FATHERS WHO MAKE AN IMPACT

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ST. JOSEPH FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE WORKBOOK

This workbook is to be used with the 12 meeting/video series of The St. Joseph Workshop.

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NAME:

OPENING PRAYER:

ST. JOSEPH FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE WORKBOOK

OPENING PRAYER FOR EVERY SESSION OF THE ST. JOSEPH FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE WORKBOOK

Lord God,
Good and faithful Father,
We thank you for this moment in which we gather
as men, husbands and fathers,
called to reflect your love within our families.

Today we begin this journey inspired by Saint Joseph,
a just man, silent and obedient,
guide and protector of Jesus and Mary.

We ask you to grant us a heart like his:
strong and compassionate, humble and full of faith.
Give us wisdom to teach, patience to accompany,
and courage to hold our family up in difficult moments.

May we be a loving presence,
tireless workers and guardians of the home.
Saint Joseph, model of fatherhood,
walk with us through this program.

Teach us to live simply, to trust without fear,
and always to seek the will of God.
Holy Spirit, guide our steps,
and make this group a true brotherhood
where we grow together as men after the heart of God.

“With the strength of Saint Joseph, may we learn to walk firmly toward Jesus.”

Amen.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The silence that speaks 4

Work with dignity 8

Obedience and trust in God 12

Raising with love and discipline 15

A presence that accompanies 18

A man of faith and hope 23

The hundred-percent husband 27

The weight of responsibility 30

Saint Joseph, model of service 35

Citizen, neighbor, brother 40

Quality time 43

The legacy we leave behind 46

Supplementary: The discipline of forgiveness 51

TOPIC 1: THE SILENCE THAT SPEAKS

Matthew 1:18–25

- **Objective: To learn from Saint Joseph the value of silence, reflection and prudent action in family life.**

INTRODUCTION:

In a society marked by noise, haste and a flood of words, silence often looks like an uncomfortable emptiness, or like something unproductive. Yet in spiritual and family life, silence has a profound value: it is the space in which we listen, discern and act with prudence. Saint Joseph, husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus, teaches us that silence is not the absence of words but the presence of wisdom.

THE SILENCE OF SAINT JOSEPH

The Gospels do not give us a single word spoken by Saint Joseph. Even so, his life was an eloquent testimony. He was a just man, obedient to the voice of God, protector of his family and a tireless worker. Hidden within his silence is a deep capacity to listen to the Word of God and to answer with deeds rather than speeches.

SILENCE THAT LISTENS:

- Joseph listens to the dreams in which God reveals his will. He does not resist and he is not distracted; he receives the message in silence and turns it into a decision.

SILENCE THAT REFLECTS:

- He does not act impulsively. Faced with Mary's situation, before he knew that the conception was the work of the Holy Spirit, Joseph considered how to act without exposing her to public shame. His silence is a space for discernment.

SILENCE THAT ACTS:

- Joseph does not speak, but he protects, cares for, guides and sustains the Holy Family. His life shows that prudent actions speak louder than empty words.

How can I bring silence into my family life?

In our families, silence has a fundamental role:

1 SILENCE IN ORDER TO LISTEN TO THE OTHER PERSON:

- Instead of interrupting or imposing, learning to welcome what your wife, your children or your parents have to say.

2 SILENCE IN ORDER TO DISCERN:

- Before answering in anger or making hasty decisions, stop to reflect and to look for what is best for everyone.

3 SILENCE IN ORDER TO PRAY:

- Opening space in the heart for God and asking for his guidance in the middle of family challenges.

4 SILENCE THAT TURNS INTO ACTION:

- Expressing love, care and commitment through concrete deeds rather than through words.

Saint Joseph's silence is neither passive or indifferent; it is a profound language of love and wisdom. Today his example invites every family to rediscover the value of silence as a space of an encounter with God, of prudent reflection and of generous action. In this way, in the middle of a noisy world, we learn that silence often speaks louder than words.

The absence of words communicates a meaningful message, whether through non-verbal communication or in the search for inner peace.

Silence is a powerful tool for reflection, allowing God's wisdom to speak to your heart. In moments of stillness, you can find clarity and strength. By embracing silence, you learn to listen more deeply, both to yourself and to others. This quiet space fosters a deeper connection with God, guiding you toward peace and understanding.

> **"So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes through the word of God." (Romans 10:17)**

ACTIVITY:

Answer the following questions about silence in your workbook, and feel free to share your answers with others.

- **1. At what moments do noise or haste keep me from listening to my family?**

- **2. Which situations in my life call for more reflection before I act?**

- **3. How can I express love more through deeds than through words?**

- **4. What space can I open in my life in order to listen to God in silence?**

Something to keep thinking about…

TOPIC 2: WORK WITH DIGNITY

Genesis 2:15

- **Objective: To recognize in the life of Saint Joseph the value of work as a source of dignity, service and personal growth, so as to encourage men to live their daily labor with responsibility, honesty and love towards their family and their community.**

INTRODUCTION:

Work is an essential part of human life. From the very beginning, in the book of Genesis, God entrusted man with the mission of "cultivating and caring for the earth" (Gen 2:15). This reminds us that working is not a punishment but a vocation: to collaborate with God in creation and to provide for our families. Yet work is often reduced to nothing more than a way of earning money, forgetting its deeper dimension — the dignity it gives to a man and the service it offers to others.

SAINT JOSEPH AS AN EXAMPLE OF WORK

In the life of Saint Joseph, we find an extraordinary model of what it means to work with dignity. Joseph was not a great political leader or a wealthy man, but a simple carpenter from Nazareth. His humble little workshop became a school of life, a place of love and a testimony of faithfulness. There, through daily effort, he provided for his family, taught Jesus the value of hard work, and turned every task into an act of faith.

Today, in a world that so often measures a man by what he has rather than by who he is, Saint Joseph reminds us that the true value of work lies not in prestige or wealth but in the honesty, the service and the love with which it is done. To work with dignity is to understand that every working day, every effort and every sacrifice can be a path to holiness, a source of pride and a legacy for our family.

The dignity of work does not depend on social prestige or on a money, but on the love and responsibility with which it is carried out. To work with dignity is to understand that our effort sustains and gives life to those we love.

Every effort should carry the loving face of our family. Through work we express, in the purest way, our love for those whom God has entrusted to us to guide and protect.

WORK AS COLLABORATION WITH GOD

Work is not only human effort, nor merely a means of obtaining material goods; it is also a way of sharing in God's creative work. When a man works, he unites his effort to the divine plan and helps to make the world a more just, more livable and more joy-filled place.

In the life of Saint Joseph this can be seen clearly:

- As a carpenter, Joseph turned wood into useful objects for his community. That simple task was a concrete way of continuing the creative work of God, who "saw everything he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31).
- His workshop was not only a place of work but a sacred space, because there he taught Jesus to value patience, creativity and perseverance.
- In working, Joseph did not only earn a living; he glorified God by placing his gifts and talents at the service of others.

This teaches us that every task, however small it may seem, has immense value when it is done with love and integrity:

1 A father who goes out to work each day collaborates with God in caring for his wife and children.

2 An honest worker who does his job without corruption or deceit is building the Kingdom of God in the midst of the world.

3 A man who teaches his children to value hard work is sowing in them an inheritance of faith and dignity.

> **Pope Saint John Paul II summed it up in his encyclical Laborem Exercens: "Through his work, with his hands and his intelligence, man continues the creative work of God."**

When we work with dignity, we do not only produce material goods; we also produce life, value and a future. We become collaborators with God in caring for our family, in serving society and in building a better world.

ACTIVITY:

Let us take some time to reflect and discern through the following questions about dignity in work, as true Christian men in formation.

- **1. Which of Saint Joseph's attitudes can I apply in my working life?**

- **2. How can I give a deeper meaning to my everyday work?**

- **3. In what ways does my work affect the life of my family and my community?**

- **4. Do I work only to survive, or also to serve and to set an example?**

A summary of the encyclical letter Laborem Exercens (1981) by Pope Saint John Paul II

1 THE VALUE OF HUMAN WORK

- Work is not only a means of producing goods; it is an expression of the dignity of the human person.
- Through work, man collaborates with God in the work of creation.
- The value of work lies more in the person who does it than in what is produced.

2 WORK AS SHARING IN GOD'S WORK

- From the beginning, God entrusted man with “cultivating and caring for the earth” (Gen 2:15).
- To work is to share in the divine mission of transforming the world.
- In Christ, work takes on a redemptive dimension: even weariness and effort have saving value when they are united to the cross.

3 THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The Pope stresses that the dignity of work calls for just conditions:

- The right to a just wage, sufficient to support the family.
- The right to rest and to a balance between work and personal life.
- The right to association and to form unions in order to defend their interests.
- Special protection for the most vulnerable workers (women, migrants, people with disabilities).

4 WORK AND PROPERTY

- Work comes before capital: a man must not be a slave to money.
- Private property is legitimate, but it has a universal destination: it must serve the common good.

5 THE SPIRITUALITY OF WORK

- Working with honesty and love is a way of growing in holiness.
- Saint Joseph, as a humble worker, is a model of how everyday work can be a path towards God.

TOPIC 3: OBEDIENCE AND TRUST IN GOD

Matthew 2:13–15

- **Objective: To recognize that obedience and trust in God are fundamental attitudes for living as his true sons, learning from biblical examples how these virtues lead us to peace, to faithfulness and to the fulfillment of his plan in our lives.**

INTRODUCTION:

In the Christian life we come up against moments when we do not understand what God permits or what he asks of us. It is there that obedience and trust become essential. To obey is not simply to carry out orders; it is to open the heart in order to do God's will even when we do not always understand why. To trust in God is to rest in his love, knowing that he has a greater plan, even when the road looks uncertain.

All through the Bible, the great men and women of faith obeyed and trusted without understanding everything. So, it was with Abraham when he left his homeland, with Mary when she said "let it be done to me according to your word", and with Saint Joseph when he welcomed Mary and Jesus into his life.

ACTIVITY:

What is God saying to you through the following passage of Scripture?

Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight."

1 OBEDIENCE: RESPONDING WITH LOVE TO THE WILL OF GOD

- Obedience is not an act of blind submission but an expression of love and faith. When we obey, we acknowledge that God knows more than we do and wants what is best for us.
- In the Bible, obedience is the key to walking in blessing: "If you listen to the voice of the Lord your God and keep his commandments… all these blessings will come upon you" (Deut 28:1-2).
- Biblical example: Abraham (Gen 12). God asked him to leave his land and his security, and he obeyed without knowing where he was going. His obedience gave rise to the chosen people and made him "the father of faith".

Personal application: today God asks us to obey in everyday things:

- Being faithful in marriage and in the family.
- Acting honestly at work, even when others do not.
- Serving in the community even when it costs us something.
- Loving our neighbor, including the one we find difficult.

Obedience is not always easy, but it always bears fruit in peace and blessing.

2 TRUST: BELIEVING IN GOD'S LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS

- To trust in God means to abandon oneself into his hands. It is to believe that, even when we do not understand the present, God is preparing a better future.
- Often our logic or our emotions tell us one thing, but faith invites us to believe what God promises.
- Biblical example: the people of Israel in the desert (Ex 16). They doubted, but God gave them manna each day. It was a reminder that he never abandons his children.
- The words of Jesus: “Look at the birds of the sky… your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?” (Mt 6:26).

Personal application: today God asks us to trust in everyday things:

- Trusting God in times of financial hardship, believing that he will provide.
- Trusting when we face illness, knowing that he has the last word.
- Trusting as we raise our children, sowing values and asking God to make the seed grow.
- Trusting in the future, even when we do not have all the answers.

Trust is resting in the love of a Father who never fails.

3 OBEDIENCE AND TRUST: TWO INSEPARABLE PATHS

- Obedience and trust cannot be separated:
- If I obey without trusting, I do it out of fear, not out of love.
- If I trust without obeying, my words remain empty.
- **Biblical example: Saint Joseph. In dreams he received God's instructions — to take Mary as his wife, to flee to Egypt, to return to Nazareth. He never asked “why?”, never argued, never looked for what suited him. He obeyed because he trusted God. His silence became eloquence: his life spoke louder than a thousand words.**
- The example of Jesus: in Gethsemane he obeyed and trusted: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; yet not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). That prayer sums up true faith.

Personal application

- As husbands and fathers: obeying God's will in caring for the family, trusting that he will give us strength.

- As workers: obeying the principles of justice, trusting that God will bless our honesty.
- As sons of God: obeying his Word even when it is countercultural, trusting that his truth sets us free.

4 THE FRUITS OF OBEDIENCE AND TRUST

When a man lives in obedience and trust in God, visible fruits appear:

- Inner peace: he no longer carries his worries alone.
- Strength in trial: he knows he is not alone, that God fights for him.
- Witness to others: his family and his community see in him an example of living faith.
- Closeness to God: he becomes a friend of God, as Abraham was.

SPIRITUAL CLOSING:

Compare the guide with the voice of God in daily life: clear, yet often hard to follow when we cannot see the whole picture. Even so, obeying him and trusting him is what brings us safely to our destination.

Something to keep thinking about…

TOPIC 4: RAISING WITH LOVE AND DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 22:6

- **Objective: To reflect on a man's responsibility in raising his children and forming his family, understanding that true love involves both tenderness and firmness, following the model of God the Father and the teaching of the Church.**

INTRODUCTION:

Raising children is one of the greatest and most demanding tasks a man has as a father. Education is not limited to passing on knowledge; it means forming the heart, the conscience and the character of one's children.

Men face two temptations in raising children:

Being too rigid, thinking that discipline means harshness.	**Being too permissive, confusing love with letting everything go.**

The Word of God and the teaching of the Church show us that true education is a balance between love and discipline, between tenderness and firmness, between accompanying and correcting. This is how God teaches his people, and this is how we are called to teach as fathers, husbands and leaders within the family.

1 LOVE AS THE FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION

- Love is the basis of all true authority.
- God teaches us out of love: “The Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Prov 3:12).
- Loving our children means being present, giving them time, listening, valuing, encouraging and accompanying them.
- The Church reminds us: “The family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs” (Catechism, 2207).

Application:

- **Teaching with love means showing affection, giving security and being an example of Christian living. Children learn more from what they see than from what they hear.**

2 DISCIPLINE AS AN EXPRESSION OF TRUE LOVE

- Discipline is not punishment; it is formation. Its root means “to learn”.
- “Discipline, at the moment it is received, brings no joy but sorrow; later, however, it produces a harvest of justice and peace in those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:11).
- God himself corrects us because he loves us, not because he wants to humiliate us.
- Pope Francis teaches: “Correct with firmness but not with anger; teach with love but not with weakness” (Amoris Laetitia, 268).

Application:

- **Parents should set limits that are clear, consistent and meaningful — never violent or arbitrary. Firmness is necessary so that children grow up responsible and respectful.**

3 THE BALANCE BETWEEN LOVE AND DISCIPLINE

- A father who only loves without correcting raises insecure children with no direction.
- A father who only disciplines without love produces resentment and fear.
- The balance lies in teaching as God does: with tenderness and firmness.
- “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).
- Saint Joseph is a model: he never appears speaking in the Gospels, yet he formed Jesus through the example of his work, his faith and his obedience to God.

4 TEACHING WITH AN EYE ON THE FUTURE

- To teach is not to just give solutions, but to prepare a child for life.
- A child raised with love and discipline will become a free, responsible and just man.
- “Train a child in the way he should go, and even in his old age he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6).
- Teaching with love and discipline is an act of faith: we sow seeds we may not see grow straight away, but which will bear fruit in God's time.

REFLECTION:

Teaching with love and discipline means reflecting the very heart of God within the family. A man, as a father, is called to be an image of the heavenly Father: firm yet close, just yet merciful, strong yet full of tenderness.

A child who grows up in this atmosphere will learn that authority is not oppression but service; that love is not permissiveness but responsibility; and that true freedom is reached when one has been raised with affection and with limits.

Personal Activity-Write 2 Reminder Cards

THE LOVE CARD	THE DISCIPLINE CARD
A concrete action through which you can show love while raising your children.	**A concrete action through which you help to form your children with order and limits.**
For example: listening, accompanying, supporting, being patient, or acknowledging what is good.	For example: setting clear rules, correcting respectfully, giving responsibilities, or being consistent.

Something to keep thinking about…

TOPIC 5: A PRESENCE THAT ACCOMPANIES

Luke 2:41–52

- **Objective: To reflect on the role of a man, especially as a father and a husband, in being an active, close and accompanying presence in family life, following the model of Saint Joseph and the providential love of God the Father.**

INTRODUCTION:

In today's world, one of the great challenges facing the family is the absence of the father. Often men — because of work, distractions or simple lack of awareness — remain physically at home while being emotionally and spiritually absent. This lack of presence creates gaps in children: a lack of security, emotional deprivation and difficulty in forming healthy relationships.

The Church reminds us that love is not only words but concrete, close presence. Pope Francis teaches in Amoris Laetitia: "The presence of the father and of the mother in the lives of their children, from the earliest years, is decisive for their future" (AL, 172).

God himself is revealed to us as a Father who is present, who accompanies the history of his people, who never abandons and who always walks beside his own: "I will not leave you or forsake you" (Josh 1:5).

That is why speaking of a presence that accompanies means understanding that a man is called not only to provide but, above all, to be close — to listen, to guide and to share family life with faithful and constant love.

1 GOD'S PRESENCE AS OUR MODEL

- God is never a distant Father: "Even if your father and your mother abandon you, the Lord will take you up" (Ps 27:10).
- Jesus promises: "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).
- God's presence is not only physical, but affective, spiritual and permanent.
- As men, we are called to reflect that same closeness within our families.

2 SAINT JOSEPH: A SILENT BUT STEADFAST PRESENCE

- Saint Joseph is the finest example of a presence that accompanies. In the Gospels he does not say a single word, yet his whole life was a testimony of love and care.
- He stood beside Mary in difficult moments, accompanied Jesus through his childhood, worked to support the home, and was always attentive to God's voice.
- Patris Corde (Francis, 2020): “Joseph knew how to turn a problem into an opportunity by always putting his trust in divine Providence first. His discreet and hidden presence was fundamental in the lives of Jesus and Mary.”

His presence was neither domineering nor absent, but attentive, responsible and loving.

3 THE NEED FOR AN ACTIVE PRESENCE IN THE FAMILY

- Being present is not just being in the house; it is taking part in the life of the family.
- Listening to your children, playing with them, teaching them by example, sharing prayer and the table.
- Amoris Laetitia 260: “A present father helps a child to perceive the limits of reality; he holds him up, and teaches him to wait and to strive for what he wants.”

Application:

- **Accompanying your children as they grow, with quality time.**
- **Being a loving presence in moments of joy and of crisis.**
- **Showing interest in what they are living and feeling.**

4 THE FRUITS OF A PRESENCE THAT ACCOMPANIES

When a father lives out his mission of active presence:

- His children grow up secure, loved and with healthy self-esteem.
- His wife feels accompanied and supported.
- The family grows stronger in faith and in values.
- The home becomes a true “sanctuary of life”, as Saint John Paul II calls it in Familiaris Consortio (11).
- A presence that accompanies is far more than being physically there: it is a commitment of constant, close and responsible love. As men we are called to reflect God's faithful presence in our families, as Saint Joseph did — without grand speeches, but with a life given over in love, silence and service.
- At a time when many children and wives suffer absence, the Church invites us to rediscover the value of a presence that encourages, listens, guides and accompanies.
- To be men whose presence accompanies is to sow peace, security and trust in the family, and to leave the mark of God on our children's hearts.

Personal Reflection

In what way am I present in the life of my family — only physically, or also emotionally and spiritually, as God teaches us and as Saint Joseph shows us?

Saint Joseph accompanied Jesus and Mary with a silent, responsible love. What concrete attitudes can I adopt to reflect that same closeness and care in my home?

Am I giving quality time to my children and my wife, or am I letting work, distractions or routine pull me away from their daily lives?

What fruits do I see — or hope to see — in my family when I choose to accompany them with love, with listening and with steady guidance? And how do those fruits compare with absence or emotional distance?

Given that God never abandons us and is always present (Josh 1:5), how can I draw on his providential love to be a father and a husband who accompanies actively and faithfully?

Read the following extract from the apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio and share, in groups of three, the reflection it brings to your heart.

> **"The family is by its very nature the place where one learns to live in solidarity, in self-giving and in mutual responsibility. The participation of the father and the mother in the education of their children is irreplaceable; their active and responsible presence ensures the human, affective and spiritual development of the children, and strengthens faith and values in the home." (Familiaris Consortio, 11)**

Something to keep thinking about…

TOPIC 6: A MAN OF FAITH AND HOPE

Hebrews 11:1

- **Objective: To reflect on a man's call to live his masculinity with deep faith and firm hope, being an example of trust in God for his family and strengthening his role as father and husband in the midst of everyday challenges, following the model of Saint Joseph and the providential love of God the Father.**

INTRODUCTION:

In society today, men face many pressure; demands at work, financial difficulties, family conflicts, and the temptation to put what is immediate ahead of what truly lasts. In this setting it is easy for faith to weaken and for hope to be clouded by discouragement.

The Church reminds us that faith and hope are not passing feelings but virtues that transform daily life. A man who cultivates faith trusts in God even in adversity, and a man who keeps hope alive passes on security, comfort and strength to his family.

Saint Joseph is the perfect model of this: a man of unshakeable faith and confident hope. Although he faced difficult situations — the conception of Jesus, so far from anything he expected, the danger posed by Herod, and a humble life in Nazareth — he always trusted in God's Providence (Mt 1:20-21; Mt 2:13-15). His life teaches us that faith and hope translate into concrete, responsible actions, not merely into words or thoughts.

1 FAITH THAT GUIDES A MAN'S LIFE

- Faith is not only believing but acting in trust in God: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding” (Prov 3:5).
- A man of faith recognizes that God has a plan for his family, and he strives to fulfill his role with responsibility, love and consistency.
- The Church teaches that the Christian father is the first catechist of the faith for his children, showing by his own example how to trust God even in difficulty (Familiaris Consortio, 36).

2 HOPE THAT SUSTAINS US IN ADVERSITY

- Hope is the virtue that lets us look to the future with confidence even when circumstances are uncertain: “For I know well the plans I have for you — says the Lord — plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11).
- A man of hope is not overcome by frustration, by failure or by financial hardship; instead he looks for solutions and accompanies his family with calm and strength.

3 SAINT JOSEPH: FAITH AND HOPE IN ACTION

- Saint Joseph trusted God in accepting Mary as his wife, despite his initial shock (Mt 1:20).
- Faced with Herod's threat, he did not hesitate to act on the guidance he was given, taking his family to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15).
- His faith and hope were not abstract: they showed themselves in concrete decisions that protected and sustained his family.

4 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR MEN TODAY

- Praying daily with the family, showing trust in God and teaching your children to depend on him.
- Being an example of perseverance and patience at work and in family life.
- Teaching your children to face problems with hope, looking for solutions and trusting in Providence.
- Taking an active part in the family's spiritual life: Mass, prayer, reading Scripture, and constant affectionate support.

5 THE FRUITS OF A MAN OF FAITH AND HOPE

- The family grows in security, love and mutual trust.
- The children learn to face life with resilience and trust in God.
- His wife feels accompanied by a solid, dependable and spiritual companion.
- The home becomes a true sanctuary of faith and hope, reflecting the providential love of God, just as Saint John Paul II describes it in Familiaris Consortio (11).

To be a man of faith and hope is far more than an ideal: it is a concrete call to live one's masculinity in the style of Saint Joseph — trusting in God, accompanying the family with love, and passing on security and comfort in every decision. Faith and hope translate into daily actions that strengthen the family and leave the mark of God on the heart of each of its members.

ACTIVITY: QUIZ — HOW ARE YOUR FAITH AND HOPE?

Instructions:

- **Read each question and choose the option that comes closest to your own life. At the end there is a guide for interpreting your results.**

1. When you face a difficult family problem, your first reaction is usually to:

a) Look for solutions on my own, without trusting God.

b) Think of God, but act mainly on my own judgment.

c) Pray and ask for God's guidance before deciding, trusting in his providence.

2. How often do you share your faith with your family (prayer, reading Scripture, going to Mass)?

a) Almost never; it is not part of our family routine.

b) Sometimes, when the opportunity or the need arises.

c) Regularly; it is part of our daily life.

3. When something does not turn out as you expected at work or at home, your most frequent attitude is:

a) I get discouraged and lose confidence.

b) I worry, but I try to keep going on my own.

c) I trust God and try to learn from the situation so as to keep moving forward.

4. How active are you in accompanying and guiding your family emotionally and spiritually?

a) I only take care of material or financial matters; I let the rest go.

b) I try to be there, but sometimes I get distracted or feel that it is not enough.

c) I take an active part: I listen, I teach, and I share moments of faith and hope with them.

5. When you look at your family's future, your predominant feeling is:

a) Insecurity or fear; I do not know whether we will get through the challenges.

b) Uncertainty, but I try to stay optimistic.

c) Confidence and hope, knowing that God walks with us.

6. How do you handle important family decisions?

a) On my own judgment alone, without consulting God or my wife and children.

b) I take God and my family into account, but I mainly make the final decision alone.

c) I seek God's guidance in prayer and talk it through with my family before acting.

7. When your children face difficulties, your usual reaction is to:

a) Avoid getting involved, or let them sort it out on their own.

b) Try to help, though sometimes I feel I do not know how to support them spiritually.

c) Accompany them patiently — listening, advising and passing on confidence and hope.

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS:

- Mostly “a” — Faith and hope that are weak or little practiced: you need to give time to strengthening your relationship with God and your presence to your family. This is a call to reflect on your presence and on your trust in Providence.
- Mostly “b” — Moderate faith and hope: you recognize the importance of faith, but at times your actions do not fully reflect your trust in God. You can grow in consistency and in active participation in your family's spiritual life.
- Mostly “c” — Strong faith and hope: your life reflects trust in God and active hope. You are an example of a father who is present, a guide and a spiritual support for your family, following the model of Saint Joseph.

TOPIC 7: THE HUNDRED-PERCENT HUSBAND

Ephesians 5:25

- **Objective: To reflect on a man's vocation as a husband — a love that is faithful, self-giving and tender — learning from the way Saint Joseph cared for Mary, and from the standard Saint Paul sets for every Christian husband.**

INTRODUCTION:

A man's first mission inside his home is not his children. It is his wife. Almost everything a father gives his children — their sense of safety, their picture of what love looks like, their expectation of how a man treats a woman — flows through the way he treats their mother.

Scripture records not one word spoken by Saint Joseph, but it records his choices. When he could have exposed Mary to public shame, he chose quietly to protect her. When the road to Bethlehem and the flight into Egypt demanded it, he walked beside her. His love was never loud. It was faithful, and it was gentle.

Saint Paul sets the bar higher than most men expect: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Notice what that is not. It is not a licence to rule, and it is not a call to be obeyed. It is a call to lay down a life — daily, in small pieces, mostly unseen.

Two things make that kind of love possible: fidelity, which holds the door shut, and tenderness, which makes the room worth living in. A man needs both. Fidelity without tenderness produces a house that is secure and cold. Tenderness without fidelity produces warmth that nobody can rely on.

1 FIDELITY: A LOVE THAT DOES NOT NEGOTIATE

- Fidelity begins long before infidelity does. It is decided in advance, in the quiet choices about where the eyes go, what the phone holds, and which friendships are kept at a distance.
- It is not only physical. A man can be faithful in body and unfaithful in attention — giving the best of his energy, humor and patience to work, to friends, or to a screen, and bringing home what is left over.
- Saint Joseph's fidelity showed itself in protection: “being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, he planned to dismiss her quietly” (Mt 1:19). His first instinct, even when he did not understand, was to shield her reputation rather than his own.

Application: fidelity is the promise that she never has to compete for you — not with another woman, and not with your work, your phone, or your hobbies.

2 TENDERNESS: STRENGTH THAT IS SAFE TO COME CLOSE TO

- Tenderness is not weakness, and it is not softness. It is strength that has been brought under control so that someone smaller can come near it without fear.
- Many men were never shown this. If your father was reliable but hard, you may be reproducing a home that is safe and silent — without ever deciding to.
- Pope Francis writes in Patris Corde that Joseph's was “a love that is at the service of what is unfolding” — attentive, patient, adjusting itself to what the other person actually needs.

Application: tenderness is measured by her, not by you. The question is not whether you feel loving, but whether she experiences you as gentle.

3 THE DAILY WORK OF LOVING ONE WOMAN WELL

- Marriages rarely fail over one large betrayal. They erode through a thousand small withdrawals — the question not asked, the apology not made, the evening spent in the same room but not together.
- Love that lasts is built from ordinary, repeatable things: listening without solving, speaking well of her when she is not present, touching without an agenda, and returning to a conflict once the heat has gone out of it.
- A wife who feels cherished raises children in a different house than a wife who feels tolerated. Your children will absorb the difference without anyone explaining it to them.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

A note for the men in this room who are not married. Some of you are single, widowed, divorced, or carrying a marriage that has already ended. This topic still belongs to you. The call is to faithful, tender love wherever you have been placed — toward a former spouse who is still your children's mother, toward aging parents, toward the people who depend on you. Answer these questions about the relationship that most needs your fidelity right now.

ACTIVITY:

Answer the following questions honestly, and share what you are willing to share with the group.

- **1. If I asked your wife — or the person closest to you — whether she experiences you as gentle, what would she say?**

- **2. Where in your life right now is your best attention going? Is your family receiving it, or the leftovers of it?**

- **3. Saint Joseph protected Mary's reputation before he protected his own. When was the last time you chose her good over your pride?**

- **4. What is one specific way you will show faithful, tender love this week — something she would actually notice?**

TOPIC 8: THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Sirach 3:1–16

- **Objective: To reflect on a man's call to take up his role as head of the family with maturity, faith and love, recognizing that responsibility is not merely a burden but a mission entrusted by God so that he may protect, guide and serve his family. Inspired by the model of Saint Joseph and by the teaching of the Church, the aim is to strengthen in men an awareness of their role as responsible, faithful and consistent leaders in their family and social life.**

INTRODUCTION:

Responsibility is often misunderstood today — seen as a heavy weight to be avoided rather than a gift to be embraced. Many men grow up without a clear example of what it means to answer for their family, their word and their work. Yet Scripture and the life of Saint Joseph teach us that true responsibility is born of love: a father does not merely provide for his own; he stands before God as the one who answers for those entrusted to his care.

> **"To whom much has been given, much will be required; and of the one to whom much has been entrusted, still more will be asked" (Lk 12:48).**

What does this passage of Scripture say to you? (share your answer in the plenary session)

A man's responsibility as head of the family is not a title of power but a service of love and self-giving. To be responsible means answering faithfully to God's call, caring for what has been entrusted to him, and setting an example with his life.

The family is one of the greatest gifts God entrusts to a man, and one of his chief responsibilities. As Saint Paul teaches:

> **"Whoever does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).**

- This is not limited to financial support; it also covers spiritual, emotional and moral care. A father's responsibility is integral: it means accompanying, protecting, teaching, guiding and being a living witness of faith and hope.

The Church has underlined this truth in many documents. In Familiaris Consortio (25), Saint John Paul II teaches:

> **"In the communion and sharing of family life, a man has his own particular and singular responsibility as husband and father. His role as husband and father must be expressed in a generous and responsible love that translates into concrete actions at the service of life and of family communion."**

Likewise, Pope Francis recalls in Amoris Laetitia (55):

> **"Parents are, for their children, the first witnesses of the faith. They are called to create, by their own example, an environment of responsibility, love and trust that fosters integral growth."**

Therefore, being responsible men means:

- Taking up leadership in the family with humility and firmness.
- Not avoiding difficult decisions, but facing them with faith and prudence.
- Giving daily witness of consistency, love and service.
- Being aware that the family is a mission, not a possession.

The model of Saint Joseph lights up this path once again: silent, hardworking, attentive to the voice of God, faithful protector of Jesus and Mary. His life shows that true responsibility does not look for the spotlight, but for faithful and constant service.

1 SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Being head of the family means leading the family towards God.

- Praying with the family and for the family.
- Encouraging the sacraments and the life of faith.
- Giving personal witness of prayer, of reading the Word, and of trust in providence.

> **"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).**

A man who is spiritually responsible is a priest of his own household — not in the clerical sense, but as the one who leads his home along the path of faith.

2 AFFECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Many men were raised to provide but not to give emotional support. Yet the family needs the father's tenderness, his listening and his close presence.

- Listening attentively to his wife and his children.
- Being present in moments of joy and of difficulty.
- Accompanying each member's personal journey with firmness and empathy.

> **"Love is patient, love is kind… it hopes all things, it endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4,7).**

Affectionate fatherhood is not weakness; it is an inner strength that gives security and heals wounds.

3 PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A head of the family must take his role as provider and protector seriously.

- Managing resources prudently.
- Planning the family's future with vision and steady work.
- Facing difficulties without running away, with resolve and faith.
- Being consistent in what he says and what he does, so becoming a model for his children.

> **"The worker deserves his wages" (Lk 10:7). "Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col 3:23).**

ACTIVITY

Answer the following questionnaire, which will help you understand your responsibility in its different areas.

Choose the option that comes closest to your own reality:

1. In spiritual matters:

a) I do not usually pray or talk about God at home.

b) I sometimes share my faith, but not consistently.

c) I gladly lead the prayer and the spiritual life of my family.

2. In emotional support:

a) I find it hard to listen or to get involved.

b) I listen sometimes, but I am easily distracted.

c) I try to be present and emotionally available.

3. In practical decisions:

a) I tend to let others decide, or I avoid problems.

b) I take part, but without planning properly.

c) I make decisions through dialogue, prudently and with vision.

4. When facing difficulties:

a) I freeze up or withdraw.

b) I try to solve them, but without much faith.

c) I face them with resolve and trust in God.

5. As a model for my children:

a) I do not think about it much.

b) I know I need to improve my example.

c) I try to be consistent and to give good witness.

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS:

- Mostly A: You need to awaken your family responsibility — God has entrusted you with an important mission.
- Mostly B: You are on the right road, but you can grow in consistency and steadiness.
- Mostly C: You live your responsibility with faith and self-giving; keep strengthening your family leadership with humility and hope.

ACTIVITY

Am I being responsible spiritually, emotionally and practically?

Map out four concrete actions: daily family prayer time, active listening to your children, good stewardship, and shared decision-making. Use the chart below to write down the actions you are going to take; it will help you organize your responsibilities.

Daily family prayer	Active listening to the children	Good stewardship	Shared decision-making

Something to keep thinking about…

TOPIC 9: SAINT JOSEPH, MODEL OF SERVICE

Matthew 20:28

- **Objective: To discover in the life of Saint Joseph; a model of humble, faithful and silent service that inspires men — as husbands, fathers and leaders in the family — to live their vocation with generosity, self-giving and complete availability to the will of God.**

INTRODUCTION:

In a world that so often links male leadership with power, success or dominance, the figure of Saint Joseph shines out as a different and profoundly evangelical model: the model of silent, faithful service.

Saint Joseph preached no great speeches and sought no spotlight; his greatness lay in listening to God, obeying promptly and serving his family with love. He was the guardian of Jesus and the faithful husband of Mary, the support of the Holy Family and a discreet witness to God's plans.

Pope Francis describes him as “the man of active silence”, the man who acts decisively without looking for applause. His simple life was a complete gift of self to the mission God entrusted to him: to protect, to provide, to accompany and to serve.

For men today — husbands, fathers, leaders in family and community — Saint Joseph is a close and timely point of reference. He reminds us that serving is not a sign of weakness but of true spiritual strength. To be a man of service is to reflect the face of Christ, who “did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

1 SAINT JOSEPH: A FAITHFUL AND SILENT SERVANT

Saint Joseph did not speak a single word in the Gospels, yet his whole life was a response of obedience and service to God and to his family.

- He receives the angel's announcement in a dream and obeys without hesitation (Mt 1:20-24).
- He takes Mary as his wife, cares for Jesus and protects the Holy Family.
- He flees to Egypt to protect the Child (Mt 2:13-15).
- He works humbly as a carpenter in order to support his home (Mt 13:55).

His service was not passive: it was active, responsible, courageous and constant, even though he never looked for recognition.

“Joseph took the child and his mother by night and set out for Egypt” (Mt 2:14). “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26).

Saint Joseph is a model of leadership understood as service, not as dominance. His strength lies in his humility.

2 SERVICE AS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

True service is born of love. Saint Joseph served God by serving his family.

- He served Mary by accompanying her and protecting her.
- He served Jesus by caring for him and teaching him faith and work.
- He served God by faithfully obeying his will.

“I did not come to be served but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

A man who serves his family with love and joy builds a strong home, wins the trust of his children and leaves deep marks behind him.

3 SERVING FROM WITHIN ONE'S OWN MASCULINE VOCATION

Serving is not weakness; it is a higher form of spiritual authority.

- In the family: accompanying, providing with love, protecting, teaching, sharing the work of the household.
- In the community: giving witness, taking part in parish life, supporting those in need.
- In society: living out the faith at work, being just, generous and consistent.

“Let each one put at the service of others the gift he has received” (1 Pet 4:10).

Saint Joseph teaches us that true service does not look for applause, but seeks to please God and to love his own.

Saint Joseph teaches men that true leadership is service. It is not about standing out, but about loving through faithful service — trusting in God and being the family's quiet support. His example invites us to live with daily self-giving, through concrete actions that reflect God's presence in the home.

"Blessed is the faithful and prudent servant, whom his master will put in charge of his household" (Mt 24:45).

ACTIVITY: "HIDDEN SERVICE"

Reflective – 10-15 min

- **Objective: To recognize the everyday acts of service that are carried out in silence.**

Do at least 2 acts of kindness that no one knows about.

ACTIVITY: "LETTER TO SAINT JOSEPH"

Spiritual – 15 min

- **Objective: To make a personal call to service one's own.**

HOW IT WORKS:

- Each participant writes a short "letter to Saint Joseph", asking him to intercede so that he may serve better in his family and in his community.

TOPIC 10: CITIZEN, NEIGHBOR, BROTHER

Matthew 5:13–16

- **Objective: To extend a man's fatherhood beyond his own front door — into his parish, his workplace and his neighborhood — living as salt and light in a world that badly needs both.**

INTRODUCTION:

A man who is faithful at home and invisible everywhere else has done only half the work. The family is the first place a father is formed, but it was never meant to be the last place he is useful.

Jesus does not tell his followers that they should try to become salt and light. He tells them that they already are: "You are the salt of the earth… You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13–14). The only question left is whether the salt has kept its taste, and whether the lamp has been put under a basket.

Saint Joseph was not a public figure. He held no office, led no movement, and left no writings. But he was known in Nazareth — as the carpenter, as a just man, as someone whose word could be relied upon. That is a public witness, and it is available to every man in this room.

For fathers in the United States this matters in a particular way. Our neighborhoods are more anonymous than they once were, our parishes more diverse, our workplaces more scattered. A man who deliberately knows his neighbors, shows up at his parish, and treats the people he works with justly is doing something increasingly rare — and increasingly visible.

1 THE MAN YOUR NEIGHBORS ACTUALLY SEE

- Most people will never hear you talk about your faith. They will only see how you drive, how you speak to your children in the driveway, and whether you help when something goes wrong on your street.
- Hospitality is one of the few forms of witness that costs almost nothing and is almost never refused. Knowing the names of the families on either side of you is a beginning.
- Ask honestly: if your neighbors were told you were a serious Christian man, would they be surprised?

2 THE WORKPLACE AS A PUBLIC WITNESS

- Integrity at work is not mainly about avoiding large scandals. It is about the expense report, the hours you claim, the colleague you could undercut and don't, and how you speak about people who are not in the room.
- Saint Joseph's trade was his witness. The quality of what left his workshop said something true about him before he said anything about himself.
- A man's reputation at work reaches people his parish never will.

3 BROTHER TO THE MAN WHO HAS NO ONE

- Roughly one in four American children is growing up without a father functionally present. That statistic is made of specific boys and girls, many of them within a few miles of where you live.
- You do not have to start an organization. Coaching a team, mentoring one young man, or being the steady adult at a parish youth event is enough to change a life that is not your own.
- The men in this room are also a case in point: fraternity is something you offer as well as receive. Somewhere nearby is a man who needs the room you are sitting in.

4 RAISING CHILDREN WHO SEE PAST THEMSELVES

- Children learn generosity the way they learn everything else — by watching. If service is something your family does together, it will not need to be taught later.
- Let them see you give when it is inconvenient, and let them see who you give to. A child who has helped a stranger with his father remembers it for decades.
- A family turned entirely inward, however devout, teaches its children that the world stops at the property line.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden… let your light shine before others" (Matthew 5:14–16).

ACTIVITY:

Answer these with your own street, parish and workplace in mind — not in general terms.

- **1. Name the families who live on either side of you. If you cannot, what would it take to change that this month?**

- **2. Where at work is your integrity most often tested, and how have you been handling it?**

- **3. Is there a young man or a fatherless child within your reach who would benefit from your steady presence? Name him.**

- **4. What is one act of service your family could do together in the next month — and who will you ask to hold you to it?**

TOPIC 11: QUALITY TIME

Ephesians 5:15–16

- **Objective: To move from merely being in the house to being genuinely present in it — learning to guard, plan and give undivided attention to the people who need it most, while there is still time to give.**

INTRODUCTION:

Every father in this room is already giving his family his time. The harder question is what kind of time they are getting: the alert, unhurried, undistracted hours — or whatever is left once work, fatigue and the phone have taken their share.

Saint Paul puts it bluntly: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time" (Eph 5:15–16). Older translations render that phrase "redeeming the time." It assumes what every father eventually learns — that time is finite, that it is being spent whether or not we are paying attention, and that some of it can still be bought back.

Saint Joseph worked long days in a demanding trade, and yet Jesus grew up in a home marked by steadiness rather than absence. Joseph's presence was not a matter of having more hours than other men. It was a matter of what he did with the ones he had.

This topic is close to Topic 5, but it is not the same. There we asked whether you are present at all. Here we ask what your presence is actually worth when you are there — and what it would take to raise its quality this month.

1 BEING THERE IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING PRESENT

- A man can be in the room for three hours and give his children eleven minutes of real attention. Children measure the eleven minutes.
- Presence means they have your face, not your back; your questions, not just your permission; your patience, not the rushed version of you that wants the conversation to end.
- The test is simple and uncomfortable: when your child starts talking to you, do you put the thing down?

Application: undivided attention for twenty minutes is worth more than distracted company for an evening.

2 NAMING WHAT ACTUALLY TAKES YOUR ATTENTION

- For most men today the competition is not another family or a second job. It is a device that fits in a pocket and is designed to be difficult to put down.
- Fatigue is the second thief. A man who gives every ounce of his energy to his employer arrives home with nothing left, and calls it providing.
- Worry is the third. You can be physically home and mentally still at the office, running tomorrow's problems while your daughter tells you about her day.

Application: name your own thief honestly. You already know which of the three it is.

3 RITUALS THAT PROTECT THE TIME

- Good intentions do not survive a busy week; rituals do. A repeated, expected, non-negotiable practice will outlast any resolution you make tonight.
- Examples that cost little and hold up: the phone in a drawer from dinner until bedtime, a standing one-on-one hour with each child, family prayer at a fixed time, a Saturday morning that belongs to no one else.
- A ritual is stronger when the family knows about it. Announce it, so that missing it is noticeable.
- Shared prayer is quality time of a distinct kind — it forms your children and it puts you and your wife on the same side of something larger than the household schedule.

4 BE A FATHER THEY ARE GLAD TO SEE

- Presence is not only about quantity or attention. It is about atmosphere. Some men are present and the room relaxes; others are present and the room braces.
- Joy is part of the job. A father who laughs with his children gives them a picture of God that no lecture will correct later.
- Ask yourself what your family's faces do when they hear your car in the driveway. That answer is the honest measure of your presence.

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time" (Ephesians 5:15–16).

ACTIVITY:

Answer with this week in mind — not your intentions, but what actually happened.

- **1. Over the past seven days, roughly how much undivided attention did each of your children receive from you? Be honest about the number.**

- **2. Which thief takes most of your attention at home — the phone, exhaustion, or worry? What would it cost you to take some of it back?**

- **3. What happens on your family's faces when you walk in the door at the end of the day?**

- **4. Name one ritual you will begin this week, when it will happen, and who in your family you will tell about it.**

TOPIC 12: THE LEGACY WE LEAVE BEHIND

John 19:25–27

- **Objective: To make a final reflection on the road traveled during this program, evaluating personal growth and committing oneself to building a legacy that will endure in the life of the family.**

INTRODUCTION:

Closing this program is not "graduating" from fatherhood; it is recognizing that we now have more tools, more awareness and — we hope — more of a community with which to continue the journey. Saint Joseph's legacy did not end when Jesus grew up; it showed itself precisely in Jesus' adult life. In the same way, the fruit of each father's personal work will keep coming to light over the years.

The quiet but very real result of the home of Nazareth: Jesus "grew in wisdom, in stature and in grace." The fruit of a good paternal legacy is not always immediate or loud, but it is real and lasting.

Luke 2:51-52

CONTENT

The true legacy is not what we leave to our children, but what we leave within them. Evaluating our journey is not about judging ourselves, but about recognizing how much we have grown and which areas we still need to strengthen. Fatherhood is a mission that is built day by day.

We have come to the end of this course, but in reality we are only at the beginning of something more important: the daily life in which everything we have reflected on has to take flesh. Throughout these topics we have walked alongside Saint Joseph — his silence, his obedience, his strength, his tenderness, his work, his way of disciplining and of loving — not as a distant biography but as a mirror in which to measure our own fatherhood.

Saint Joseph left Jesus no riches, no famous name, no public achievements. He left him something far more lasting: a way of being in the world, a way of obeying God, a tenderness capable of holding a family together during uncertainty. That is the kind of legacy that truly endures — not the kind handed down in documents, but the kind handed on in character, in faith and in the memory of a child's heart.

That is why this final topic is not meant to make you feel evaluated, like someone sitting an examination. It is meant to make you stop, look at the road you have traveled over these months, and ask yourself honestly: what am I really building inside my children? And, above all, what am I willing to keep building, now that the program is ending but fatherhood continues?

ACTIVITY

What would you like your children to say about you as a father twenty years from now?

Of all the topics we have worked on in this program (footprints, faithfulness, work and home, discipline with love, among others), which was hardest for me to live out? Which did I feel I already had a good grasp of?

ACTIVITY

What has concretely changed in the way I am a father since I began this journey?

What do I need to keep working on, patiently and without discouragement, knowing that fatherhood is a lifelong road and not a program with a closing date?

ACTIVITY: MEMENTO MORI — THE LEGACY OF A LIFETIME

For centuries Christians have kept the practice of “memento mori” — “remember your death.” It is not morbid, and it is not despair. It is clarity. Knowing that our time is finite is what gives weight to how we spend it. Saint Joseph, who is honored as the patron of a happy death, is believed to have died in the company of Jesus and Mary — a quiet end to a quiet life, surrounded by the family he had spent himself to protect.

A father who remembers that his years are numbered stops postponing what matters. He makes the phone call. He asks forgiveness. He is present tonight rather than someday.

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Sit quietly for a few minutes. Then answer honestly — not as you wish you were, but as you are today.

- **1. If my life ended this year, what would my children say I spent it on?**

- **2. What is one thing I would regret leaving unsaid to my wife or my children?**

- **3. What habit or attitude of mine do I not want my children to carry forward after I am gone?**

- **4. Saint Joseph died in the company of Jesus and Mary. What kind of home am I building now, so that my last days are surrounded by the people I have loved well?**

- **5. Knowing my time is limited, what will I do differently starting this week?**

ACTIVITY: LETTER TO THE FUTURE

1. In an atmosphere of silence, take a few minutes to pray and to ask for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2. Write a letter addressed to your family (your wife and children, or whoever is appropriate), which may include:

A word of thanks for what you have learned and received from them during this time.

An honest acknowledgement of where you have fallen short as a father — without self-pity and without drama, but with simplicity.

A concrete commitment to live out, from now on, the virtues worked on during the program (you may mention two or three in particular that have marked you most).

A prayer or a wish that God will go on strengthening the growth and the unity of your home.

3. Suggested structure:

- "Thank you for…"
- "I recognize that I need to keep growing in…"
- "I commit myself to…"
- "I ask God that…"

4. When you have finished writing your letter, you may keep it somewhere personal and read it again in a year's time, as a way of reviewing your own growth — or give it directly to your wife or your children (depending on their age), as a visible sign of the commitment you have made.

ALWAYS CALLED TO DREAM…

SUPPLEMENTARY: THE DISCIPLINE OF FORGIVENESS

1 Corinthians 13

This chapter is not tied to one of the twelve weekly videos. Use it whenever it is needed — as a thirteenth session, as material for a retreat or day of recollection, or on your own. Forgiveness is the theme that surfaces most often once men begin speaking honestly, and every group reaches it eventually.

- **Objective: To learn forgiveness as a discipline rather than a feeling — practiced deliberately in the home, asked for honestly, and extended even when it has not been earned.**

INTRODUCTION:

Most homes are not destroyed by a single catastrophe. They are worn down by small injuries that were never repaired — the remark that was never taken back, the promise quietly broken, the resentment that hardened because no one wanted to reopen it.

Forgiveness is not forgetting, and it is not pretending the wound was imaginary. It is the decision to stop charging the debt. It is a discipline in the strict sense: something a man practices deliberately, often without feeling like it, until it becomes the way he lives.

Saint Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is read at nearly every wedding and lived at almost none of them. Read slowly, it is less a poem than a checklist — and a demanding one: love is patient, love is kind, it is not irritable or resentful, it keeps no record of wrongs.

That last phrase is the hardest for most men. Keeping a record is how we protect ourselves. We remember what was said in the argument three years ago because it might be needed. Paul says love does not keep the ledger at all.

1 WHY FORGIVENESS IS A DISCIPLINE, NOT A FEELING

- If you wait until you feel like forgiving, you will wait a long time. Forgiveness begins as a decision and the feeling follows — sometimes months later.
- Forgiving does not mean the thing was acceptable, and it does not always mean restoring the relationship exactly as it was. Some situations require forgiveness and new boundaries at the same time.

- Christ makes this uncomfortably direct: “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We are asking to be measured by our own standard.

Application: name the debt honestly, then decide to stop collecting on it. Do this before you feel ready.

2 ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS: THE HARDER HALF

- Most men find it easier to forgive than to ask. Asking requires admitting that we were wrong, out loud, to someone who already knows it.
- A real apology names the specific thing, does not explain it away, and does not end with the word “but.” “I'm sorry you felt that way” is not an apology; it is a defense wearing an apology's clothes.
- Children are watching this one closely. A father who can say “I was wrong, and I am sorry” gives his children permission to become people who can say it too.

Application: there is almost certainly one apology you have been avoiding. You already know whose it is.

3 WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS TESTED

- Patient — absorbing the third repetition of the same conversation without contempt.
- Kind — choosing the generous interpretation of what she meant, rather than the one that lets you be aggrieved.
- Not irritable or resentful — refusing to let today's small annoyance be paid for out of last month's account.
- Keeping no record of wrongs — declining to bring up a settled matter in order to win the present argument.

4 FORGIVING THE FATHER YOU WERE GIVEN

- Many of the men in this room are carrying something unresolved toward their own fathers — absence, harshness, disappointment, or simply the fact that he never said the thing you needed to hear.
- Unforgiven wounds do not stay still. They get passed down. A man who has not forgiven his father often finds himself parenting against a memory rather than toward his actual children.
- Forgiving him may not require a conversation, and it may not be possible to have one. It does require deciding that you will not hand his debt to your own sons and daughters.

“Love is patient, love is kind… it is not irritable or resentful; it keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).

ACTIVITY:

Take these slowly. You may keep your answers private if you wish.

- **1. Who are you still keeping a record against? Be specific, at least to yourself.**

- **2. What apology have you been avoiding, and what has it cost you to avoid it?**

- **3. Of the four marks of love above — patient, kind, not resentful, keeping no record — which is your weakest at home right now?**

- **4. What is one act of forgiveness, given or asked for, that you will carry out before the next session?**