

## Meeting Summaries and Questions for **Centering God and Self**

for complete meeting guides, see our book "Fuel" available at [www.faithbalance.com](http://www.faithbalance.com)

**1. How Men Find God** – Men find God alone and in groups. We find God at work and on the sports field, especially when we pray for miracles. And we find God at home, out in nature and, occasionally, in traffic. There is no universal avenue or end point where all men find God, but there is one constant. We find God in the way that we seek God. God is everywhere and is waiting for us to find him in the most public and private of places. The key, of course, is to *engage* in the search, which is why we gather together. Your faith group, if you invest in it, can bring God into your life – and your life into God. Click here for discussion questions (and exercises?) to help frame your search.

**Questions** – How do you find God? How has this changed over time, from childhood to now? Do you look to God for guidance more or less often than when you were young? Have you left something behind in your relationship with God over the years? What have you gained? What do you want to change, to grow? Where would you like to be in your faith?

**2. Finding True North** – Stars have guided night travelers for thousands of years. Yet to make night navigation possible, travelers need a constant—a bearing point by which to steer through the darkness to their destination. For us, the star becomes a symbol for the long journey to continuous conversion. It is a constant to keep us on the right path. As we navigate personal issues as well as family and work obligations, we travel as seekers in every sense of the word. Along the way, we will face obstacles to living a deeper faith—from a simple lack of time for prayer to anger concerning a recent loss. It is therefore essential that we keep our eyes firmly fixed on our True North, the light of God, every step of the way. For like all nighttime travelers, we need a stable, constant light to guide us through the darkness.

**Questions** – Do you have a spiritual True North – a guiding set of principles by which you navigate life? What aspects of your life help to reinforce these principles – family members, friends, work ethics, a favorite fishing hole or other person, place or thing that helps to keep you on the right path? On the other hand, what distracts you from True North – too much work, isolation, addiction? Discuss how you can accentuate

the positive and eliminate, or at least reduce, the negative – so that you can stay on the right path toward continuous conversion.

**3. Spiritual Gifts and Talents** – How do we recognize our God-given gifts and talents? And, perhaps more important: What do we do with them? In other words, among all the competing noises of our lives, how can we discern God's call for us? Isaiah 11:2–3 recognizes Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel (also called right judgment), fortitude, piety (or reverence), and fear of the Lord, which is also called wonder and awe in God. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that these gifts are given by God to provide the inner 'Christlikeness' that helps us to develop a closer relationship to God. St. Paul outlines another set of gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, sometimes called charisms, which are to be shared with the world. In other words, there are enough gifts to go around and to help us find our place in God's light. The important thing is to recognize that we have been given certain gifts and, through prayer and good counsel, we are called to make those gifts manifest both in our hearts and out in the world.

**Questions** – Can charisms be developed over time? Can one learn to be a healer or a communicator or a leader? What charisms, if any, would you like to develop? Discuss the obstacles that may "keep your light under a bushel." Ask the group members to identify a gift that seems absent or lacking in their lives at the moment. Perhaps it is an understanding of God's intentions or a lack of wonder and awe in God. Discuss how you might rekindle this flame.

**4. When Self-Worth Is Challenged** - We all feel lost from time to time because of family troubles, dissatisfaction at work, or wrestling with our personal demons. Yet we are taught from an early age that God is always there to guide us, if we only seek him. Sometimes such teachings can be hard for men who have a hard enough time asking directions, much less seeking help for ourselves, or for friends and family. Fortunately, scripture is filled with people like us who feel lost, have doubts, and sometimes even wail and gnash their teeth. This session provides an opportunity

to delve into the Bible to find inspiration - from Abraham (an average farmer for decades before God spoke to him) to Moses (who did see God, but never the Promised Land for which he longed) to Jesus (who felt forsaken in his final hours of torment. There are many other examples and we invite you to find inspiration in the words of God, for they can teach us a great deal when our own self-worth is challenged.

**Questions –** How do you define self worth? Is it the same as self-esteem, or self-confidence? How much of your self worth is defined by other people's impressions; how much comes from within? What role does, and should, God's love play? Now, imagine a conversation with God, which is really another term for prayer. Imagine God's response to this simple question: "What am I worth?" Or, to put it another way, "What is my value on earth?" How might God respond to you? Perhaps more important, would you trust that response? Finally, allow each member of the group to discuss a section of the Bible that speaks to them of comfort and hope in times of trouble. There are many examples, since scripture is full of people in trouble! Is there a story of struggle that has resonated with you at some time in your life?

**5. Seeking Balance –** If there is one thing most men can agree on, it is that we struggle to find balance in life. The reality is that most of us only find balance in rare moments: like a family vacation, dinner with a loved one, or sharing an especially good joke with friends. Balance, it seems, comes and goes like the wind. So, how can we find centeredness amid the chaos? An important step toward balance, and toward a deeper relationship with God, is to realize we cannot possibly go it alone. Our problems, no matter how fast we juggle, are simply too much to handle by ourselves. While God cannot magically solve our problems, we are foolish to attempt solutions alone. Proverbs 16:11 says it best: "Balance and scales belong to the Lord; all the weights used with them are his concern." In other words, God is central to the question of balance for the Lord is, ultimately, the scale by which all things are measured. We will do well to take our measure in Him.

**Questions –** In what ways does your life seem in balance? In what ways does it seem out of balance? We all have a litany of causes to choose from—time, money, relationships, work, and prestige—pick one, or all of the above! The important point is to share these pressures with the group so that God and other men may enter more fully into the equation. As you discuss,

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honestly assess the degree to which you feel that God has been present, or absent, in seeking balance. If you were able (or forced) to give up one thing pulling your life out of balance, what would that be? A mortgage? Business travel? Too much television? Family resentments? What would be the consequences? If God were a life coach, what might he recommend?

**6. From Success to Significance -** Men are programmed from an early age to distinguish between success and failure—at sports, at school, and eventually at work and in adult life. Unfortunately, this is a Madison Avenue distinction that distracts us from God's true purpose for our lives. Here, we explore God's desire for us to move beyond a narrow definition of success and toward a better appreciation of true significance. Yet talking about significance and practicing it are very different things. To focus on significance is to focus outside one's self—to see the impact we have on others, positive or negative. Even the smallest act, a kindness to a co-worker or patience with a family member, can have ripple effects far beyond our own horizon. When we think of our impact on the world, we need to appreciate that our actions *are* our legacy for unseen generations to come. Our significance may not be measurable on the balance sheet of business or of life, but our very presence has the power to perpetuate God's grace in the world.

**Questions –** Think about the last funeral or memorial service you attended. Now, without getting too morose, take a few minutes to write notes for your own eulogy. What would people say about you if you died today? Is this a list of successes or of significant impact or both? What is left when you strip away conventional measures of success? How might your life be different if you focused on "significance" as opposed to "success"?

2. What do you understand "leaving a legacy" to your family, your work colleagues, or your community to mean? Identify three meaningful relationships or opportunities in life where you can make a positive difference, starting today. Has God prepared you for opportunities for significance by giving you unique talents? What are these and how do you try to use them wisely?

*For complete meeting guides – including group exercises, prayer and scripture references, humor and food for thought, see our book "Fuel" available at [www.faithbalance.com](http://www.faithbalance.com) and at [www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)*