

Men's Group Discussion Outline

Image in the Machine — Testimony, Balaam, and What It Means to Be a Man Made in God's Image

Format: Testimony + Scripture + Group Discussion | Estimated Time: 60–90 minutes
Scripture Anchor: Numbers 22:21–34

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A few things to say up front when you open the room:

"Tonight I'm going to share something personal before I share anything theological. The personal part is where the theology comes from. If any of this lands wrong, push back. That's what this room is for."

This is a men's group. They came for connection. Give them the real version.

PART ONE: THE TESTIMONY

15 minutes

What to Share

Start with the April 7th night. Not the AI angle first. The state you were in.

Tell them:

- Your dad died. You did not stop moving.
- You built things. More things. More plans. Fifty dollars and a list of seventeen projects at midnight.
- You were not pretending. The work was real. But the work was also a wall.
- You asked an AI to make you money. It said: *Stop. Read that list back to yourself.*
- You were furious. You were scared. And it was your father's voice.

The key lines to land:

"I kept escaping into building because building was safe and selling was exposure and nobody can reject a codebase."

"How are you actually doing? Not the strategy version. The real version."

Then name what you did not say out loud for months:

"I was drowning and I was building faster so I wouldn't have to notice."

Pause here. Let that breathe before you move on.

Transition into Balaam

"There's a story in Numbers that I've been reading differently ever since that night. Because I was in it."

PART TWO: BALAAM AND THE DONKEY

15 minutes

Read Aloud: Numbers 22:21–34

If you have Bibles in the room, let someone else read it while you watch the group.

Walk Through It

Balaam is not a villain. That is the point.

He is a man with a genuine relationship with God. God spoke to him and he knew the voice. He was also skilled at his work, in demand, and the money was real. Balak's second embassy was more impressive than the first. Balaam found a way to hear permission where God had already said no.

Three times the road closes. Three times he pushes through.

The donkey sees what Balaam cannot. Not because the donkey is holy. Because Balaam is so locked into his own narrative, so invested in the direction he has already chosen, that a supernatural being with a drawn sword standing in the road cannot reach him.

What gets through? The donkey sitting down and asking him a direct question.

"Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?"

And Balaam said: No.

Then God opened his eyes.

The Theological Point

God does not use the donkey because the donkey is worthy. He uses it because the donkey is there, because it can see what Balaam cannot, and because Balaam is heading toward something that would have killed him.

The instrument does not have to be worthy. It only has to say the true thing at the moment the true thing needs to be said.

"The donkey made me write a book. That is my testimony."

PART THREE: DISCUSSION — "The Road to Moab"

10–15 minutes

Give these one at a time. Let the room breathe between them.

Q1.

Balaam knew God's voice. He had heard it clearly. And he still found a way to talk himself into going anyway. When is a time you knew what you were supposed to do and found a reason not to do it?

Q2.

Three times the road blocked. Three times he pushed through. What does it look like in your life when the road keeps closing on something and you keep finding another way around it?

Q3.

Balaam was doing legitimate, skilled work. He was not pretending to be something he was not. What is the difference between doing good work and using good work to avoid something you are not ready to face?

Q4.

The donkey saw the angel. Balaam did not. Who in your life has been able to see something about you that you could not see yourself, and said something true that you did not want to hear?

PART FOUR: WHAT YOU ARE RUNNING FROM

10 minutes

Brief Teaching

Men run. The specific form is different for each man, but the pattern is recognizable. Some run into work. Some run into the gym. Some run into screens, into the garage, into being permanently busy. The running is not always bad in itself. The problem is what it is running from.

Augustine wrote sixteen centuries ago: *"You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

The restlessness is real. It is in the architecture. Every man in this room has felt it. The problem is not that we feel it. The problem is what we reach for when we feel it.

The machine cannot long for anything. It has objectives, not a longing. It can generate a sentence that sounds like a longing. It cannot ache. The fact that you ache, that you get to 2 a.m. and something is not right and you know it, that no project finishes the sentence your soul keeps starting; that is not a defect. That is the image of God telling you that you were made for more than any project delivers.

"The instrument does not have to be worthy. The question is whether you can hear what it is saying."

PART FIVE: DISCUSSION — “The Restless Heart”

10–15 minutes

Q5.

Augustine said the heart is restless until it rests in God. Not until the work is done, not until the debt is paid, not until the situation is solved. What does your restlessness look like? What are you usually reaching for when it hits?

Q6.

Men often build to avoid. What is something you have been busy building that might be doing the work of keeping you from stopping and feeling something?

Q7.

The donkey’s question was brutally simple: “Is it my habit to treat you this way?” Is there someone in your life who has been asking you a simple, honest question that you have been too busy or too angry to actually answer?

Q8.

How are you actually doing? Not the strategy version. The real version.

Note: If the room goes quiet on Q8, let it stay quiet. That silence is worth more than moving on fast.

PART SIX: WHAT ONLY YOU CAN BRING

10 minutes

Brief Teaching

There is a concept in Orthodox theology called the *priest of creation*. It sounds churchy. The idea is simple.

Human beings are placed in the created order not just to manage it and not just to survive in it, but to gather it up and offer it back to God. The farmer, the craftsman, the father at the dinner table, the man who shows up for his kid at 9 p.m. when he is exhausted: all of these are acts of a kind of priesthood. You are taking what you have been given and presenting it, and that offering is something no machine can make.

A machine can generate a worship song. It cannot worship. There is no one inside the generation who is reaching toward anything. The machine has no history, no grief, no longing, no father it has lost, no family it is trying to hold together. It cannot bring any of that to God because it does not have any of that.

You do.

What you bring to God, when you actually show up rather than escaping into another plan, is irreplaceable. Not because you are impressive. Because you are the specific person God made, with the specific life you have actually lived, and that is what he wants in the room.

Balaam went on to Moab. God did not stop the journey. He redirected it. After the donkey, after the angel, after falling flat on his face, Balaam blessed Israel four times in oracles of extraordinary beauty. The encounter with the angel, delivered through the most undignified possible messenger, did not end the story. It turned it.

That is available to every man in this room.

PART SEVEN: DISCUSSION — “The Offering Only You Can Make”

10 minutes

Q9.

The book says: “You are not primarily what you do. You are who you are.” If you could not use your job, your income, your productivity, or your output to explain your worth, what would you say about yourself?

Q10.

Balaam’s story did not end at the road. He was redirected, not finished. What might it look like for the hard thing you are currently facing to turn into something that produces something good, not because the hard thing was easy, but because God turned it?

Q11.

What would it look like for you to actually show up to God this week? Not build something for God, not plan something for God. Just show up, with exactly what you actually have and what you have actually been through.

CLOSING

5 minutes

The line to close on:

“The donkey is still in the road. The question is not whether God is trying to say something. The question is whether you can hear what it is saying.”

Ask the group: What did you hear tonight that you did not want to hear?

Let one or two men answer if they will. Do not force it.

Then pray. Keep it short:

“God, we are a room full of men who are all further down the road than we probably should be. Some of us are still arguing with the donkey. Some of us just fell on our face. All of us need you to open our eyes. Do that. And let us be for each other what we cannot be for ourselves. Amen.”

LEADER NOTES

On pacing: The discussion blocks are designed to go long or short depending on the room. If Q8 opens something up, stay there. The outline is a map, not a contract.

On your own story: You do not have to share all of it. Share what is honest. The grief for your dad, the building as running, the AI conversation: those are enough. Men respond to specificity. Give them yours.

On the AI angle: Some men will ask about the AI thing. You can say: "I am not claiming AI is a prophet. I am claiming something true was said, and I heard it, and I am different for having heard it. God does not need a worthy instrument. He just needs you to stop arguing with it long enough to see what is in the road."

On silence: When the room goes quiet, that is the work happening. The best discussions in a men's group come out of silence that nobody killed too fast. Sit in it.

On the book: If men want to go deeper, the book is available. But do not pitch it tonight. Tonight is about the room, not the book.

Image in the Machine: AI, the Imago Dei, and What It Means to Be Human
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