LEADER GUIDE · ONE SESSION · 60–90 MINUTES

The Reflex vs. the Response: leader guide

Everything you need to lead the session, word for word where it helps. Print it, or open it on your phone while you lead.

The big idea

Character isn't revealed in calm moments. It's revealed in interruption, because interruption bypasses performance. Pressure doesn't create what's in a man. It reveals it. Tonight isn't about behavior modification. It's about discovering what each man's soul has been practicing underneath the surface, and inviting Jesus to form new reflexes.

Session at a glance

5 min	Opening atmosphere and leader opening
3 min	Opening prayer
10 min	Icebreaker: what frustrates you fast?
30 min	Core study: five short teaching parts with discussion
10 min	The 3-Second Reflex Interrupt
7 min	Group activation: one reflex, one new response
20 min	Breakout groups (optional)
5 min	Closing, prayer and the week's challenge

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Short on time? Skip the breakouts for a 70-minute session, or teach Parts 1, 2 and 4 only for 60 minutes.

Before you meet

- Print a handout for each man, or text the link: thewrkshop.com/studies/reflex-vs-response/handout/
- Have a whiteboard or large paper for the flow diagram.
- Pray through Luke 6:45 yourself. Know your own first reflex before you ask anyone else for theirs.
- Set the tone: what's shared in the room stays in the room.

Opening atmosphere

5 MINUTES

Chairs in a circle or semi-circle. Phones down, Bibles open. Slow the room down on purpose. Quiet instrumental worship while men settle in is optional.

Leader opening (read slowly)

> Most men don't realize who they really are until life interrupts them.
>
> Anybody can look patient when nothing goes wrong. Anybody can look peaceful when life is smooth. Anybody can sound spiritual when there's no pressure.
>
> But interruption exposes formation.
>
> Tonight isn't about behavior modification. It's about discovering what your soul has been practicing underneath the surface.
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Because eventually, what's inside comes out.

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Opening prayer

3 MINUTES

> Jesus, we don't want to perform tonight. We don't want to hide behind church language, a spiritual image or polished answers. We want truth.
>
> Show us what pressure reveals in us. Show us where fear still leads us. Show us where anger, control, pride, defensiveness or isolation have become automatic.
>
> Holy Spirit, don't expose us to shame us. Expose us to heal us. Train us. Transform us. Form Christ in us. Amen.

Icebreaker

10 MINUTES

> **GO AROUND THE ROOM**
> What's one small thing that frustrates you fast? Slow drivers, being ignored, repeating yourself, being interrupted, waiting, being corrected...

This breaks the tension while quietly exposing deeper patterns. After several men share, say:

> Interesting how small interruptions can expose massive realities inside us.

Part 1: Interruption reveals formation

6 MINUTES

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> “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”
>
> Luke 6:45 (NIV)

Most men think pressure created the anger, the interruption caused the reaction, stress made them act that way. Jesus says something different: “out of the overflow.” Pressure didn’t create it. Pressure revealed it. The frustration, the sarcasm, the shutdown, the panic, the need to control: it was already there. The interruption just removed the mask.

> **ASK THE ROOM**
> What tends to come out of you first under pressure?
> Where do you think that reflex was trained?

Write the answers somewhere everyone can see: anger, silence, blame, defensiveness, control, anxiety, sarcasm, withdrawal, overexplaining, impatience.

Part 2: You fall to your training

6 MINUTES

> You don’t rise to your intentions under pressure. You fall to your training.

A man can love God, mean well and want peace, and still react destructively. Why? Because intention isn’t formation. Formation comes through repetition. Just as an athlete trains muscle memory, a man’s heart trains emotional reflexes. Some men have practiced irritation, fear, defensiveness, control, self-protection or escape for years. When pressure hits, those pathways fire automatically.

> **ASK THE ROOM**
> What was modeled to you growing up? How did the men around you handle anger, conflict, fear, stress, failure or weakness?
> What did you inherit emotionally that you never questioned?

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Pause long enough to let the silence work.

> "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."
>
> Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Transformation means retraining. New formation is possible.

Part 3: The war between reflex and response

6 MINUTES

Draw this where everyone can see it:

INTERRUPTION → REFLEX → RESPONSE

A reflex is automatic, fast, conditioned and emotional. **A response** is intentional, Spirit-led, formed and submitted.

> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."
>
> Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV)

Fruit isn't fake calm, spiritual performance or a personality type. Fruit is evidence of connection, formation and abiding. Nobody becomes patient overnight or peaceful by accident. Fruit grows through repetition, time with God, daily surrender, practiced awareness and obedience under pressure.

> **ASK THE ROOM**
>
> Which fruit disappears first when pressure hits you: peace, patience, gentleness, self-control or kindness?
>
> What does that show you about where you still need formation?

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Part 4: The real issue isn't anger

6 MINUTES

> Most men try to fight behavior. Jesus fights roots.

Anger is often fear protecting itself, pain defending itself, insecurity reacting, pride resisting exposure, exhaustion leaking out, or control losing its grip. On the surface a man says, "I just snapped." Underneath is fear, shame, insecurity, pride, control or unresolved pain. And underneath that, very often, is distrust.

> **ASK THE ROOM**
> What are your reactions trying to protect?

That one question can change the whole room. Give it time.

Part 5: Jesus in interruption

6 MINUTES

> **ASK THE ROOM**
> What consistently came out of Jesus under pressure?

Explore a few together: calm in the storm (Mark 4:35–41), compassion when interrupted (Mark 5:25–34), silence before His accusers (Matthew 26:59–63), grace toward Peter after his failure (John 21:15–19).

> "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.""
>
> John 14:6 (NIV)

Jesus didn't only teach the way. He embodied it. His reflexes revealed His life with the Father.

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> Your automatic reactions reveal your deepest agreements. Whatever your soul trusts most leads first under pressure.

The 3-Second Reflex Interrupt

10 MINUTES

Teach this slowly. Walk through one real example from the room.

1. **Pause.** Not forever. Just three seconds. Most damage happens fast.
2. **Notice.** What rose first? Anger, fear, control, defensiveness, withdrawal?
3. **Name it.** Ask, “What is this revealing in me?” Not, “What did they do?”
4. **Replace it.** Flesh says, “I need control.” The Spirit says, “Trust God.” Flesh says, “Defend yourself.” The Spirit says, “Respond with wisdom.” Flesh says, “Escalate.” The Spirit says, “Slow down.”
5. **Repeat.** New reflexes are built through repetition under pressure.

Group activation

7 MINUTES

> **ASK EVERY MAN**
> What’s one reflex God is confronting in you right now?
> What response is God trying to build instead?

Reflex	New response
Anger	Patience
Withdrawal	Presence
Defensiveness	Humility

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Reflex	New response
Control	Trust
Sarcasm	Gentleness
Panic	Peace

Then have each man finish these two sentences out loud:

> “When pressure hits me, I usually become _____.”
>
> “With God’s help, I want to become _____.”

Breakout groups (optional)

20 MINUTES · GROUPS OF 3–4

The goal is to move from inspiration to honesty, brotherhood and practical formation. Pick the questions that fit your group.

Exposure

1. What reaction shows up in you fastest under pressure?
2. Who taught you that response, directly or indirectly?
3. What situations trigger it most?

Roots

4. What is your reflex trying to protect?
5. What fear lives underneath it?
6. What lie have you agreed with? (“I’m not safe.” “I must stay in control.” “Weakness is dangerous.” “Nobody helps me.” “I have to defend myself.”)

Formation

7. What would it look like for Jesus to form a new reflex in you?

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8. What practices would help? (Slowing down, Scripture before your phone, prayer pauses, breathing before responding, confession, journaling your triggers, memorizing a verse.)

Brotherhood

9. What kind of man do you become under pressure?
0. What kind of man do you want to become instead? Who in this group will check in with you this week?

Closing

5 MINUTES

> The goal isn't perfection overnight. The goal is formation.
>
> A man transformed by Jesus eventually stops reacting the way he used to.
>
> Because eventually, what fills you leads you.

Closing prayer (have the men open their hands)

> Jesus, we invite You into the places we usually hide: our anger, our defensiveness, our fear, our control, our shutdown, our panic.
>
> Train us, not just in public behavior but in private formation. Slow us down under pressure. Teach us to recognize what rises first. Build new reflexes in us by Your Spirit, until our responses look more like You. Amen.

This week's challenge: the Reflex Journal

For seven days, each time pressure hits, write down: What happened? What rose first? What was underneath it? What response would reflect Jesus instead? The journal pages are on the handout.

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Pressure reveals what your soul has been practicing all along.

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