

MAKE THE CALL
A 40-DAY EXPERIENCE FOR MEN
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Richt is the former head football coach of the University of Georgia Bulldogs and University of Miami Hurricanes, and is currently a football analyst for the ACC Network. He and his wife Katharyn are the parents of four children, and live in Florida.

HOW TO USE

Daily Devotion

This journal provides an 8-week guided experience for men to explore what it means to Make the Call as it relates to godly living. Each week is divided into five days of personal study with three questions at the end of each day's reading.

Group Experience

At the end of each week's study, if you choose, you'll have the opportunity to discuss what you've learned in a group setting. Each guide includes a paragraph summarizing the week's content and a few questions to guide a discussion between a small group of men.

THE EARLY YEARS

MAKE THE CALL
WEEK 1

DAY 1

In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.

EPHESIANS 1:13

MAKE THE CALL

Before I tell you a little about my playing days, let me tell you a story from my later years as a coach. Miami hadn't beaten Florida State in seven years. The year before, at home, we'd come close to beating them. It was October 7, 2017. My second year as head coach in Coral Gables, and my first trip back to Tallahassee as the enemy. This was special to me. At 3:30 in the afternoon, at kickoff under bright sunlight on Bobby Bowden Field, at Doak Campbell Stadium, this was our chance to prove that the U was worthy of the nation's attention once again.

The year before, at home, we'd come close to beating them, close to at least pushing the game into overtime, but things didn't go our way. And this year—man, this year, it looked like they'd gotten us again. The score—Florida State 20, Miami 17. Time remaining on the clock—1:24. Still, we were able to move into field goal range in the final minute. We could tie it. Or ... we could go for the win.

In my headset, coaches were giving me their opinions, feeding me up-top observations about what they could see and had seen from the coaches' booth—information and advice that might affect the pros and cons of the various alternatives in front of me. That's what I wanted. That's what I'd asked them for. Then somebody—whoever it was, I can't remember—somebody said, "Make the call, Coach."

MAKE THE CALL

That's the thing about making calls. Sometimes you've got to decide. Right now. You don't have a week or ten days to mull it over. But whether you've got all the time in the world to sit and pray about it, or you've got about forty seconds, like I did—you've got to be the one to do it. To make the call.

As Christians, we can be confident in our ability to make decisions—we have what it takes to make the call. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit lives in everyone who belongs to Christ (Romans 8:9). The Spirit functions in a number of ways—including filling the role as our Teacher and Guide. When Jesus told His disciples about the Holy Spirit He said, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26).

When the Holy Spirit lives inside us, we can move forward knowing He will give us wisdom. And even when we get off-track or make the wrong decision, the Holy Spirit will redirect us on the right path.

THE EARLY YEARS

When it's time to "make the call," who do you consult or seek out for advice?

How do you grow in your ability to "make the call"?

Which areas of your life would you like to grow in knowledge and wisdom?

MAKE THE CALL

DAY 2

*Then Jesus said to his disciples,
“If anyone wants to follow after me,
let him deny himself, take up his cross,
and follow me. For whoever wants to
save his life will lose it, but whoever
loses his life because of me will find it.*

MATTHEW 16:24-25

ALL IN

You may not know this, but I was a quarterback. Actually, a pretty good one. At one point in my career, some considered me the fourth-best quarterback in the nation. Or maybe it was just my mom who thought that. I ended up in South Florida as a thirteen-year-old kid who loved playing ball. And though baseball was my favorite sport, there was just always something about football. I found my identity in football, and it was how I defined what mattered to me.

So when Coach Roger Coffey, head football coach at Boca Raton High, told me prior to my junior year that he wanted me at quarterback, and that if I'd focus on only one sport—no more baseball—he could train me to be good enough to earn a scholarship to play football in college, there was no decision to make. I was football-only from that time forward. If I was going to excel at football it would demand focus.

There are some things in life that require our full attention—our faith is one of them. When we make a decision to follow Christ, He asks that we go “all in.” Following Jesus calls for focus and undivided attention. You can't half-heartedly follow Jesus.

Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose

MAKE THE CALL

it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it” (Matt. 16:24-25).

When we “deny ourselves,” it doesn’t mean that we give up everything that brings us enjoyment. God intends for us to live full and meaningful lives (John 10:10). Denying ourselves means we give up the things that hinder us from doing the will of God. As Christ-followers, we align our lives with the truths taught in Scripture. Following Jesus demands we align our will with His. When we “take up our cross,” we give our whole life to God—not part of our life—our whole life. In doing so, we find the life we were intended to live all along—the life God created us for.

THE EARLY YEARS

Describe your faith in this season of your life.

What reservations do you have about “denying yourself” or “taking up your cross?”

What steps can you take to go “all in” as you follow Jesus?

MAKE THE CALL

DAY 3

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

ACTS 2:42

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY

I remember Coach Coffey asking me one time if I believed in God. I'm not sure why he asked me that. Maybe he sensed my priorities were out of whack. "I don't know, Coach," I said, "but I'll tell you what I do believe in. I believe in football."

I thought he'd be proud of that. But the look on his face wasn't the look of approval I expected. He didn't really say anything. In hindsight, maybe he thought he'd created a monster.

I learned so much from Coach Coffey. He taught me how to be a quarterback. He coached me not just on the practice field and in the classroom but in his home, in his life. I spent a lot of time at his house as a high-school kid—eating meals, watching game film, just hanging out with his family. One of his daughters, no joke, still calls me her brother.

Coach Coffey was the type of coach who made young men out of football players. He had a rule for us: if any trouble ever broke out at the school, which was always a possibility, we were to head straight for the cafeteria and meet him there. If you wanted to be on his team, that's where you better be. No fighting. No trouble. I loved him. I'd have done anything for him.

In football, you quickly learn the value of coaches, mentors, and the greater sports community. We learn

MAKE THE CALL

from one another and need each other. It's the same way in Christian community. You need mature people in the faith to teach and guide you. And you need to use what you've learned to mentor those who came to faith later than you. You need brothers and sisters in Christ who spend time with you and your family. There are no spiritual hermits in the Bible—the Christian life is meant to be lived in community.

THE EARLY YEARS

Who do you seek for spiritual guidance?

Are you mentoring anyone? Who do you know who could use a friend?

What steps can you take to get more involved in a community centered around faith?

MAKE THE CALL

DAY 4

*When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you, and the rivers will
not overwhelm you. When you walk
through the fire, you will not be scorched,
and the flame will not burn you.*

ISAIAH 43:2

AN IDENTITY CRISIS

At Boca High, you pretty much fit into one of three peer groups. You were either a nerd, a jock, or a surfer. Not really, but in general. I was a jock. A jock who was going places. A jock they'd all be talking about one day.

I was a guy who believed in football.

But what I didn't know was, it's a big problem if your identity is all wrapped up in what you do rather than who you are. When your identity is in what you do, and when what you do falls apart, YOU fall apart.

But the God I wasn't sure I believed in—the God who knew exactly what to do with a guy who believed only in football—must have decided the time was right for taking me through a crisis of identity. He did it by letting me watch Jim Kelly live out my dreams.

This was the guy I would forever be backing up. He wasn't going to be leaving his seat unoccupied anytime soon. We were in the same class. Barring injury, I knew I wouldn't be seeing much playing time. However, Jim did get hurt our senior season, so I got to play in five games. But by then, I'd already thrown most of my drive and determination away. Instead of being All-American on the field, I'd become All-American at the nighttime games. All those big-time hopes and dreams of mine were gone. Blown out of the water. And yet it was my identity that had taken the biggest beating of all.

MAKE THE CALL

There are times when God allows us to go through seasons of hardship to reveal our need for Him. I had been attempting to build my identity through my performance and when things didn't go the way I'd planned, I had to reassess who I was. At the time, I had no way of knowing that God was using my circumstances to work on my heart and make me see my need for Him. I didn't know it yet, but I would learn that when we place our identity in what we do or how we perform, our self-worth can easily be crushed. But when we realize our value is already established because we are a child of God—that can't be taken from us.

THE EARLY YEARS

**In a few words, how would you describe yourself?
What makes you valuable?**

**Would your identity change if you were no longer able
to perform your job? Why or why not?**

**How does your relationship with God affect the way
you view your identity?**

MAKE THE CALL

DAY 5

*Indeed, we have all received grace
upon grace from his fullness*

JOHN 1:16

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

The summer of 1979, I ended up spending a lot of time with a teammate of mine named John Peasley, probably because we'd long been going down the same path. Up until that time, for as long as I'd known him—if I was an All-American candidate at the nighttime games, he was a Heisman Trophy candidate. We were sure to have a wild summer. Or so I thought.

Except John was different that summer. Way different. He'd gone from being this really angry guy, always looking for a party and a fight, to having a real peace about him. It was just obvious. You couldn't keep from noticing it. I finally just asked him, "What's happened to you, man?"

You can guess. Stop me if you've heard it before, where a guy who's been a rough, tough person, gets tired of the trouble he's causing himself and gets cleaned up to walk the straight and narrow. He tried telling me what he'd experienced, how he'd come to know Christ—how he'd become a Christian—even though the change was still new to him and hard to explain. But I heard him out. And though I didn't exactly admit it then, I got it. I got what he was saying. His description of what had happened to him and the peace that had become so evident and so different in his demeanor made a lot

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of sense to me. I remember thinking, “You know what? That’s what I need.” I needed the peace he had.

But I needed to think about it first. And the closer it got to the end of summer, the harder it became to figure out how this desire that I’d been feeling for a new life with God could possibly share space with my old life that would soon be rolling back into town for the fall. What would my roommates think? What would my girlfriend think? What would everybody think? That’s what was hanging me up. I was more worried about what people thought than what God thought. Imagine that. Not very smart.

Besides, I still wanted to be a quarterback. So becoming a Christian—especially if it meant being called to be a missionary or something—sure wasn’t going to square with what I planned to be doing with my Sundays in the fall.

I knew my identity as a football player wasn’t what it used to be anymore. But I didn’t know if I really wanted to identify with what being a Christian seemed like to me. I thought it meant being perfect. I thought it meant never doing anything wrong, ever again. And as I took inventory of my sins—and trust me, there were a lot of them—I didn’t see how I could ever turn things around without turning into a huge hypocrite. I guess I just didn’t understand grace.

I couldn’t seem to make that call. Not right then.

THE EARLY YEARS

Who first told you about Jesus? What role did they play in your faith?

Have you ever experienced a time when you couldn't "make the call?" If so, what got you unstuck?

Are you as close to God as you'd like to be? If not, what steps can you take to bridge the gap?

See group discussion guide for week 1 on page 176.