindness, he has a spiritual responsibility for the good and godly growth of this body and will give effort to that end. In the list of his priorities, the church and fellowship will be high, and his love for the body should be evident in his speech and actions.

Work and the World: In vocation and the world, working and keeping looks like laboring diligently for the good of your employer and your neighbor. If you have a leadership role, you will use it for the good of those under you and strive to see them grow. You will work as unto the Lord in everything you do, show up on time, do what you say you are going to do, do the right thing even when it doesn't benefit you, do all things without grumbling or complaining, speak well of others—in short, work as a Christian. When you have the chance, do good to your neighbor by serving them physically by helping provide for their need physically, and spiritually with the gospel.

HOW TO GROW AND HOW TO SOW

These areas, in general, cover most of the “gardens” men will be in throughout their lives, and a few of the ways we work and keep them. The final question that I want to answer for us is a simple one: “How?” How can we grow in our understanding of masculinity and live it out practically? For the women reading this article, I would love to give you a few ways to encourage the men around you.

How to Grow

By God's grace, the way to grow in biblical masculinity is not complicated, but it does require consistent effort over a lifetime. Think more like training for a marathon than a 5k. There are three main ways we can grow.

- **Discipleship:** This one you should have seen coming from a mile away, but that's for a good reason! Discipleship (in the context of the local church) is the iron forge that the Lord uses to heat, shape, and sharpen us. It's where holiness is pursued, minds and hearts are equipped, sin is confessed and called out, strength is imparted, and encouragements can be given to live out the masculine mandate. One of the most striking times this happened to me was when an older brother looked me in the eye and said, “You need to go and try and reconcile with that person.” In that moment, I was being passive. I knew the right thing to do, but didn't want to do it. It was the Lord's grace to me to have someone call me to lead and pursue reconciliation. To grow as a biblical man, you need the fire of discipleship so you can be shaped and sharpened to fit the mold the Lord has for us.

- **Discipline:** Lean into the spiritual disciplines and be disciplined in doing them. Read the word, pray the word, submit to the word, evangelize, love the church—be strong and be consistent in these graces.

- **Delight:** Strive to delight in the Lord. The most masculine man ever to walk the face of the earth was Jesus Christ, and he delighted in his Father and delighted to obey his will. This delight led Christ ultimately to the cross, where he would show the perfect display of masculinity in laying down his life as a sacrifice for ours. If you strive to delight in the Lord the way Christ did, you will start to model him. As William Blake said, “You become what you behold.” Behold and delight in Christ, and become like him.

How to Sow

For the women reading this, first off, thanks! I know it can be tempting to think, “What does this have to do with me?” But the truth is that all teaching in Scripture on every topic is beneficial for all of us to hear, regardless of whether it directly applies to us. I appreciate you practicing that by reading this article! I am also assuming you are reading this because you recognize that masculinity (like femininity) is a part of God’s good design and plan, and you want to see that lived out well in our church and in your relationships.

Here are two ways you can help with that. The first is to encourage the men around you. This is often an underappreciated thing, but encouragement is something that men need. A kind encouragement from a sister in Christ can be like a breath on a warm fire that helps the flame grow stronger. As 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

This can be as simple as a mom giving encouragement to her son or other young boys when she sees them take on good responsibility or show self-control. It can be an older woman who uses her godly wisdom to ignite courage in men, by reminding them of God’s faithfulness in all seasons of life. It can look like a younger woman giving appropriate appreciation and encouragement because they were blessed by the teaching or prayer a brother gave. It looks like the kind wife, who reminds her husband of the gratitude she feels for his hard work to provide in a job situation that isn’t ideal. This may seem small or unimportant, but it isn’t. Like a gentle wave of water can over time shape a stone, all of these means of encouragement help men embrace the mandate God has given them.

The second thing is to expect the men around you to live up to the masculine mandate that God has given them. While there is always a need for grace and the understanding that no one is going to do this perfectly, women can help set the bar for how men should act by their expectations. Expect men to be disciplined and self-controlled in their individual lives. Expect them to work and keep by providing and showing Christ-like servant leadership to their families and church families. Expect them to show strength, courage, integrity, and to stand up tall under the weight of responsibility. Of course, ensure that those expectations are biblical ones, but expect the men in church to act according to their calling and to desire it for the good of our church, their families, and the world around us. I would much

rather us have a high biblical bar that everyone expects than a low worldly bar that doesn’t benefit anyone.

Church family, men, this mandate to work and keep is a big calling—one that is a good, God-given gift designed for the flourishing of the world. The reason for all of this is not ultimately because we just want men to be and act like men (even though we do), or because we want things to flourish (we definitely do!), but it’s because we want the world and those around us to see the beauty of Christ and the gospel on display in biblical masculinity.

When you see a man working and keeping by demonstrating servant leadership, you see a glimpse of Christ and are reminded of his perfect servant leadership in how “He came not to be served but to serve and lay down his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When you see a man working and keeping through diligent provision, you see God as our Provider through these ordinary means. When you see a man exercise tenderness, love, and strength in the gardens of his life, you see a picture of Christ, his tender loving-kindness and strength to protect us. And when you see the flourishing fruit from a man’s garden, you see the goodness and kindness of the Lord. Even though the soil is rocky, sinful, and hard to work, the Lord is stronger still and can make life to flourish in any circumstances.

In light of all this, let’s strive to be the men the Lord has called us to be. Let’s be strong in the Lord. Let’s go to battle. Let’s be fierce and humble in our pursuit of living out the call the Lord has for us. A soldier doesn’t stop fighting till the war is won. A runner doesn’t stop till he crosses the finish line, and a biblically masculine man doesn’t stop pursuing and persisting in his calling until the Lord calls him home. And while we wait and strive for that glorious day, we know that Christ was the perfect man. We may strain against the weight of this load of responsibility as if it were on our backs, but we know that Christ is the one who is bearing up the weight and has completed the journey ahead of us.

Your faithful climber, Matt Williams

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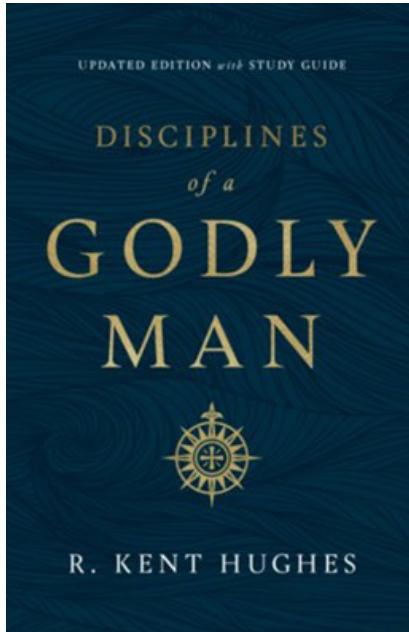
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BOOK HIGHLIGHT

DISCIPLINES OF A GODLY MAN

Written by R. Kent Hughes | Recommended by Trent Roberts



In *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Kent Hughes emphasizes the importance of being spiritually disciplined in all aspects of a man's life. Many of the chapters focus on the ordinary means of grace, but Hughes goes further to show how the gospel should shape a man's relationships, soul, character, and ministry. He argues that excellence in any area of life requires discipline, and he contends that this is doubly important for our spiritual lives. His reasoning is that, while we may benefit from natural advantages such as talent or genetics in other areas, no such advantage exists spiritually, since we all begin in the same place: dead in our sins. This reality should prompt men to have true "spiritual sweat" as they strive to grow in godliness through intentional spiritual discipline in every aspect of their lives.

Having recently become a father, and given my role in the church, I found Hughes' chapters on the disciplines of fatherhood and ministry especially encouraging. He urges fathers to lead their children with tenderness, discipline, and instruction, portraying fatherhood as a spiritual discipline that demands daily perseverance and reliance on the Lord. Hughes reminds readers that faithfulness in this calling requires God's help to grow. It is a task men should diligently set their minds on and intentionally

strive for improvement in. In his chapter on ministry, he challenges men to open their hearts widely to others for their spiritual good—a labor that is often exhausting and painful, yet deeply rewarding. He specifically calls for disciplined labor in reaching out to other Christians in spiritual need, instead of being content with a mere inward spiritual focus. Together, these chapters reminded me that growth in these areas doesn't happen by accident but through intentional effort and humble submission to God in his word and through prayer. Sustained discipline in these areas over time is key for men wanting to see spiritual fruit grow in their lives.

This book is a rich resource for men, as it systematically walks through key areas of life that should be shaped by the gospel driven discipline. With its abundance of practical applications and helpful reflection questions, it's an excellent book to read alongside another man in the church. I could see it being especially beneficial for fathers with teenage sons who want to impress God's truth upon them and spark meaningful conversations about how these principles are lived out. There is much to reflect on, but readers should be cautioned against trying to apply everything at once. Instead, identify one area in which you need greater spiritual discipline and use Hughes' thoughtful guidance to grow there.

BOOK EXCERPTS

Men, submit to Christ and allow him to turn your hearts to your children. Ask the Holy Spirit for the power to practice the discipline of fatherhood. Sweat for your children's souls.

– "Discipline of Fatherhood" p. 73

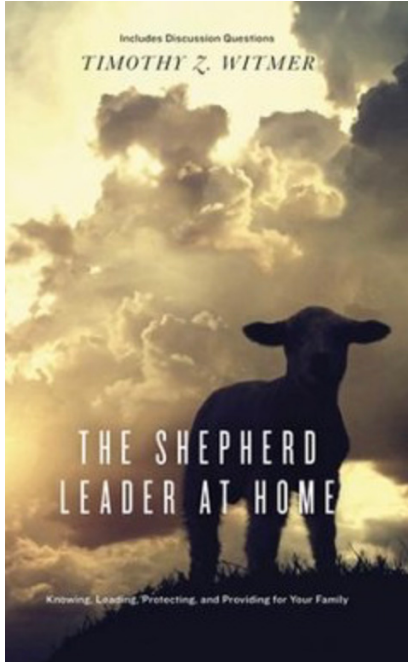
Ministering hearts are disciplined to labor, for they regularly move beyond their comfort zones, they put themselves in vulnerable spots, they make commitments that cost, they get tired for Christ's sake, they pay the price, they encounter rough seas. But their sails billow full of God's Spirit.

– "Discipline of Ministry" p. 268

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

THE SHEPHERD LEADER AT HOME

Written by Timothy Z. Witmer | Recommended by Chad Ireland



The two-parent, husband-wife unit was on the cusp of becoming the minority in the US, according to 2005 census data (49.7% of the nation's households). No doubt that percentage has only decreased in the years following. Where are men to learn how to be the head of the home God designed them to be? God's word and the local church are God's good gifts to men and families in need of instruction. Timothy Witmer's book, *The Shepherd Leader at Home*, aims "to help families by helping husbands and dads become loving shepherds of their families." (12) He does so by applying the biblical shepherding categories of knowing, leading, providing, and protecting to the home. Witmer begins by grounding a theology of marriage in the eternal triune relationship of God, which frames the husband's/father's responsibility to know, love, and lead his home. The book is divided into four parts: the first two lay the theological groundwork for knowing and leading your family with specific applications to one's wife and children. Part three focuses on providing materially and spiritually. Finally, part four applies the role of protector to husbands and fathers. Witmer concludes with a brief afterword, reminding the reader that the time is short and exhorting men to make the most of it to lead their homes.

The Shepherd Leader at Home is brief yet rich in teaching toward a biblical framework for male headship in the home. Witmer blends substantive instruction grounded in Scripture with practical ways men can apply it

today. In the chapter on knowing your wife, he concludes with a list of questions to self-assess how well you know your wife. I was challenged by them, and it has led to many fruitful conversations with my wife (and other men to pursue their wives). The book reminded me afresh to engage each of my children where they are with the aim of drawing out their hearts and instructing them with God's word. Witmer mixes the right amount of urgency to prioritize the task with instruction on how to do it effectively. My only caution for the reader is to take some of his applications as suggestions rather than binding obligations.

BOOK EXCERPTS

As we train our children, we are introducing them to the essential principle of authority and accountability with the ultimate goal of helping them honor the Lord's authority

– "Protecting Your Children" p. 141

Every new day that you are given with your wife is a precious gift from the Father. So cherish her while you can...There is less time than you might think for providing loving care, instruction, and discipline, in the hope that they will come to know the Lord and walk in his truth.

– "Afterward" p. 156

BIBLE READING PLAN

NOVEMBER

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

November 1 1 Corinthians 2

November 2 Proverbs 8-9

November 3 Jude 1-4

November 4 Galatians 1

November 5 Galatians 2

November 6 Galatians 3

November 7 Jeremiah 28

November 8 2 Peter 1

November 9 Jude 1-4

November 10 Matthew 9:18-34

November 11 Luke 7:11-17

November 12 Mark 5:21-43

November 13 John 9

November 14 Psalm 107:1-21

November 15 Psalm 103

November 16 Matthew 9:18-34

November 17 Matthew 9:35-37

November 18 John 10:11-18

November 19 Acts 20:17-35

November 20 Isaiah 6

November 21 Micah 5:1-5

November 22 Psalm 23

November 23 Matthew 9:35-37

November 24 Jude 5-16

November 25 Galatians 4

November 26 Galatians 5

November 27 Galatians 6

November 28 Genesis 19:1-14

November 29 2 Peter 2

November 30 Jude 5-16

*Sermons in Bold

NEW MEMBERS



MATT COX



MARISA COX



CLAY VEDDER



ABIGAIL VEDDER

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES



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