

THE FORGE

FORGED

A Man's Guide to Following Christ

Reflections from an Unfinished Man

Zach Smith

Forging Men of Faith

Proverbs 27:17

Contents

A Note Before We Begin.....	2
Why The Forge?.....	4
The Night I Could Not Stay in My Seat.....	5
What I Think We Are Missing.....	7
Chapter 1 - Start With Christ.....	9
Chapter 2 - An Unfinished Man.....	12
Chapter 3 - Who Am I When Nobody Needs Me?.....	15
Chapter 4 - Let the Word Correct Me.....	18
Chapter 5 - Prayer When You Do Not Like the Microphone.....	20
Chapter 6 - Character Is the Man at Home.....	23
Chapter 7 - Men Need Men Who Will Step In.....	26
Chapter 8 - The First Ministry Is Close to Home.....	29
Chapter 9 - God Uses the Man Behind the Soundboard.....	31
Chapter 10 - Work, Responsibility, and the Weight We Carry.....	33
Chapter 11 - When Death Is Closer Than You Think.....	35
Chapter 12 - Do Not Disappear When Life Gets Heavy.....	38
Chapter 13 - Sent From the Forge.....	41
What I Think a Godly Man Looks Like.....	44
What I Think Men Need From Each Other.....	46
When I Fail at What I Wrote.....	48
A Simple Way to Keep Walking.....	49
My Challenge to You.....	51
I Am Still Being Forged.....	53
My Prayer for Us.....	55
AWAKEN. FORGE. SEND.....	57

A Note Before We Begin

I need to tell you something before you read another page.

I am not writing this because I have figured out how to be a godly man. I have not. I am not writing because I have mastered prayer, marriage, fatherhood, leadership, brotherhood, discipline, or anything else in this book. I have not.

I am writing because I am trying to follow Christ, and the longer I do, the more I realize how much of me still needs to be shaped.

There are things I can see clearly in somebody else's life and struggle to see in my own. There are truths I can explain to another man and then have trouble living out when I am tired, frustrated, busy, afraid, or carrying too much. There are times I know exactly what I should do and still have to fight myself to do it.

So I am not writing from the finish line.

I am writing from somewhere on the road with you.

In fact, building The Forge and writing these pages have become part of my own journey. Every time I write about prayer, I have to look at my prayer life. Every time I write about fatherhood, I have to think about the ways I got it right and the ways I did not. Every time I tell another man not to carry everything alone, I have to face how bad I am at asking for help myself.

That is uncomfortable. I think it is also necessary.

This book is not Scripture, and my opinions are not Scripture. I want everything here to drive us back to Jesus and back to the Bible. Where my thoughts are useful, keep them. Where they are not, let God's Word correct both of us.

The Forge is not meant to replace the church, a pastor, discipleship, counseling, recovery, or any other help a man may need. It is meant to point men toward Christ and toward one another.

My hope is simple: that something in these pages helps a man stop pretending, look honestly at himself, and take one more step toward Jesus.

That man may be you.

It is definitely me.

Why The Forge?

The image of a forge has become deeply meaningful to me.

Raw metal does not enter a forge because it is worthless. It enters because there is something it can become. Heat makes it workable. The hammer shapes it. The anvil provides resistance. The process is repeated. Again and again, something useful begins to emerge.

I think God often works in men in much the same way.

Life brings heat. Scripture brings correction. Failure humbles us. Relationships expose us. Responsibility tests us. Suffering changes us. Grace restores us. Other men sharpen us. And through it all, Christ continues shaping those who are willing to remain in His hands.

That is where the mission of The Forge comes from:

Awaken men to Christ.

Forge men in Christ.

Send men for Christ.

First, we awaken. We recognize that we need Jesus.

Then, we are forged. Not once. Continually.

And eventually we realize that God was never shaping us only for ourselves. We are sent back into our homes, churches, workplaces, friendships, and communities to serve others.

We are sharpened so that we can sharpen others.

This book is not the program for The Forge. A man does not have to attend a single Forge gathering to benefit from it. It is simply a foundation: my attempt to put into words what I believe it means to be a man who follows Christ, what I think many men are missing today, and what I am trying to become myself.

The Night I Could Not Stay in My Seat

I grew up around church. I attended. I heard the words. I knew the routine. But for a long time, I do not think I was really paying attention.

When I was around seventeen, I was at church on a Sunday night when we had a special speaker. I remember thinking it seemed like he might have been fairly new at speaking. He did not give some complicated theological presentation. He started with the basics. He explained salvation simply. He explained what Christ had done and what I needed to do.

Something happened in me that night.

I had not arrived planning to walk an aisle. I had zero intention of making some public decision. But when the invitation came, it felt like the Hulk could not have kept me in my seat.

I walked forward and gave my life to Christ.

That night matters to me because it reminds me that we sometimes make Christianity more complicated than it needs to be. I had spent years around church, but that night the truth became personal.

I needed Jesus.

For a while afterward, I was focused. I began serving the church by helping with the sound system. I was involved. I was growing.

Then life happened.

Not one dramatic rebellion. Not one day where I decided I was done with God. He simply moved out of focus.

I got married. I had children. I worked. I became focused on providing. I became a police officer and spent eleven years meeting people on some of the worst days of their lives. I worked hard. I carried responsibility. I tried to take care of my family.

Those were not bad things.

But somewhere along the way, I learned something I think many men learn: **it is possible to be responsible and still become spiritually distracted.**

You can work hard for your family and still neglect your soul.

You can be dependable and still drift.

You can believe in God and still allow Him to become background noise.

Eventually my family and I began attending Camp Hill Baptist Church. Early on, I rededicated my life to Christ. I started serving again in the place that felt natural to me - behind the scenes, helping with sound and media.

I wish I could tell you that from that point forward I became the man I was supposed to be.

I did not.

I became a work in progress.

I still am.

That is where this book begins.

Not with a man who found Jesus and never struggled again.

With a man who keeps discovering that he needs to come back to Jesus.

What I Think We Are Missing

When I look at men today, I do not think our biggest problem is that men are not masculine enough.

I think we are confused about what strength actually is.

We often picture a strong man as somebody who needs nobody. He handles his problems. He provides. He fixes things. He absorbs pressure. He does not complain. He does not cry. He does not admit fear. He certainly does not tell another man that he is struggling.

Some of those instincts can produce responsible men. Taken too far, they can also produce isolated men.

Men who carry enormous burdens while everyone around them thinks they are fine.

Men who provide financially but do not know how to be emotionally present.

Men who can lead employees but struggle to lead themselves.

Men who can repair almost anything except the relationships they have damaged.

Men who know how to help everybody else but cannot say, "I need help."

Men who know the rules but forget the relationship.

I know some of those men because I have been some of those men.

Jesus does not call us to weakness. He shows us a different kind of strength.

Strength that can kneel.

Strength that can serve.

Strength that can apologize.

Strength that can forgive.

Strength that can admit fear and still move forward.

Strength that can resist temptation when nobody would ever know.

Strength that can tell another man, "I am not doing well."

Strength that does not need to control everyone in the room.

Strength that protects without dominating.

Strength that leads without needing recognition.

Strength that speaks truth while still showing grace.

If we are going to talk about becoming godly men, I believe we have to allow Jesus - not our culture, our pride, or our insecurity - to define what a godly man looks like.

That is the journey of this book.

Chapter 1 - Start With Christ

Before Anything Else

A man can be disciplined, hardworking, successful, respected, generous, physically strong, financially responsible, loyal to his family, and still be far from God.

Those things may be good. They are not the foundation.

The foundation is Christ.

A godly man is not first defined by what he does. He is defined by who he belongs to.

That matters because it changes everything that follows. If I begin with an image of the perfect man and then try to build myself into him through willpower, I will eventually either become proud or exhausted. Christianity starts somewhere else.

It starts with surrender.

I did not save myself at seventeen. I responded to what Christ had already done for me.

And I have had to keep learning that surrender is not a one-time event.

I can give something to God on Monday and start taking it back on Tuesday.

I can pray, "God, this belongs to You," and then spend the next three days trying to control the outcome.

That is one of my struggles. I like solving problems. I like helping. I like knowing what needs to happen next. There is comfort in feeling like I have some control.

But I cannot call Jesus Lord while quietly keeping veto power over every part of my life.

Eventually Christ reaches something I do not want to surrender: my plans, my pride, my money, my time, a habit, a resentment, my reputation, my expectations, or my idea of how life should go.

That is where following Him becomes real.

Grace Before Performance

One of the dangers in a book about becoming a godly man is that it can accidentally sound like a list of requirements we have to complete so God will accept us.

That is not the gospel.

We do not earn salvation by becoming better men.

We follow Christ because He has shown us grace.

That means I can face my failures honestly without pretending they do not matter and without believing they make me beyond redemption.

Grace does not tell me sin is harmless. Grace tells me I do not have to hide from the One who can forgive and change me.

If You Are Not Sure Where You Stand

Maybe you grew up in church like I did. Maybe you know the words but you are not sure they ever became personal.

Maybe you have never been part of a church at all.

I am not going to make this complicated.

Scripture teaches that all of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Sin separates us from God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sin and rose again. Salvation is not something we purchase with good behavior. We receive it by grace through faith, turning from sin and trusting Christ.

If you do not know whether you belong to Him, do not hide behind church attendance, a baptism date you barely remember, being a decent person, or the fact that your family believes.

Talk to God honestly.

Talk to a trusted pastor or mature Christian.

Settle the foundation.

Everything else in this book comes after that.

Read

Luke 9:23-25; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8; Romans 10:9-13; Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 2:20.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Name one area you are trying to control without God. Put it before Him honestly, then take the next act of obedience you already know you should take.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What has been hardest for you to surrender to God?**

Chapter 2 - An Unfinished Man

The Truth About Failure

I am a flawed man.

I do not say that to sound humble. I say it because it is true.

I sin. I get things wrong. I can become impatient. I can overcommit. I can neglect things that matter because I am trying to take care of too many other things. I can know the right answer and still struggle to live it.

I believe one of the most damaging things we can do in Christian community is pretend otherwise.

Church can become a place where everybody knows how to give the correct answer.

"How are you?"

"Good."

Sometimes we are not good.

Sometimes we are angry, ashamed, exhausted, addicted, resentful, grieving, afraid, or spiritually dry.

The answer is not to celebrate failure. The answer is to stop hiding it.

Repentance Is Not Defeat

Men often respond to failure in predictable ways.

We hide it.

Defend it.

Minimize it.

Blame somebody else.

Or allow shame to convince us we are beyond repair.

Christ gives us another way: repentance.

Repentance means I stop explaining why my sin is understandable and agree with God that it needs to go. I turn from it and turn back toward Him.

That is painful to pride.

It is also freedom.

A strong man is not a man who never has to say he was wrong.

A strong man learns to say it sooner.

When I Have to Say, "I Let You Down"

One of my flaws is that I tend to take on more than I realize.

If somebody needs help and I believe I can help, my instinct is usually to say yes. If I tell someone I am going to do something, I want my word to mean something. I would rather work late, sleep less, or run myself into the ground than disappoint somebody.

For a long time, I could convince myself that was entirely a strength.

Sometimes it is.

But there is a point where willingness becomes overcommitment.

I have had to apologize to people because I took on too much, fell behind, and did not meet a responsibility the way I should have.

Those apologies are hard for me because I want to fix the problem before I admit there is one.

I am learning that responsibility includes being honest about my limitations.

Sometimes humility is saying, "I cannot do that."

Sometimes integrity is saying, "I took on too much."

Sometimes following Christ is simply saying, "I am sorry. I let you down," without adding ten excuses after it.

I am still learning that.

Read

Psalm 51; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:5-9; James 5:16; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

If you owe someone an apology, make it without defending yourself. If you are hiding sin, begin by bringing it honestly before God.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What makes it hardest for you to admit when you are struggling?**

Chapter 3 - Who Am I When Nobody Needs Me?

Men spend a lot of life answering one question without saying it out loud:

Am I enough?

We ask it through other questions.

Am I successful enough?

Strong enough?

Respected enough?

Making enough money?

Providing enough?

Useful enough?

Do people need me?

Do they respect me?

Have I accomplished enough?

I have wrestled with those questions, and I still wrestle with identity.

I have been a police officer. A husband. A father. A church volunteer. A technical person. A problem solver. A person people call when something needs to be fixed. Those things describe parts of my life, but they do not completely answer who I am.

What happens when the job changes?

What happens when the children grow up and need you differently?

What happens when somebody else can do the job better?

What happens when you are no longer the person everyone calls?

If my identity is built entirely on usefulness, what happens when I cannot be useful?

A Place Where I Belonged

As a teenager, I attended a Centrifuge church event in Florida. I remember it as a great experience, but what has stayed with me most is not a particular activity or speaker.

I remember feeling like I belonged.

That feeling matters more to me now than I understood then.

Men need places where they belong before they have everything figured out.

Places where they are not valued only because of what they produce.

Places where somebody notices when they are missing.

Places where they can be quiet without being invisible.

Places where a man can be known as a brother instead of a title.

That desire for belonging is part of what I want The Forge to become.

But no group can carry the full weight of a man's identity.

For the Christian, the deepest answer has to be this:

I belong to Christ.

That gives me freedom to work hard without worshipping work. To serve without needing applause. To admit another man is better at something than I am. To fail without believing I have become worthless. To succeed without believing success has made me more valuable.

My identity is still something I am learning to rest in.

Maybe yours is too.

Read

2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 3:1-4;
1 Peter 2:9-10.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Write this somewhere you will see it: **My identity is received from Christ, not earned from people.**

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What do you think men most commonly use to measure their worth?**

Chapter 4 - Let the Word Correct Me

I have learned that knowing what Scripture says and allowing Scripture to correct me are not the same thing.

It is easy to find a verse that supports something I already believe.

It is harder to sit with a passage that challenges me.

We live in a world overflowing with opinions. I have plenty myself. But my opinion is not the final authority. Neither is yours. Neither is a pastor's personality, a political party, social media, tradition, or whatever our culture currently celebrates.

For a follower of Christ, Scripture has to be allowed to confront all of us.

Sometimes I open the Bible looking for reassurance and find correction.

Sometimes I look for an answer and leave with another question.

Sometimes I realize the problem is not everybody around me.

Sometimes the problem is me.

That is one reason we need God's Word. It exposes things we are good at hiding from ourselves.

You Do Not Need to Be a Scholar to Begin

You do not have to understand every difficult passage before Scripture can shape you.

Read.

Slow down.

Think.

Ask:

What does this show me about God?

What does this reveal about people?

Is there something I need to believe, obey, confess, stop doing, or start doing?

Then ask the harder question:

What needs to change in me because this is true?

A few focused minutes in Scripture every day will shape a man more than owning shelves of Bibles he never opens.

Read

Psalm 119:9-16; Joshua 1:8; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:22-25.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Choose one book of the Bible and read a manageable amount every day for the next two weeks. Read to listen, not to finish.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What passage of Scripture has shaped you the most, and why?**

Chapter 5 - Prayer When You Do Not Like the Microphone

I do not like speaking in front of people.

I am quiet by nature. I do not want the spotlight. Even praying out loud has always been something I have a real fear of.

That may sound strange coming from somebody helping build a men's ministry, but it is true.

For years I found much more comfort behind a soundboard than behind a microphone.

I mention that because Christian men sometimes compare themselves to the most visible men in the church. The guy who can stand in front of a room and pray without hesitation can look more spiritual than the guy who would rather disappear into the back row.

I do not believe God measures us that way.

Prayer is not a performance.

God is not grading vocabulary, volume, confidence, or whether I sound like the person who prayed before me.

Learning to Be Honest With God

I have had moments when prayer felt natural and others when I did not know what to say.

I have prayed passionately.

I have prayed distractedly.

I have prayed because I desperately needed God.

And if I am honest, I have probably prayed at times because I knew I was supposed to.

God already knows when I am angry, afraid, disappointed, tempted, ashamed, or confused.

Trying to hide those things while praying makes no sense.

Sometimes prayer is:

"God, I do not understand."

Sometimes:

"I am angry."

Sometimes:

"I am afraid."

Sometimes:

"I knew better. Forgive me."

And sometimes:

"I do not even know what to ask for."

That is still prayer.

If you are like me and public prayer is hard, do not allow fear of public prayer to become an excuse for no prayer.

Start where you are.

Talk to God honestly.

When God Does Not Fix It the Way I Want

Prayer is not a machine where I put in the right words and God produces the result I requested.

Sometimes God changes the circumstance.

Sometimes He changes me while the circumstance remains.

The second answer can be harder.

But both can be grace.

Read

Matthew 6:5-13; Psalm 62:8; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:14-16;
Romans 8:26-27.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Find ten quiet minutes. Put the phone away. Do not try to sound spiritual. Tell God the truth.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What makes prayer difficult for you?** You may discover you are not as different as you think.

Chapter 6 - Character Is the Man at Home

Pressure reveals things.

I can look patient when everything is going my way.

The real question is what comes out when I am tired, frustrated, disrespected, financially stressed, disappointed, or overwhelmed.

Character is not the version of me I can maintain for two hours on Sunday.

It is who I am when there is no audience.

Integrity means the public man and the private man are becoming the same person.

Not perfect.

The same.

If everybody at church thinks I am patient but the people in my home have to walk carefully around me, there is a problem.

If I demand honesty from other people but make exceptions for myself, there is a problem.

If I talk about grace but make my family afraid to fail, there is a problem.

Rules Are Not the Same as Love

This is something I learned painfully as a father.

For a long time, I was focused on making sure my boys followed the rules and did what was right.

Be responsible.

Stay out of trouble.

Do what you are supposed to do.

I cared because I loved them. I wanted them to grow into good men. I believed part of my responsibility was keeping them on the right path.

But somewhere in all the correcting, teaching, working, providing, and trying to raise them right, I missed something.

I did not tell them enough that I loved them.

I remember one moment with each of my sons when I told him that I loved him and saw something on his face that hurt me. It made me realize he had not heard it enough. What I believed was obvious had not always felt obvious to him.

My love for my children was always unconditional.

I knew that.

But I had assumed they knew it too.

There is a difference between loving somebody and making sure they experience that love.

That realization bothers me to this day.

I cannot go backward and say every word I should have said. What I can do is learn from it.

A father can provide a roof, food, discipline, transportation, opportunity, and rules because he loves his children. Those things matter. But sometimes a child simply needs his father to stop, look at him, and say:

"I love you. I am proud of you. My love for you is not something you have to earn."

Do not assume they know.

Tell them.

Strength Under Control

I also think men sometimes confuse intimidation with leadership, volume with authority, or anger with strength.

Self-control is strength.

Gentleness is not weakness.

Humility is not weakness.

Patience is not weakness.

Jesus possessed authority without needing to make every room afraid of Him.

A godly man should become safer for the people he loves, not more frightening.

Read

Galatians 5:22-25; Proverbs 16:32; James 1:19-20; Colossians 3:12-14; Philippians 2:3-8.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Tell someone close to you what you assume they already know. If you owe an apology, give it. If you need to say "I love you," say it.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another father or older man: **What do you wish you had understood earlier about loving your family well?**

Chapter 7 - Men Need Men Who Will Step In

One of the strongest convictions behind The Forge is simple:

Men need other men.

Not just acquaintances.

Not only men who sit near us at church.

Brothers.

Someone willing to ask, "How are you really doing?" and wait long enough for the real answer.

I understand why men resist that.

Trust can be dangerous. People can mishandle vulnerability. Things told privately can become public. Some of us have learned through experience that keeping our mouths shut feels safer.

I am not suggesting every man tell everybody everything.

But somebody should know you.

Somebody should know when you are drifting.

Somebody should have permission to tell you the truth.

The Man on the Golf Course

Early in my law-enforcement career, I was called to a golf course for a serious accident.

A young worker had been operating a tractor with a blower attachment, clearing leaves from the course early in the morning. The tractor went off an embankment. He fell in front of it and was run over.

When I reached him, he was in terrible condition. From experience, I believed he was probably not going to survive, but that did not change what we did. I pushed to get a helicopter in the air, established a landing zone, and did everything possible to get him help.

I remember the smell of alcohol on him.

As the investigation developed, we learned he had been out drinking late and had reported to work in no condition to operate heavy equipment.

He died.

That call has stayed with me because of how many small things could have changed the ending.

If he had slept late.

If a friend had stopped him.

If a coworker had noticed his condition before he climbed onto the tractor.

Even something that would have felt terrible in the moment - getting arrested before he made it to work - might have kept him alive.

I do not tell that story to reduce his life to one bad decision. I tell it because it taught me something about intervention.

Sometimes loving another man means getting in his way.

"Give me the keys."

"You are not okay."

"I am not letting you leave like this."

"What you are doing is going to destroy your marriage."

"You need help."

"I am staying with you tonight."

A friend who interrupts you may feel like an enemy for five minutes and turn out to be the man who saved you from a lifetime of consequences.

That is part of brotherhood too.

The Part I Still Struggle With

I wish I could tell you that because I believe men need other men, I am now good at asking for help.

I am not.

There have been many times in my life when I needed help and did not tell anybody.

I still struggle with that today.

My instinct is to help, not to be helped. To carry, not to be carried. To solve, not to admit that I do not know what to do.

So when I tell you not to carry everything alone, understand that I am saying it to myself too.

Iron sharpening iron requires contact.

Sometimes I am the piece that needs sharpening.

Read

Proverbs 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 5:16.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Reach out to one man this week. Ask a real question. If you are the one who needs help, practice saying it plainly.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask: Is there anything in your life right now that you are carrying alone?

Chapter 8 - The First Ministry Is Close to Home

It is possible to be respected everywhere except at home.

That thought bothers me because the people closest to us see the version nobody else sees.

They know whether the public character is real.

Not every man will marry. Not every man will have children. Marriage and fatherhood are not requirements for being a godly man.

But if God has entrusted a wife, children, parents, siblings, or others to our care, our faith should become visible in the way we treat them.

Leadership Is Not a Title in the House

I do not think Christian leadership in the home means constantly reminding everybody that you are the leader.

Jesus washed feet.

That image should affect the way men think about leadership.

Do I listen?

Serve?

Apologize?

Protect?

Encourage?

Keep promises?

Make home safer or more stressful?

Lead by example or by demand?

A man can win arguments and still lose trust.

He can enforce rules and still fail to communicate love.

I learned that in my own fatherhood.

I cannot change every mistake I made when my boys were younger, but I can refuse to pretend those mistakes did not happen. I can tell them I love them now. I can listen. I can apologize. I can keep growing.

That may be another lesson men need to hear:

It is not too late to become more present.

You may not be able to rewrite yesterday, but you can change what the people you love experience from you today.

Your Children Are Watching More Than Your Church Attendance

Children notice how we speak when we are angry.

How we treat their mother.

How we treat strangers.

Whether we keep promises.

Whether church is something we attend or whether Christ actually changes the way we live.

They also notice whether Dad can say, "I was wrong."

I think there is tremendous power in a child hearing those words from his father.

Read

Ephesians 5:21-33; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Do one intentional act of love or service at home without announcing it. Say one thing you have been assuming your family already knows.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What is one thing your family needs more of from you?**

Chapter 9 - God Uses the Man Behind the Soundboard

I do not like the limelight.

That has been true for a long time.

When I first began serving in church after I was saved, I helped with the sound system. Years later, when I came back into a deeper walk with Christ at Camp Hill Baptist Church, I found myself serving in sound and media again.

That makes sense to me.

Give me equipment, a problem to solve, a system to build, something that helps somebody else do ministry, and I am comfortable.

Hand me the microphone and tell me to stand in front of everybody and speak, and I would rather disappear.

For a long time, I think part of me assumed that the people God really uses are the people everybody sees.

I do not believe that anymore.

When the Church Doors Closed

During COVID, churches suddenly had a problem none of us expected. People could not gather normally, but the church still needed to worship, teach, encourage, and stay connected.

I poured myself into helping Camp Hill create an online service.

It took work. Equipment. Troubleshooting. Learning things as we went. Countless hours that most people would never see.

Other churches reached out, and I helped some of them figure out how to do it too.

I did not preach those services.

I did not need to.

I was helping make sure the message could be heard.

That experience reinforced something I wish more men understood:

**God does not only use the man holding the microphone.
Sometimes He uses the man making sure the microphone works.**

The church needs pastors and teachers. It also needs men who set up chairs, fix doors, cook food, run cables, visit the sick, drive the van, clean up, mentor teenagers, pray quietly, repair what is broken, give faithfully, and show up when nobody is taking pictures.

Visibility and usefulness are not the same thing.

Serve Without Needing to Be Seen

Jesus repeatedly challenged the desire to be recognized.

That challenges me too, because even a person who does not like public attention can still want to feel needed.

Serving Christ means learning to do good even when nobody notices and being okay when somebody else gets the credit.

That is harder than it sounds.

But it is freeing.

Read

Mark 10:42-45; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Matthew 6:1-4; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Find one useful thing to do that is unlikely to receive recognition. Do it as service to Christ.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **Where do you feel most useful to God, even if nobody sees it?**

Chapter 10 - Work, Responsibility, and the Weight We Carry

For much of my adult life, work and responsibility were central to how I understood being a man.

I got married. I had children. I wanted to provide. I worked hard. Then I became a police officer and spent eleven years in a profession where responsibility can become very real very quickly.

There is something good in a man wanting to take care of the people entrusted to him.

There is also a danger when providing becomes the only language of love he knows.

A man can work sixty hours a week because he loves his family and still leave his family wondering whether they matter more than the work.

A man can be dependable for everybody else and become emotionally unavailable at home.

A man can be so committed to carrying responsibility that he no longer knows how to put anything down.

I understand that temptation.

Your Work Matters, But It Is Not Your God

Scripture teaches us to work faithfully. Our word should mean something. We should be honest, dependable, and diligent.

But work cannot answer the deepest questions about who we are.

A job title can disappear.

A career can end.

Health can change.

Retirement comes.

If all of my worth comes from what I produce, I will eventually be crushed by either failure or exhaustion.

Work is a place to serve Christ.

It is not the place from which I receive my identity.

Know Your Limits Before Your Limits Know You

I still have a tendency to take on more than I should.

Part of maturity for me has been learning that saying no is not automatically selfish and that asking for help is not automatically failure.

A man should be dependable.

He should also be honest.

Sometimes the honest answer is, "I cannot carry that right now."

That sentence may prevent a broken promise later.

Read

Colossians 3:23-24; Proverbs 22:29; Ecclesiastes 4:6; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 6:31.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Look at what you have committed to. Identify one responsibility that needs better boundaries, delegation, or an honest conversation.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **Where is responsibility becoming too heavy for you right now?**

Chapter 11 - When Death Is Closer Than You Think

Police work exposed me to things I would never have seen otherwise.

You meet people on terrible days. You see how quickly ordinary life can become tragedy. You also learn that death does not always announce itself ahead of time.

One night after a home football game, another officer and I were sent to a fast-food restaurant where a crowd had gathered in the parking lot. We started toward the back, talking with people and trying to clear the area.

Then gunfire erupted near the front.

I remember hearing bullets strike the brick wall behind me.

Everything happened incredibly fast.

Someone was firing from a vehicle at a man running down the road.

My first instinct was to move toward the gunfire.

I passed people with minor injuries and kept moving until I reached the man who had been targeted.

He was dead.

Seconds earlier, he had been alive.

There was no time to stand there and process it. I still had a job to do. There was an armed person somewhere, people everywhere, and a scene that had to be secured. I located someone in the bushes with a gun, but he turned out to have been with the man who had been killed rather than the shooter we were seeking.

Only later did I really think about how close the gunfire had been to me.

The Question Had Already Been Answered

What has stayed with me is that dying was not really on my mind in those seconds.

I was not standing there calculating my chances or thinking through eternity. I was doing the job in front of me.

Later, when I thought about it, I realized something: somewhere deep inside, the question of where my ultimate hope rested had already been answered.

I knew that if my life ended, my eternity rested with God through Christ.

I do not say that to make myself sound fearless. I have known fear. Courage is not the absence of fear, and Christians should not be reckless.

I say it because moments like that strip away many of the things we spend our lives worrying about.

Titles do not matter much when bullets are striking the wall behind you.

Your bank account does not matter.

Your possessions do not matter.

The argument you had yesterday becomes very small.

Eventually every man has to confront a question we are good at avoiding:

If my life ended sooner than I expected, what am I actually standing on?

For me, the answer cannot be that I was a good person, worked hard, provided for my family, served at church, helped people, or wore a badge.

My confidence has to rest somewhere outside myself.

It rests in Jesus Christ.

Courage Is Faithfulness in Front of You

Most men will never run toward gunfire.

That does not mean they will never need courage.

Sometimes courage is telling the truth when lying would protect your reputation.

Sometimes it is asking forgiveness.

Sometimes it is walking into a counselor's office.

Sometimes it is saying, "I need help."

Sometimes it is leaving a sinful situation.

Sometimes it is standing beside a friend everybody else has abandoned.

Sometimes it is telling another man about Christ even though you are afraid you will say it wrong.

Courage is often much less dramatic than we imagine.

It is simply faithfulness when fear gives you another option.

Read

Psalm 23; Psalm 46; Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 13:5-6.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Take one action you have been delaying because of fear, provided it is wise and right. Courage usually begins before confidence arrives.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **What is something you know you need courage to face?**

Chapter 12 - Do Not Disappear When Life Gets Heavy

There are seasons when life feels like a forge in the least poetic way possible.

Marriage problems.

Money problems.

Grief.

Family conflict.

Betrayal.

Illness.

Failure.

Loneliness.

Questions that do not have clean answers.

Christianity does not promise men a life without pain.

Jesus never offered that.

Faith Is Not Pretending Everything Is Fine

Read the Psalms. Read Job. Read Jeremiah. Read Paul's descriptions of suffering. Look at Jesus weeping.

Biblical faith has room for pain.

Faith does not always say, "Everything is fine."

Sometimes faith says:

"Nothing feels fine, but I still believe God is here."

That may be one of the bravest prayers a man can pray.

My Instinct Is to Carry It Quietly

I have needed help many times and not said anything.

I still struggle with that.

My nature is often to keep moving, keep helping, keep solving, and avoid becoming a burden to anybody else.

Sometimes helping everybody else can even become a way of avoiding what is happening inside me.

I do not think I am alone in that.

Men often disappear when they hurt.

We get quiet.

We get busy.

We isolate.

We numb ourselves with work, screens, alcohol, anger, hobbies, pornography, or anything else that keeps us from sitting still with what hurts.

Isolation can turn a difficult season into a dangerous one.

You do not need to tell everybody everything.

But do not disappear.

Tell somebody.

If you are in a place where you may hurt yourself or someone else, or you are dealing with addiction, trauma, depression, or another serious struggle, get appropriate help. Talk to a pastor, counselor, doctor, recovery leader, trusted family member, or other qualified person. Asking for help is not a failure of faith.

Sometimes asking for help is obedience.

Read

Psalm 34; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; Galatians 6:2.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Tell one trustworthy person what is actually going on. If the situation needs professional help, take the step to get it.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask another man: **When life gets heavy, what helps you keep going?**

Chapter 13 - Sent From the Forge

Eventually I had to ask what all of this is for.

Why character?

Why Scripture?

Why prayer?

Why brotherhood?

Why endure?

Why let God keep changing us?

I think the answer is bigger than personal improvement.

God is shaping us to be useful in His hands.

That is why The Forge does not stop with "Awaken men to Christ" or even "Forge men in Christ."

There has to be another movement:

Send men for Christ.

A changed man goes somewhere.

Back to his wife.

His children.

His church.

His workplace.

His neighborhood.

His friends.

His community.

The patience God develops in you will eventually bless somebody else.

The wisdom gained through failure can help another man.

The comfort God gives you in grief can become comfort you offer somebody who is hurting.

The truth somebody once taught you can be passed forward.

You Do Not Have to Be Finished

This may be one of the most important things I have learned while writing this book.

I struggled with whether I had any business putting my name on something called *A Man's Guide to Following Christ*.

Because I know me.

I know where I fall short.

But if we wait until we are finished before helping another man follow Christ, none of us will ever help anybody.

Proverbs does not say perfect iron sharpens defective iron.

It says iron sharpens iron.

Both pieces are involved.

Both are affected.

Both are being shaped.

I do not have to be finished before God can use me.

Neither do you.

Sometimes discipleship may be as simple as saying:

"I am still walking this road too. Walk with me."

Bring One

One of the ideas we have adopted through The Forge is incredibly simple:

Bring one.

Not recruit one.

Not pressure one.

Bring one.

Invite one man into your life.

Invite him to eat.

To church.

To The Forge.

To coffee.

To sit around a fire.

To talk.

Maybe he needs Christ.

Maybe he already knows Christ but feels completely alone.

Maybe he needs someone to listen.

Maybe he needs somebody willing to get in his way before he makes a terrible decision.

You cannot save him.

Christ does that.

But you can open a door.

Read

Matthew 5:14-16; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 3:15.

At the Anvil

The Next Strike

Write down one name. Pray for that man. Then reach out.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Ask him: **How can I pray for you this week?** Then actually pray.

What I Think a Godly Man Looks Like

After everything I have written, I want to be careful here.

This is not a checklist that determines whether somebody is "man enough." It is a picture of the kind of man I want Christ to shape me into.

I want to become a man who belongs completely to Jesus.

A man who knows God's Word and allows it to correct him.

A man who prays honestly, even if he is not comfortable praying into a microphone.

A man who does what is right when nobody knows.

A man who can admit when he is wrong.

A man who repents quickly.

A man whose family sees the same faith everyone else sees.

A man who tells the people he loves that he loves them.

A man who controls his strength instead of using it to control other people.

A man who speaks truth without becoming cruel.

A man who shows grace without abandoning truth.

A man who works hard without allowing work to become his identity.

A man who can lead and still serve.

A man who can follow when somebody else should lead.

A man who does not need credit for everything he does.

A man who can say, "I need help."

A man who lets another man know him.

A man who will get in a brother's way when that brother is heading toward destruction.

A man who stands beside another man when life falls apart.

A man who protects people rather than exploiting them.

A man who gives more than he takes.

A man who is teachable.

A man who is still willing to change when he is old.

A man who understands that courage is not the absence of fear.

A man who keeps following Christ when following Him becomes costly.

A man who realizes that whatever strength God has given him was never meant only for himself.

That is the man I want to become.

I am not there.

But I am moving.

And perhaps that is what matters most: not pretending we have arrived, but knowing the direction we are walking.

What I Think Men Need From Each Other

I believe men need permission to stop performing.

We need places where saying, "I am struggling," does not immediately change the way everybody sees us.

We need older men willing to invest in younger men without talking down to them.

We need younger men willing to learn without assuming anything old is useless.

We need fathers willing to apologize.

Leaders willing to listen.

Friends willing to confront.

Brothers willing to stay.

We need men who can disagree without becoming enemies.

Men who celebrate another man's success instead of quietly resenting it.

Men who actually pray for each other rather than only saying, "I'll pray for you."

We need to recover the ability to sit together without everything becoming a competition.

We need to talk about more than work, sports, politics, money, and whatever project we are currently fixing.

We need to talk about Christ.

Our marriages.

Our children.

Our fears.

Our failures.

Our temptations.

Our questions.

Our regrets.

Our hope.

And sometimes we need to sit beside another man who is hurting and resist the urge to fix him.

Just stay.

Our society has plenty of men trying to prove they are strong.

What it desperately needs are men strong enough to love.

Strong enough to serve.

Strong enough to sacrifice.

Strong enough to tell the truth.

Strong enough to receive truth.

Strong enough to kneel before Christ.

When I Fail at What I Wrote

I know what will happen after I publish a book like this.

Eventually I will fail at something I wrote.

I will become impatient after writing about patience.

I will try to control something after writing about surrender.

I will neglect prayer after telling you how important prayer is.

I will carry something by myself after telling you not to.

I will probably say something I regret after writing about self-control.

That does not make the truth less true.

It does not mean I should stop pursuing it.

The danger would be pretending otherwise.

So if you ever meet me, I hope you do not look at me as the guy who wrote the book about being a godly man.

Look at me as another man in the forge.

If you see me getting something wrong, I hope you love me enough to tell me.

That is the entire idea.

Iron sharpens iron.

And sometimes I am the piece that needs sharpening.

A Simple Way to Keep Walking

When life becomes complicated, I think we need simple things to return to.

Stay Close to Christ

Everything begins and ends there.

Stay in the Word

Even when you do not feel like reading.

Keep Talking to God

Especially when you do not know what to say.

Do Not Hide Sin

Bring it into the light.

Do Not Disappear

Let other believers know you.

Love the People Close to You Out Loud

Do not assume they know.

Serve Without Needing the Spotlight

Useful is more important than visible.

Do the Next Right Thing

You usually know more about the next step than you think.

Remain Teachable

You are never finished.

Help Another Man

Do not keep everything God teaches you for yourself.
Then tomorrow, do it again.

My Challenge to You

I do not know why this book ended up in your hands.

Maybe someone gave it to you.

Maybe you attended The Forge.

Maybe you found it on a website.

Maybe you have followed Jesus for thirty years.

Maybe you are not entirely sure what you believe about Jesus at all.

Wherever you are, I want to ask you not to compare yourself to me or to the man beside you.

Do not compare yourself to some idealized version of Christian manhood in your head.

Look at Christ.

Then ask:

What is He trying to shape in me?

Maybe the answer is surrender.

Maybe it is your marriage.

Maybe anger.

Pornography.

Pride.

Your relationship with your children.

Prayer.

Dishonesty.

Loneliness.

Bitterness.

Fear.

Maybe you simply need to stop running from God.

Whatever it is, start there.

One strike at a time.

One act of obedience at a time.

One conversation at a time.

One prayer at a time.

One day at a time.

Let God work.

I Am Still Being Forged

I do not know what God will ultimately do with The Forge.

I do not know how many men will ever read these words.

I do know what creating them is already doing to me.

It is forcing me to think seriously about the man I am becoming.

It is forcing me to confront areas where my life does not yet match the things I say I believe.

Perhaps that is exactly how it should be.

I never want The Forge to become something where I stand at the front and tell everybody else how they should live.

I want to be in it.

I want God to forge me too.

I want to sit around the same fire.

Answer the same hard questions.

Need the same grace.

Receive correction.

Grow.

Fail.

Get back up.

Keep following Christ.

If The Forge becomes anything worthwhile, I believe it will be because men discover they do not have to pretend there.

They can come unfinished.

Because we all are.

But we should not be content to remain unchanged.

So this is where I stand.

I am a flawed man.

Saved by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Still learning.

Still struggling.

Still asking questions.

Still being corrected.

Still being shaped.

Still trying to become the husband, father, friend, leader, servant, and follower of Christ that God has called me to be.

And if you are willing, I would be honored to walk part of that road with you.

Not ahead of you.

Beside you.

Because we are all still in the forge.

My Prayer for Us

Father,

I give You the man I actually am.

Not the one I show everybody.

Not the one I wish I were.

Not the one I think I should already be.

The real one.

You know what is good in me.

You know what is broken.

You know what I hide.

You know what I fear.

You know where I am strong.

You know where I am weak.

You know every failure I regret and every part of my life I am still trying to control.

I belong to You.

So keep working.

Show me what needs to change.

Give me courage when change hurts.

Teach me Your Word.

Teach me to pray.

Teach me to listen.

Teach me to serve.

Teach me to love people well.

Teach me to lead without pride.

Teach me to follow without resentment.

Give me brothers who will encourage me and brothers who will correct me.

Make me the kind of brother who will do the same for them.

Make me faithful in my home.

Faithful in my work.

Faithful in my church.

Faithful when people are watching.

Faithful when nobody is.

And when I fail, remind me to return quickly to You.

Do not let me become satisfied with appearing godly.

Make me more like Christ.

Then take whatever You build in me and use it for someone else.

I am still being forged.

Keep me in Your hands.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

AWAKEN. FORGE. SEND.

Awaken men to Christ.

Because everything begins with Jesus.

Forge men in Christ.

Because becoming like Him takes a lifetime.

Send men for Christ.

Because whatever God builds in us should eventually become a blessing to someone else.

We are sharpened so that we can sharpen others.

The Forge

Forging Men of Faith

Proverbs 27:17

Written by **Zach Smith**

A Forge Foundations publication, 2026.