



# Men's Golf Fellowship

## Speaker Discussion Questions

### Mark Whitacre (Part 2) Leaders Guide

**Spiritual Topics:** Marriage, Stress, Reputation, Looking back on your life

#### About the Talk

This is a continuation of Mark's talk regarding his time as an undercover FBI agent at ADM in the 1990's. Through that experience and his subsequent imprisonment, Mark's life and marriage were under considerable pressure and his reputation as a high profile executive was ruined. Mark says that if it were not for his relationship with God, he would never have survived. We will again use Mark's experiences as a platform for our discussion as we think about how they apply to our lives.

#### Discussion Questions

- Mark was very explicit that it was not his conscience that drove him to turn himself in, but that it was the urging and insistence of his wife, Ginger. Who are the two or three people who have played a role in giving you direction over your lifetime? More specifically, what role has your wife played in guiding you in your career or spiritual life? Would you say that you listen to your wife's counsel more times than not? Please share a time when your wife challenged a particular area of your life that you did not want challenged (i.e. refuse a promotion, refuse a physical move, apologize to someone, etc.). Did you listen? Have you ever not listened to your wife and regretted it? *(Leader Note: you might want to press in here if you feel the group can handle it and ask if they wish they had trusted their wife's counsel more than they did. The purpose being to engender more transparency and model weakness and trust within the group)* **Related Scripture: Genesis 2:18-24 – A Wife's Role**

- *Where we're going:* **Your wife's role in your life.** The purpose of this section is to help men understand that their wife's role in their life might be greater than they know or allow.
- *Going Deeper:* Read 1 Kings 11:1-4. In the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" the mother of the bride tells the future wife "the man is the head, but the woman is the neck". The Bible instructs a man to choose his wife (his helpmate) very carefully because of the critical role she will play in the man's life. Mark went so far as to describe Ginger as his "moral compass". What or whom is your moral compass? Where do you take your cues for

your moral and ethical judgments and decisions? Perhaps as a group develop a list of places from where people take their moral cues, like the Bible, culture, peers, parents, worldly proverbs, etc. This would be a good place to begin directing men toward scripture. Mark accepted some very bad counsel from his boss when he agreed to price fix. Have any of you ever taken bad advice? What was the outcome?

- Mark described a time when he broke down under the tremendous stress from being an undercover agent. He found himself outside in the rain one night at 3:30 a.m., wearing a 3-piece suit and blowing leaves off his driveway. He admitted that during his time undercover, he could not sleep at night. What are some things that create stress or pressure in life (i.e. job, marriage, finances, retirement plans, etc.)? As a group, develop a list of ways that people cope with stress and pressure, both in healthy and not so healthy ways? (*Leader Note: Make sure to help the group delve below the more common ways such as drinking, drugs, eating and nail biting to things such as short fuse anger/frustration, recessive behavior, control, being overly critical of others, consumerism, etc.*) How do/did you typically handle stress and pressure in a healthy way? Have you ever had anything good result from the pressures in your life? How has it changed you? **Related Scripture: Matthew 11:28 – Coping with Stress**

- *Where we're going: Finding purpose in life's difficulties.* The focus of this discussion is to lead men to be more transparent with how they coped with pressure, as well as help them understand that for the Christian, there is purpose in any and all of life's difficulties.
- *Going Deeper:* Read James 1:2-4. Mark's wife came out to him on the driveway that night and told him that he needed God in his life. That was her answer to help Mark deal with the tremendous pressure of being an undercover agent. What do you think she meant by that? How can God help someone dealing with stress/pressure? He not only promises to be with you through life's difficulties (Matthew 28:20), but also promises that they have a purpose. Pastor Rick Warren said, "Since God intends to make you like Jesus, he will take you through the same experiences Jesus went through. That includes loneliness, temptation, stress, criticism, rejection and many other problems." What do you think of what Rick Warren said?

- Mark's talk is remarkable on many levels, but what is especially noteworthy is the transparent way he describes himself. He talks about his tremendous greed, his pettiness, the importance he placed on his position of power and even his blatant stupidity in a very open manner. Why do you think he is able to describe his failings so openly? If you had to describe your shortcomings to a group of peers, how easy or

difficult would it be? What is one area of your reputation that you are proud of? (*Leader Note: depending on the group, perhaps ask them to describe one quality about themselves that they are not so proud of.*) How important is your reputation to you? How important should it be? **Related Scripture: Proverbs 22:1 – Reputation**

- *Where we're going: Freedom from the fear of man.* In this discussion, we are trying to help men understand that our reputation is not the most important thing in life. To live an open and transparent life is what God calls us to as Christians.
  - *Going Deeper:* Read Philippians 2:6-8. In these verses, consider how God's own Son put his reputation on the line and embraced becoming man, living a life where the elite considered him an outcast, being accused of a crime he did not commit and allowing himself to be humiliated by being crucified. Ask the group to think of one or two situations in their life where their reputation was on the line. How did they handle it (i.e. protected their reputation through lying, dismissing, comparing to another to make themselves look better or even crushing another person's reputation in order to preserve their own)? Ask what one aspect of their reputation that, if threatened, might cause them to resort to some of the above (i.e. not being as wealthy as people perceive, not as philanthropic as others perceive, not as good a golfer as others perceive, their marriage is not as good as others perceive, etc.).
- Mark tape-recorded his colleagues for over three years for the federal government without his peers knowing it. Because of those tapes, the FBI was able to convict all 4 of the top ADM executives. I'm sure that after they were convicted, looking back they regretted what they had done. Looking back on your life, are there one or two things that you regret? The ADM executives did not know they were being taped. Do you think that they would have acted differently and made different choices if they had known they were being taped? What is it about that knowledge that you think would change their decisions? What would be your reaction right now if you found out that your whole career had been taped? What about your entire life? **Related Scripture: Luke 12:2-3 – Your Life on Tape**
    - *Where we're going: Final judgment.* In this discussion, we want to help men see that this life is fleeting and that what you do in this life matters eternally. There will be a time when everything we have done will be revealed. Then what?
    - *Going Deeper:* Read Matthew 12:36-37. If this is true, that means that your whole life has been taped. How does that make you feel? Would there be things recorded that you wish had not been? Are these comforting or terrifying words? If terrifying, why? We all have secrets (i.e.

sins) that we do not want revealed and have done things we are ashamed of. Where could we possibly find relief from this terror and guilt? This is the path to Christ. The only relief from this shame and terror is to realize that on the cross Christ absorbed our sin and took the penalty for all of our careless words and actions.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, help me to approach the difficulties in my life with an eternal perspective. Give me eyes to see your purposes in them to shape and change me and to loosen my grip on the things of this life. Help me to understand the wisdom in the fact that you are not as concerned with my happiness as my holiness. Amen.