



## Into the Breach – Introduction

*“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land...” (Ezekiel 22:30)*

In 2015, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted issued a challenge to the men of his diocese—to step into the breach. His exhortation, *Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men*, identifies the crisis of faith facing the Church today and presents a vision of the role of Catholic men in combatting it.

Inspired by Bishop Olmsted’s vision, the Knights of Columbus and the Diocese of Phoenix have joined together to produce a 12-episode video series, also titled *Into the Breach*. Each episode focuses on a different aspect of authentic Catholic masculinity and features interviews with well-known Catholic commentators and follows the personal story of a man whose life illuminates each theme.

The Fishermen have adopted this training format to use as the initial formation for Fishermen candidates. By joining together in brotherhood, men receive the support they need to grow in virtue and to take action to serve Christ and others. We hope that this series will help you and all of us to step into the breach.

## A Man Who Can Stand in the Breach

To step into the breach, we must begin by recognizing an important reality: that we are engaged in a battle for the hearts and souls of every person. This battle is real, and it is spiritual. It began before we were born and will continue until Christ comes again. It is larger than any of us can see. It includes angelic beings, the men and women who have gone before us in the faith, as well as each of us. As Fishermen, we have committed in a special way to engage in this battle in defense of our families, our parishes, our communities and our world.

Since the turn of the millennium, millions of men have left the Catholic faith. There is a sizeable breach in the lines. But the mission of the Church goes beyond mere defense. Christ commissioned his disciples, and that includes us, to preach the Gospel to all nations. We are all called to evangelize. On this front there is also a great need, and the sizeable number of young people leaving the faith indicates we need to step into this offensive campaign as well.

This series is an invitation to join this battle, to step into the breach and to join the evangelical offensive. It challenges men to seek greatness, to be heroically virtuous and to develop a character marked by goodness and truth, strength and courage. It helps prepare men to be capable of standing in the breach and fighting for Christ.

To be a man who is willing and able to step into the breach requires certain commitments, including:

- Striving for a life of holiness and virtue
- Praying daily and frequently receiving the sacraments
- Fulfilling the duties of fatherhood and family life
- Supporting one’s brothers in Christ



- Serving others, especially the most vulnerable, such as the poor and unborn
- Supporting the Church, especially through the parish

The Into the Breach episodes and study guide are meant to help men deepen their understanding and practice of these commitments.

## Scriptural Reflections

For each of the twelve sessions there will be a related reference from Sacred Scripture. Take time a few minutes to close your eyes and reflect upon these versus and how God is speaking to you through his Word in each of these areas. If God does speak to you, be ready to share this with your fellow Fishermen Candidates during your weekly meeting.

## Challenge

The “Challenge” section contains challenges that offer practical goals and suggestions for participants to implement changes in their lives to better live out the principles expressed in each episode.

Must I accomplish every one of the Challenges every week? No. That could become a bit overwhelming.

You are encouraged to find one or two every week that you believe are doable and would be beneficial. Some challenges might not be practical due to your current prayer life, personal situation or stage in life, so consider ways to adapt the challenges accordingly.

Each of the challenges help us to grow as Fishermen in the areas of virtue and in our relationship with God. This will be a lifelong journey for each of us so take it one step at a time.

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## Masculinity

### Scriptural Reflection:

*[Jesus said:] Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table?’ Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat?’ Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished?’ Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’ (Luke 17:7-10)*

### Group Discussion Questions:

Who is a man that you respect and why?

What characteristics of virtues (such as courage, honesty, loyalty) define a great man? Do any men in our current culture stand out who exemplify these virtues?

Boys become men in the company of other men. Can you think of some examples from your own life where this is the case?

Why might a man feel unqualified or unprepared to fully embrace authentically masculine roles, particularly those of husband and father.



Challenge

**Fast one day a week for a month.** St. Paul writes, “Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus, I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). Exercising self-control over the body builds self-control over the will, and therefore resistance to bad habits and temptations.

**Read about the life of one of the saints who exemplified manliness.** St. Joseph, St. George, St. Thomas More, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Maximilian Kolbe and Pope St. John Paul II come to mind, but there are many others. Identify how this saint exhibited manliness and write down specific, concrete resolutions on how you can emulate him. Biographies can be found online or purchased at Catholic bookstores—some parishes even have libraries where you can borrow religious books.

**Imitate Christ.** Jesus Christ shows us the fullness of what it means to be a man. Pick one of the Gospels and read a short portion, at least a few verses, each day. Meditate on these passages to discover the ways in which Christ exhibits true manliness and better understand how to true be a man.

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## Brotherhood

Scriptural Reflection:

*Iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)*

Group Discussion Questions:

Men sometimes act like lone rangers who want to be self-sufficient, taking burdens without assistance, not wanting to admit weakness or needs of others. Why is it important even for such rugged individuals to form bonds of male friendship?

“You can’t handle the truth” is a quote from the movie A Few Good Men. Why is it good to hear the truth about ourselves, even when it hurts? Why is it important to have the courage to have difficult conversations with those we love and care about?



What characteristics are necessary in a relationship in order to offer fraternal correction? Have you ever experienced this type of correction? What was your initial reaction? Did that change over time?

How has social media undermined the design of life to be lived as a team sport? How can we combat this tendency to be isolated?

Challenge

**Join in prayer with fellow Catholic men.** An important way to strengthen fraternity with other men is to pray for them, for their struggles and for their material and spiritual needs. Ask a Catholic man or group of Catholic men you know to pray for a specific intention (or intentions) you have. Ask if he or they have any intentions for you to pray for and commit to praying for them every day until the intention is answered. Try to form an informal group of men who share prayer intentions on a regular basis, either in person or using social media.

**Strengthen the bonds of faithful friendships by serving others.** One way that our faith is expressed is in works of mercy. Men united by a shared faith can often serve their neighbors and their communities far more effectively than as individuals alone. Ask your pastor if there is an unmet need at your parish and gather a group of men to address that need. Alternatively, identify some other need in your community, like homelessness, elderly loneliness or crisis pregnancy support, and work to address these needs.

**Build fraternity with other Catholic men.** Much of friendship simply consists in spending time with others. Find a specific way to meet socially with your brothers in Christ, whether watching a sports game or going fishing, to build your bonds of fraternity. Open your time together with a prayer and use some of the time together to talk about the most important things in life as well as enjoying the activity at hand.

*Note: Excerpts for this session have been copied from the Knights of Columbus: Into the Breach Video Series Study Guide. (2021)*

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