

# Church Leader Survival Guide



**MANHOOD**  
JOURNEY

# Church Leader Survival Guide

*For Father & Son Group Studies*

## Preparing for the Journey

Welcome to the Manhood Journey! We help the fathers and sons at your church connect for intentional spiritual growth. We provide resources and coaching to help you launch a small group studies as a catalyst for Fathers & Sons.

We know our society – and our churches – are suffering greatly due to disengaged and often absent Fathers. This one way to help a Dad get into the disciple-making driver’s seat and be the spiritual leader in his home. This targeted approach has ripple effects that create better marriages, more engaged men in your church and overall more spiritually healthy homes.

This Church Leader Survival Guide will be your handy companion in forming, leading and deepening your group.

### **The vision.**

Engaged Fathers are a crucial component of a healthy church. If Fathers are leading at home, then, a number of blessings are unlocked for your congregation:

- Families require fewer “rescue” operations (marriages, children in crisis)
- Your fathers step up in other areas (missions, weekends, teaching)
- Your youth groups have children in them who can be “on mission” without the undue burden of “swimming against the current” in their own homes

The power in the process is how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of your fathers & sons. Once a dad stops abdicating his role as a leader in the home, he unlocks his family’s full potential. His son(s), after being on this journey with him for a while, should be able to:

- Articulate what it means to be a godly man in his own words
- See areas where he has grown and matured through the process
- Identify areas of future growth, his own personal weaknesses/temptations
- Engage in open and transparent dialogue with his dad on important issues
- Know where to look in the Bible when they have questions

## **Our heartbeat.**

The guys who built this curriculum are probably a lot like you. We want to be intentional in raising our boys to honor The Lord. We don't believe it's the “church's job” to raise our young men. We want them to love God, know the word and serve others. We have attempted to build a series of studies that effectively put the fathers and the sons together in the same format. We hope this serves its purpose!

Additionally, we believe that to a large degree, the reason our churches and families languish is due to weak leadership from the men in the church. We believe that as the men go, so goes the family in the vast majority of cases. We take our encouragement from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”*

In this charge from Moses, we see Fathers being exhorted to take the lead! We echo that command and hope that by participating in a Manhood Journey group experience, your dads step up and lead as God intended for them to!

## **Manhood Journey ministry.**

Manhood Journey is a nonprofit organization based in Louisville, Kentucky. We provide various resources – eBooks, studies, reading plans, events – all geared toward helping Dads become disciple-makers in their homes. While we're focused in our studies on the father-son relationship, we've seen thousands of dads with daughters benefit from our resources; and, we've heard from many single moms who use our resources to “fill the gap” created by a dad who's no longer in the picture.



*“The bible calls on fathers to be the spiritual leaders of their home. Manhood Journey is a practical way to meet this need. They provide solid and understandable materials that will give you and your family a really good foundation.”*

**- Bob Russell**  
**Retired Senior Pastor**  
**Southeast Christian Church**

## Before You Embark

### **An eye toward disciple-making.**

While there are no firm rules on the makeup of the groups, we hope to help you introduce a discipling component into each group. Ideally, you will have the following building blocks:

- Group Facilitator – if you’ll be hosting multiple tables in a room, you’ll want a Group Facilitator. This person helps the group discussion get moving, but he’s not a teacher or lecturer. He’s merely a facilitator to help the Table Leaders know what to do.
- Table Leader(s) – these dads will be at the tables and will serve to keep the discussion on track. They’ll take queues from the Group Facilitator. We suggest you have one Table Leader for every five (5) Fathers in the group (1:5 ratio). This will mean that each Table Leader has a group of about 10-12 Fathers and Sons.
- Fathers and Sons – these are the men and the boys they’re discipling who form up into Tables in larger group settings.

This should be an ideal setting for guys with various levels of time in the faith or at the fatherhood helm to mix with and learn from each other. Some guys will step in and lead quickly, and others just need to be encouraged to jump into the game.

## **Starting small.**

If we hear one thing from dads over and over, it's this: I'm too busy. Now, we realize that often our busy-ness is of our own making. In that light, what the dad's really saying is that he has taken on too much and has trouble prioritizing. But, to help him see that, we want to give him some "quick wins" with his sons. This is why the six-week format (or six sessions, delivered on some other timeframe) has worked so well for Manhood Journey. Men can usually commit to six weeks amidst a busy schedule and stick to it.

However, over time, we hope that you can "string together" successive Manhood Journey studies and reengage Dads and Sons for years to come. Our framework and approach will make that possible, but let's start small and get Dads a "W" up on the board.

## **Key roles we'll help you fill.**

*Church Leader:* this is the person who, on behalf of the church, handles commitment, recruiting and resources. This could be a staff person or a lay leader.

*Group Facilitator:* this person will facilitate the discussions during each of the sessions; and, ideally, help you recruit dads and promote and organize the groups.

*Table Leaders:* these are dads who will likely have a son there (but not a requirement) and will keep the discussion moving at their tables.

## **Recruiting a Group Facilitator.**

Each Church group needs a single facilitator if you're hosting a "multi-table" format at your church. This person could be a staff member (minister, priest, pastor, men's minister) or a lay leader (engaged dad, elder, deacon). It's someone who can call the group to order, decide when certain subjects need to be addressed or moved on from, and give dads direction along the way. *This individual is critical to the group's success.*

These Group Facilitators can help you shoulder the load, share your frustration when some dads are unaccountable (!) and keep the discussion moving week to week. There are even some administrative things (name tags, emailing reminders, etc.) that you might want to share with this key individual. You probably aren't gifted equally in every area - so, enlist a guy who you trust who can bring his giftedness to bear on the group and be an encouragement and support to you.

## **The numbers game.**

The base building block of the group is “the table.” While you’re free to setup your room however it makes sense for your group, for purposes of illustration, let’s assume you’re using round tables of 10 for these meetings.

At a table, you might have:

- 4-5 dads with their sons
- Odds are, one dad will bring 2 sons
- A designated Table Leader (one of the dads)
- Total of 10 fathers & sons

We recommend one Table Leader for every 5 Dads you expect to have.

As you probably know, you hardly ever get 100% of your people to show up for any particular event, and Manhood Journey groups are no different. In fact, we normally find that if you invite 10 dads, you’ll net about 5. Everything from night of the week to family dynamics to busy schedules will converge to have you bat about .500 when inviting your dads, so plan accordingly.

Here’s how a typical church with 200 weekly attendees might play out:

- You might have about 70 dads in your church
- Only about 35 of them will have sons between 8-18
- About one-third to one-half of those will attend
- So, you’ll have about 3-4 tables of fathers and sons
- You’ll need 1 Facilitator and 3-4 Table Leaders for your study

Manhood Journey groups have launched in churches of a couple hundred, and they’ve launched at large churches running over 10,000. It can work in any context. You just will want to scale your number of Table Leaders down or up as needed.

## **Optional: Family Social.**

About 45 days before your first session, as you’re recruiting Dads to join, you might want to host a family social. This could be a cook-out at someone’s home, or a dessert social or lunch at the church after Sunday services. The point of this is to make a face-to-face offer for Dads to join up, and ideally, within the hearing of their wives! If the wives hear that their husbands might be meeting up to walk through the Bible with their sons, it can go a long way to convincing Dads to sign-up. Is this a trick we’re playing on the Dads? Sort of. But it works. :-)

## Modules and Lessons.

A few terms will be helpful as you work with Manhood Journey resources:

- A Lesson = one hour's worth of discussion content
- A Module = 6 lessons that fit together on a topic (work, leadership, etc.)
- A 1on1 Guide = a booklet (or PDF) with one Module's contents in it

We have 6 Full Length modules that your Dads and sons can walk through along their journey. We recommend that if you're starting out, you begin with the EMBARKING Module. It provides your group with a solid point of launch, and they can chart their own course from there.



## Boys age ranges.

The modules are built with boys ages 8-18 in mind. You and your dads can be the judge here, but the idea is that 8 years old is about the right age to begin, and boys over 18 can't be found anywhere except commuting to their jobs or college!

You may wonder, "Is it odd to mix groups with 8-year-olds and 18-year-olds?" In our earlier years, we thought this would be an issue too. However, over time, here's what we've found. When you mix the boys' ages, something amazing happens: the older boys automatically and naturally step into a leadership and discipleship role.

So, when the young boy says, "I hate my sister!" we see the older teen boys volunteer, "Yeah, I used to feel that way too. But, I've realized as I got older that she's pretty cool." The young boy listens to the older teen (probably even more attentively than to his own

father!) and the older teen is beginning to learn how to disciple. It's powerful and effective.

### **Someone other than dad.**

Some boys in your church don't have a father who's engaged or even alive. In those cases, the group will run great if you can pair that young man up with someone – another dad who's coming, or that boy's uncle, grandfather or neighbor. Each boy in the room should have a “chaperone” of some sort, but it's not essential that chaperone be his own father. If you know of boys in your church who will fit this profile, you'll want to be careful in your messaging and perhaps use language like “fathers and sons, and mentors and mentees” in your promotion.

## Setting Sail

### **Discussion & dialogue vs. teaching & lecturing.**

These meetings cannot become a lecture where you or the Facilitator talks or teaches while the “audience” listens to you. The goal is to get the dads and sons talking, and if you follow the prompts in the 1on1 Guides and the Facilitator's Guide, this will happen naturally. These discussions will engage the dads and sons in transparent, honest and interesting dialogue that has spiritual context and Biblical basis.

Set the expectation early with your group - participation is required! Get everyone talking without being too heavy handed.

### **Room setup is key.**

If your church has a “casual” room to meet in, that would be idea. Or, if you have a small enough group (or a big enough home!) you could even meet at a leader's house.

Regardless, try to setup the room so that distractions are minimized and that the space is as inviting and comfortable as can be.



## **A note for Table Leaders.**

DO:

- Try to get all the dads talking
- Try to get all the boys talking (without embarrassing them) (...too much)
- Encourage various viewpoints without letting one person get you way off track
- Consider using "The Pre-Tee-Up" technique by working with a dad or young man to have a prepared response to get things rolling (you text this dad or pull him aside before the session and ask him to "go first" when the discussion time begins)

DON'T:

- Don't let one guy dominate
- Argue or criticize
- Become dogmatic - avoid doctrinal debating and matters of opinion
- Use ridicule or sarcasm to get people talking - you might get an immediate response, but it will build up resentments over time and push people away

## **Respect people's time.**

Meet for 60-90 minutes. Start and end on time. Pick a night of the week that you and most of your group can agree on and honor their involvement by beginning and ending on time. Busy dads (and, that's all of them!) will appreciate a well-organized and efficiently run group.

## **Sit with who brought you.**

Make sure kids sit next to their dads or chaperones. Don't let dads gather around one side of a table and the sons sit on the other. This might feel a bit awkward the first week, but with only one or two weeks of reinforcement you will have everyone trained. The goal of these groups is to have dads with their sons, not just hanging out with the other dads. Strictly enforce this early on and it'll pay dividends later.

## **Not a checklist.**

The modules are discussion guides that will enable good conversation and a deepening group experience. So, you can follow them fairly closely and track right along with the Facilitator's prompts.

However, if the discussion veers into rich territory and you sense that the fathers and sons are connecting, resist the urge to try and get through all of the content. One of the

goals within Manhood Journey is to invigorate discussion and dialogue among the men and their sons, so if that's happening, let it play out.

## Keeping the Journey Going

### **The main point: get back together.**

The goal of the Manhood Journey groups is to have a group of fathers and sons who continue to meet over some span of time. Initially, they connect during this six-session experience. Hopefully, they enjoy it so much they want to do it again (and again...). So, consider some of the following techniques to ensure that your group gains and keeps momentum along the journey.

### **Take breaks!**

If your group gels quickly and everyone has a positive experience - it may be tempting to keep meeting every week. Under some circumstances, that might make sense. However, in most cases, it will cause the group meeting to become a chore. Meet for the length of a module – 6 weeks or sessions – then take a 2-4 week break. This rhythm will help you build and keep momentum.

### **Annual or quarterly outings.**

Look for opportunities to serve or play together a few times per year. This might be a holiday outing, going camping, hosting a cook-out or seeing a game together. It can be any occasional event that allows the group to connect without a major agenda.

### **Include your wives/siblings.**

Try to find a way to work the moms and siblings into the mix, maybe once a year. This might take the form of a cookout before beginning on a new module or could even be a night focused on having the fathers and sons pray for their families!

## **Charting your course.**

“Embarking” is the module that all groups start with. After that, each group can chart their own path. We recommend that in the last week of each Module, you get the group's input on which module they would like to do next. If you can invite them into the “module selection process,” you'll have stronger buy-in moving forward.

## **On the boat, off the boat.**

Ideally, you will have a core group of guys who are part of the group for the long haul. But, you can let guys float in or out of the group in between modules. Try to keep the group fixed during any given six week stretch; but, use the breaks in between to allow new members to join, or let over-scheduled guys take a break.