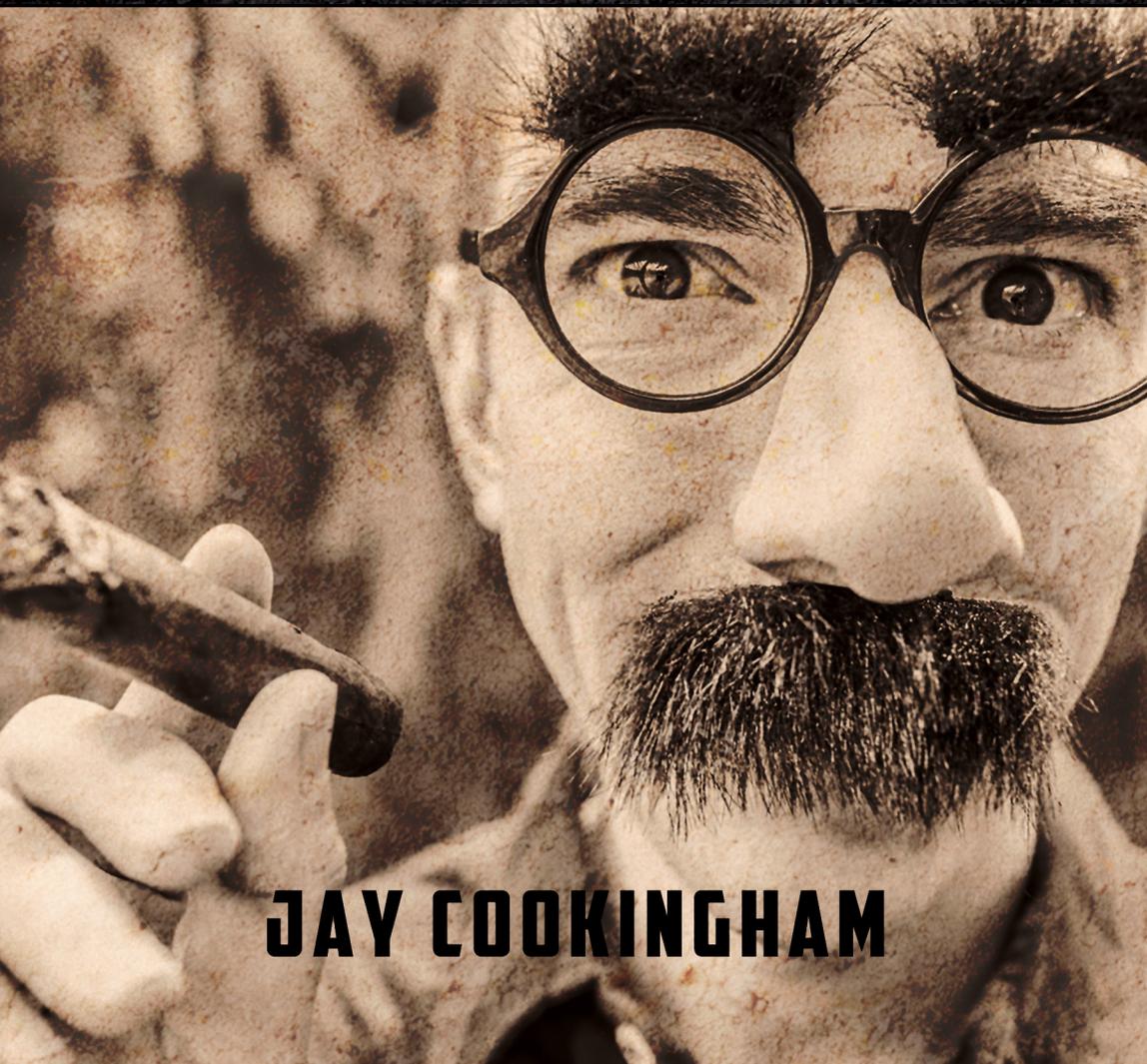


For you did not receive a spirit of slavery that returns you to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" Romans 8:15

SONSHIP

RESTORING A MAN'S IDENTITY



JAY COOKINGHAM

PRAISE FOR SONSHIP: RESTORING A MAN'S IDENTITY

“Jay’s strong heart for God and others is clearly apparent in this devotional. His discerning insight fortifies these reflections to be provocative and challenging. These devotions pulled on my heart strings and convicted me to seek a deeper commitment to God’s mission. I thoroughly enjoyed how I was stirred to look at life through a Kingdom-focused lens. This is a must read for every man!”

- Damon Hawkins

Area Director for Man in the Mirror

“Jay Cookingham’s devotional book “Sonship,” is a transformational book forged out of the fiery battles that Jay personally experienced, and the victorious kingdom lifestyle he stepped into as a son because of encountering Father God’s extravagant love. In my opinion, Jay’s book is not just a devotional book but a prophetic book that calls on men to contend for their identity, discover the secret of sonship and manifest their sonship. I highly recommend this book to any man who wants to live unashamedly as a true follower of Jesus Christ, especially in a world desperately in need of authentic men who are godly examples of Christ-likeness.”

-Eric N. Supen

Author of several books including Kingdom Lifestyle, Kingdom-Driven Prayers-Prayer Works! Trainer and Life Coach, Germany, <http://esupen.wix.com/kingdom-lifestyle>

“There are any number of devotionals in print and I’m sure many of them are great. The reason I’m recommending this one is, not only for its wonderful encouragement and great insight, but because of the author. I have known Jay Cookingham for more than 40 years. He is a friend and a brother who has walked with me through ups and downs, tears and a lot of laughter. The words and insights in this devotional come from a man who has been an example and mentor to many. It’s because of his heart, experiences and humility that the words bring life.”

- Paul Grimsland

Program Director, Hope4Change-Philippines

“Sonship: Restoring a Man’s Identity is a motivating daily devotional for those seeking a deeper walk with Jesus. Cookingham challenges men to drop the act and get honest with ourselves, family, friends, and community. This devotional is a call to repentance, prayer, and commitment to our position as sons of God. It’s packed with servant leadership principles you can use in your role at work, as husband, father, or ministry leader. If you are looking for a devotional that will to refresh your relationship with Jesus, look no further.”

Duane K. Brown
University Adjunct Professor

“Every male needs a male! This devotional book is impactful and intentional, to the end that we as males continue to grow as mature Christian men! I highly recommend this book and applaud this author, my friend Pastor Jay Cookingham!”

Pastor Edwrin Sutton
Husband, Pastor, Author of Purpose Unleashed

SONSHIP

RESTORING A MAN'S IDENTITY

JAY COOKINGHAM

Sonship:Restoring a Man's Identity

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The logo features a stylized grey starburst or arrow shape pointing upwards and to the right, positioned behind the letter 'S' of the word 'Strategic'.
www.strategicfathering.com
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MINISTRIES

*This book is dedicated to my bride Christine,
who has rescued my heart.*

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"Quote me as saying I was mis-quoted." - Groucho Marx

We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.

2 Corinthians 4:2 MSG



INTRODUCTION

The fake disguise affectionately known as Groucho glasses are one of the most familiar silly faces known across the world. For decades this false glasses, nose and mustache combo have graced famous and ordinary faces alike. They're funny looking and provide a good-natured laugh or chuckle for most everyone. Still, I think they represent a deeper truth about humanity.

People seem gifted at wearing masks and using them to hide. The goal of a mask wearer can be to cover up the past, to mislead, or to please people. This cover up is detrimental to our freedom. Inside every human heart is a deep yearning to be known. We hunger for recognition, and for our story to mean something. We want someone to know who we are, to find us interesting. The problem with wearing masks is that they blur the line between the cover-up and discovery. Like seeing the Groucho mask on someone, we know something is off but we're unsure of what it might be.

The failure to fit in or belong to a group fuels shame, often encouraging men to hide behind masks of distrust, coolness, or remoteness. Further impacting this issue are the demands of the false

expectations of others. These expectations beg us to wear masks to avoid labels from family, friends, coworkers and the image they want us to project. Mask wearing is an exhausting cover up power trip. The power is our imagined control over what others see and the trip punishes us with loneliness.

The camouflage covers our true identity and keeps us from freedom

I have discovered that many men share this masquerade problem and embed themselves in an espionage mission. They have spent most of their lives covering up, disguising themselves in fear of being discovered. The fear comes from having a misunderstanding of their identity as men. I know this from experience.

My story of sonship started in a dark place of abuse and neglect. My dad's assault on my identity was vicious and left me searching for meaning. I chose the mask of a clown, masking my pain and anger with humor. For years my father's words, threats and beatings echoed in my spirit and the caustic abuse pushed me deeper behind the mask.

Growing up in an abusive home may not seem like the correct environment for me to discover freedom, but this is where my story began. Living through this dark period of my life helped me uncover the secret to sonship.

The secret was discovering who my real father was. It was the unearthing of the greatest treasure there is; a relationship with Father God. This discovery is the encounter that completely changes a man and enables him to feel free and alive.

When I met Jesus, my unmasking began. It involved forgiveness and rediscovering what it meant to be a man. Removing a mask is difficult and painful but freedom fills the wounds with grace. It's risky to reveal what's behind a mask, but it's riskier to stay behind one. There's pain involved in both decisions, but unmasking is a productive pain, leading to the abundant life Jesus promises. As you experience life beyond the mask, you hunger for more and the cost is nothing compared to the freedom gained.

Sonship retooling will remove the mask, empowering us to face the world as ourselves, unafraid and free. Unmasked men can see themselves as sons, accepting the fullness of Father's love and trusting His definition of their masculinity.

God's love and acceptance of us removes the mask

There is a call on your life—whether you are a Christ follower or not—soon you will face a choice. To follow Christ and embrace all He created for you to fulfill (your mission) or not. You may think about it, mull it over, ponder it, meditate on it, and even study it, but you will decide, either to accept or reject this invitation. This is the first call to us, the call of Salvation. From sin yes, but salvation is more of a call to become someone new. We are called to be His sons, free and unmasked to fulfill the destiny laid out for us. Salvation gives us legs for the journey; unmasking clears our sight to see the path ahead.

The struggles that confront my heart also strengthen my faith and leave me hungry for more of the heart of God. Settling for less never did that for a man. A son's heart must be free, uncaged and hungry for redemption. Liberty empowered by redemption speaks deep to my identity as His son and shakes the dust of the past from my soul. As the dust settles, my redeemed, rescued heart looks more like Jesus.

I pray these devotions mess with you, disturb your comfort zone and get under your skin; as they got under mine. I hope the next thirty days release fierceness in you to fight for your freedom. I pray for an unquenchable thirst for the living water that flows from the Father's heart.

For the King!

Jay Cookingham

“One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.” - Jeanne d’Arc

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
1 Peter 2:9-10



DAY 1 - LEGEND

In the movie, Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King is this wonderful scene between Elrond (the Elf king) and Aragorn, (the future king of Gondor). The armies of men are gathering at a camp, preparing for battle, not far from the city of Minas Tirith (the capital of Gondor) where the evil armies of Sauron are attacking.

In one scene, Aragon is troubled, restless, and unable to sleep soundly. A guard awakens him and takes him to King Theoden’s tent where Elrond waits. The Elf king arrives with the news that his daughter, Arwen, (Aragorn’s love) is dying, her fate tied to the darkness that is now spreading because of Sauron. To add to the bad news is the revelation of additional armies joining the enemy’s cause and Elrod proclaims.

“You ride to war but not to victory.”

To Aragon, hope seems lost.

Elrond, however, has not come empty-handed. He gives Aragorn the re-forged sword Andúril, the weapon used by Aragorn’s father to defeat Sauron in battle many years before.

According to legend, this sword will lead to his defeat again when the true king (Aragorn) returns to the throne of Gondor. Elrond encourages Aragorn to take the sword and embrace his true lineage as king.

Elrond: *You're outnumbered, Aragorn. You need more men.*

Aragorn: *There are none.*

Elrond: *There are those who dwell in the mountain.*

Aragorn: *Murderers. Traitors. You would call upon them to fight? They believe in nothing. They answer to no one.*

Elrond: *They will answer to the king of Gondor!*
[Pulls out Anduril]

Elrond: *Anduril, Flame of the West, forged from the shards of Narsil.*

Aragorn: *Sauron will not have forgotten the sword of Elendil. The blade that was broken shall return to Minas Tirith.*

Elrond: *The man who can wield the power of this sword can summon to him an army more deadly than any that walks this earth. Put aside the ranger. Become who you were born to be.*

That last line moves me every time I hear it. Aragorn seizes the role offered, a symbol of hope for Middle Earth, and leaves the shadows for good. He undertakes a dangerous mission that may kill him before he regains the throne. Yet, by accepting the sword Andúril, his focus is on rescuing a kingdom.

This is the life we're called to!

You are a legendary creation, made in the image of God, called to a life of following Jesus. Your life matters because God says it does. You are on a holy mission, a calling and an epic journey to rescue others. Your heart, forged in the fire of the Father's love, moves you to love like Him. He designed you to impact this world with the way you live. This is who you are, a man—God's son—a man after His own heart.

Take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God and bring hope to a dying world. Put away the Ranger, the part of you that drifts from your destiny. Become a man who follows hard after his King.

“Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:17

A son is legendary!

Unmasking Questions:

Do you feel you have drifted from your destiny?

Are you embracing all God has called you to?

What hope can you bring to the world?

Unmasking Prayer:

Father, Give me the strength to move past my failures and move in the direction of your heart. Forgive my sin and the doubt it causes in my spirit, I choose to trust in you and you alone. Help me to walk by faith and not give into the fear that failure produces.

I know that you are faithful and just and will forgive me.

In Jesus name, Amen!

“We need to find God, and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.” - Mother Teresa

“God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”
Acts 17:27



DAY 2 - NEED

During one of my quiet times with Father God I made this journal entry.

“Often, it is so much easier to do something for God than to just trust in God.”

This statement stirred thoughts about my faith and why I follow Jesus. Walking with Jesus for 50 plus years, I recognize how to do the “Christian Thing”. I know how to talk, how to behave and when to use appropriate religious buzz words. The problem is this form of religion is like dancing the hustle (excuse the disco reference) complete with strange dance moves. This funky spiritual dance moves with religious conviction (the famous list of do’s and don’ts) but hinders relationship growth with the God I proclaim to love.

Our huffing and puffing to impress God, our scrambling for brownie points, our thrashing about trying to fix ourselves while hiding our pettiness and wallowing in guilt are nauseating to God and are a flat out denial of the gospel of grace. - Brennan Manning

In other words, my dance moves do not impress God.

My journey with God does not depend on my natural ability or what talents I bring to the table. It's not my strength of character, my experience obeying commandments or my (assumed) wonderful grip of the Scriptures that move God to act on my behalf. None of these traits or any other I have moves the heart of God to accept me as a son.

It is simply my need.

I need the Father to enter my life daily and teach me new dance moves, ones aligning my heart with His. The discipline of a son is birthed from acknowledging our need of Him. Father God designed this journey; He knows maturity, obedience and "right doing" come with discovering His heart.

My decision to answer the call of discovery imbeds me in a relationship that changes and deepens my need of Him. It's a call that can't be ignored; or easily pushed aside. Pursuing a deeper relationship with the Father is in us, He put it there. We can try to push it aside or ignore it, but the need, the longing to know and be known by God will never be silent in our souls. The hunger is that great.

But, what do I do about the list?

The Ten Commandments are the foundational list for the Christian man and obeying them is essential for our faith. The Sacraments, Baptism, Communion, are good life practices. They can be the bridge, the step, or the trigger that awakens us to our need for more of Him. But the truth is deeper than that. We must remember that just following rules, obeying commandments, and observing sacraments, are not guarantees of intimacy with the Father.

As I move away from a work list mentality, (and funny dance moves) I realize that I am here for a purpose higher than just behaving myself. I'm here to be His son, to enjoy a life getting to know my Father and the purpose He has for me.

Sons need their Father!

Unmasking Questions:

Do you feel you have to earn the Father's love?

How close do you feel to the Father?

*Is it easier for you to do something for God rather than
trust you belong to Him?*

Unmasking Prayer:

*Father, we declare our great need of You. We are hungry men. Men
that need You. We need to be with You, live and love like You. We
ask not to satisfy our hunger, but increase it. Let it burn down
deep, changing our hearts, and freeing us to follow you with
everything we have. Amen*

“This is the power of sonship; men who give their heart to the Father become free! They are motivated by relationship not by reward. They will follow the Father to the ends of the earth and help others on the way.” - Jay Cookingham

“O my son, give me your heart. May your eyes take delight in following my ways.” Proverbs 23:26



DAY 3 - FOLLOW

Imagine you are at your place of work, at the office, construction site, wherever. One day this stranger shows up, he stops by your cubicle or the coffee shop. He appears to be just passing by but he stops and says... come, follow me.

What would you do? Would you question his sanity, his motives? Are you crazy? Follow you where? Why should I follow you?

In Matthew 4: 18-21 we read what the disciples did when Jesus dropped by their work site.

“While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. (19) And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”(20)Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Immediately they followed him, without hesitation. No background check; no asking co-workers for their opinion; they dropped their nets and followed the Master. These men exchanged an occupation for a calling.

There was urgency in the steps of Jesus and a passionate hunger to fulfill Father God's mission for Him. His invitation to journey with Him doesn't work for hesitant individuals or the "let me sleep on it" crowd. Jesus is going somewhere, and He calls us to go with Him... now! As His followers, we need life in our steps, and passion in accepting the path He leads us on.

"You cannot follow God in neutral." Erwin McManus

Jesus applies no pressure, no arm twisting, no gimmicks, no hard sell, no fine print, no strings attached. Just... come follow me. To follow Jesus is relationally motivated, transforming us into active, engaged and determined agents of change. Becoming focused disciples, moving beyond ourselves and leaving behind the neutral, passive parts of our heart.

This is the sweet spot of life, following Him.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25" For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 16:24-25

Sons follow the Messiah!

Unmasking Questions:

What are you willing to drop to follow Christ?

What are you willing to pick up to follow Christ?

What motivates your heart to follow Christ?

Unmasking Prayer:

Father God, I trust in your strong hand. I trust in the training of my hands and my heart. Strengthen my resolve, my faith and vision. I rely on your full armor and every promise from your Word. I follow hard after your heart; I am driven by your spirit to your side. I will bow to no other King but You... my God and my deliverer! Amen!

“The God of light insists on traveling into dark places; the God of peace continuously involves Himself in the wars of men; the God who is good engages the depth of human evil. To follow Jesus is to enter the unknown, to relinquish security, and to exchange certainty for confidence in Him.” - Erwin McManus

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”
Psalm 27:1*



DAY 4 - MISSION

The Green Berets are some of the toughest men on the planet; they are the “special” of special ops. Their training, their dedication, and their sacrifice are off the charts.

Green Berets have five primary missions:

- Unconventional warfare (guerrilla warfare to overthrow an occupying power)
- Foreign internal defense (training allies how to fight)
- Special reconnaissance (behind enemy lines)
- Direct action (Taking the fight to the enemy, on their turf)
- Counter-terrorism. (attacking terrorist threats before they strike)

The Green Berets’ motto got me thinking about freedom. Their motto is something special.

De Oppresso Liber — To Liberate the Oppressed

In the battle for the human heart, God did something wild and unconventional. He sent Jesus to liberate the oppressed, including you and me. He put a brilliant battle plan in motion, a countermeasure to the forces out to destroy the human heart and soul. Jesus went behind enemy lines, took the fight to the enemy and totally won the victory for us.

In Romans 5: 7-8 we read His battle plan.

“God demonstrated his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”

We are the liberated; the set free ones, now we get to fight for the freedom of others. Our mission is special because redemption not only invites us into the Father’s heart; it also invites us into His work. In Luke 4:18, Jesus lays out the mission plan.

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free.”

Jesus charged into life with the purpose of setting people free, going wherever they happened to be. In modern day context that could be bars, clubs, strip joints, bingo halls, or city hall. Speculation of Jesus’ mission strategy is great to debate and muse about but I’m sure we would all be surprised where He would turn up.

However, Jesus does “turn up” where we go, the places we frequent, visit and live by. We are called to share the message of the Gospel to a dark world every day. Father God sends us into the risky and heroic action of touching the lives of other human beings to reach the world He loves. It takes faith to walk out this plan and calls for a heart of obedience. When we surrender all to the Father’s way—like Jesus did—there is no surrender to any other force. This is the way to liberate the oppressed, by following His heart.

Sons go on mission!

Unmasking Questions:

What have you been liberated from?

Are you afraid of following Christ to dark places?

What do you think your mission is?

Unmasking Prayer:

“Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me. I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only your love and your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more.”

- St. Ignatius - 16th century

*“True nobility is exempt from fear.” - Shakespeare
(King Henry the Sixth, Part II Act IV, Scene I)*

*“But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble
deeds he stands.” Isaiah 32:8*



DAY 5 - NOBLE

In the movie Braveheart, William Wallace becomes a central figure in the revolt to secure Scottish freedom from the English. Following the exploits of Wallace is Robert the Bruce, the leader of the Scottish Noblemen. He is a man in conflict, feeling the tug of joining the fight or staying the course of entitlement. His father (dying of leprosy) keeps whispering in his ear to bide his time, to wait for the right time to “rise up” but in reality is keeping his son from becoming a great leader.

This movie makes me think how much passivity makes us act like Robert the Bruce. A leader inspires us and boldly we run off to join his cause. Then we are reminded of our holdings, the land and comfort we own. We buy the lie that the enemy is too strong to conquer, and it’s not the right time for such boldness. We think that if we’re patient, if we bide our time, then we can overthrow the enemy in our lives. The truth is that the waiting, the laying back, lulls us to inactivity and eventually spiritual slaughter. All we thought we possessed has seductively fallen into enemy hands. We don’t realize

how “occupied” we have become. It is worse than the disease that was wasting his father’s flesh; it’s the decay of true nobleness.

The possibility of having their own freedom didn’t motivate the “nobles”. It meant risking the loss of what they already had. Contrast that to this Scripture in the book of Isaiah:

“But the noble thinks noble things; and by noble things he shall stand.” Isaiah 32:8

A noble heart is bold and ready to act; it doesn’t give way to passivity. This heart does not back down from fear, it rises up and stands for what is right. Nobleness frees a man’s heart to follow a heart greater than his own. This heart grows bigger when it runs on a trail of obedience.

“I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!” Psalm 119:32

On this path sons learn the faithfulness of obedience, super-sizing their hearts as they run in the Father’s way. Becoming agents of hope, marking the trail for others to follow, challenging them to leave the orphan life behind and live as sons. We deliver hope by courageously coming alongside someone when they’re in need. By allowing someone’s voice to be heard when no one wants to listen. Noble men clear the trail of despair by believing in someone when no one else will, everything the Father’s does for us!

Nobility is a relational marker of who we are in Christ but it is also an action. Our No-bility, is the power to say no to lesser things and yes to Kingdom things. That’s the inner strength needed in the daily fight for our hearts. We need to be noble men, if there is a war for our hearts; our loved one’s hearts are also on the hit list. Noble sons fight for God’s kingdom and the hearts of the people He loves.

Sons are noble men!

Unmasking Questions:

How’s your No-bility today, what are you saying no to?

Are you too comfortable?

Who can you mark the trail for today?

Unmasking Prayer:

Father, Move me in such a way that I become courageous to fight and to care in ways I didn't think possible of me. Help me to be a noble man, standing for what is right. Awaken the spiritual warrior in me to do battle as you see fit, for your glory and for the freedom of many. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

SONSHIP

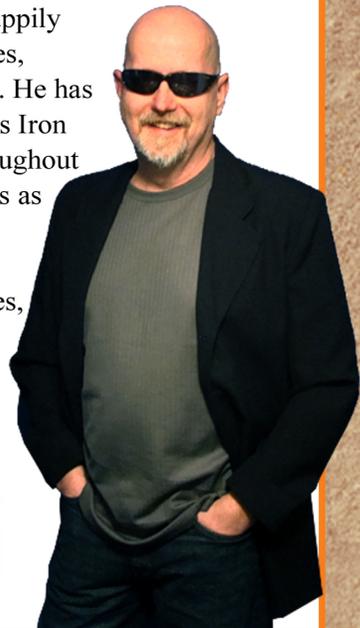
RESTORING A MAN'S IDENTITY

These devotions are a series of reflections from journals, teachings and discussions with brothers over the years. I hope they inspire you on your journey with Jesus, our Master, Messiah and King. It is His example of sonship we seek to follow. I pray that as you learn about sonship, you'll discover the love Father God has for you.

I believe that sonship is God's best strategy to rescue our identity. Come out from behind the mask and live the life you were born for.

ABOUT JAY

Jay and his wife Christine have been happily married for 36 years and have seven (yes, seven) children, 5 sons and 2 daughters. He has spoken at several national Iron Sharpens Iron events and numerous men's events throughout the Hudson Valley (NY). Jay also serves as pastor at Bridge Builders Community Church in Hyde Park, NY. He is the founder of Strategic Fathering Ministries, and host of ManUp Moment, a two minute radio spot heard on the Sound of Life Radio network and around the world.



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