

## A Calling

*The Center for Executive Leadership is a place for reflection, repose and reexamination*

By PAIGE TOWNLEY Photos by MARY C. FEHR

Having spent years traveling and networking in the business world, Richard frequently saw the struggles that consistently plague men. “Not only did I see the issues, but I saw men dealing with all of those issues in silence,” Richard says. “Men have somehow come to think that we aren’t supposed to struggle or get depressed. There is a pattern that men think they are going to have the perfect life—graduate from college, have a great career making a lot of money, marry the woman of their dreams, have the

(BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT) Cartwright Morris, Paul Barber, Jay Lloyd, Jimbo Head, George Shamblin, John Scott  
(FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT) Todd Liscomb, Richard Simmons, Steve Singletary

While it takes some a long time to discover the calling of their life, for Richard Simmons, the realization came relatively easy if not so soon. And in fact, it was quite clear: to help men get through the struggles of life by finding their faith in God.





# SPIRITUALITY

perfect kids, and live the American dream. In reality, many hit mid-life and realize life didn't turn out that way."

The root of that crisis so many men face, says Richard, is really a spiritual one, and helping men realize that became his calling. Initially, Richard focused on authoring books and leading men's bible studies—all while still working full time for a property and casualty insurance brokerage. But after getting married and starting a family and free time becoming less abundant, Richard retired from his day job to focus completely on his ministry. It started out with just two bible studies, which each averaged about 15 men in the group. Then after one specially planned breakfast meeting, both groups doubled in size. That was essentially the start of The Center for Executive Leadership, a nonprofit organization that focuses on enlightening men to God's truth. "One thing I've learned is that there are so many men who don't really understand the Christian faith," he says. "So we try to slowly walk through it with them. We

talk through why God put us here, why men today have such a hard time in the pursuit of happiness, and then we integrate it into your life."

To do that, Richard seeks to teach them the true meaning of masculinity. Today's society is full of false ideas about true masculinity, Richard notes, which leads to men struggling with how they should live. Society says that a real man should always have it together—always be capable and competent and never afraid. "But that's just not true," Richard says. "That's not true of anyone. What is a real man? True masculinity is Christlikeness. The problem is that many men hear that and it's not appealing to them—that is until they learn what that really means, and that's what we try to share with them."

The center's leadership—which has grown to include 12 men since it was originally established by Richard in 2001—strives to share that vital message wherever they are in life and in the midst of whatever they are going through. That means through meeting

with them individually for one-on-one bible studies, teaching group bible studies, personal counseling, marriage counseling, and even going into prisons. It also includes the many books Richard has authored—his eighth book was released at the end of last year—and the numerous speaking engagements across the country. "Meeting men wherever they are with their struggles means sharing with them the truth of Christ, and understanding that finding their faith can help get them on the right track to find fulfillment in their lives," Richard says. "Men who don't have faith but then come to faith can learn how God can use the Gospel in their lives to make it very fulfilling."

Today, the center reaches approximately 450 men through its numerous bible studies, and that's not including the many men who visit the center for counseling. And while Richard isn't necessarily looking for ways to expand, he's always open to finding more ways to help more men. In fact, the center recently added a divorce recovery group to its many services.

"Men have issues, and oftentimes they don't want to deal with those issues," Richard says. "We are here to give these men a place to go that can help them work through the problems while learning about and finding faith. To do that, we're doing what we've done from the start—taking it a year at a time and consistently praying for God's leadership. We are just following God's lead to best minister to those who need it." ■



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—RICHARD SIMMONS