

CASEY B. HOUGH

RETRIEVING A BIBLICAL VISION  
OF MASCULINITY



WHEN  
POETS

WERE



WARRIORS

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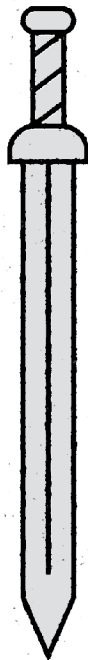


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To Carter, Jude, and Weston.

My prayer is that you would continue to grow into the kind of men that God has called you to be in Christ.

Thank you for your gracious patience with me as a father who's still growing in Christ.



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## Introduction



# WHAT KIND OF MAN CRIES?

**S**top crying! Suck it up! Man up! Be a man! You're acting like a girl!" On more than one occasion, I've hollered these types of comments at my sons. I typically did this at sporting events when they would demonstrate some sort of tender emotion. It might have been when they had struck out, walked a batter, missed a layup, or missed a tackle. They would cry. I would scream. They would bite their lip and soldier on. I felt vindicated. I told myself I was raising "real men," but honestly, at the time, I didn't even know what that meant.

My journey to understand what it means to be a Christian man began next to a baseball field dugout. I had pulled one of my sons off to the side to give him a pep talk. He was crying about his performance. I gritted my teeth, looked him in the eyes, and said, "You've got to quit crying. You've got to man up. Men don't cry." I felt like Jimmy Dugan from *A League of Their Own*: "There's no crying in baseball!" This was not a new scene in our story, but

something felt different after this encounter. For the first time, I felt like something was wrong. That something wrong was me. It was the last three words of my “conversation” with my son that hung in the air: “Men don’t cry.” I knew this was wrong. So, why was I saying it?

I am not the first to wrestle with these feelings. In his book, *Cry like a Man: Fighting for Freedom from Emotional Incarceration*, Jason Wilson aptly described the dilemma so many men have found themselves in. He writes, “With all the theories, credos, and misleading mantra—‘Man up,’ ‘No pain, no gain,’ not to be outdone by the mother of all misguided intelligence, ‘Real men don’t cry’—we have been deceived into suppressing our emotions to impress others; there is simply no room for weakness.”<sup>1</sup> Wilson explains how men “from childhood through early puberty then into manhood *have been* conditioned to swallow our pain, expressing little but indifference and detachment about the chaos around us.”<sup>2</sup> Wilson goes on in his book to vividly describe this suppression of male emotion as “emotional incarceration.” In my case, I was the looming officer making sure my boys didn’t get out of line.

After that fateful afternoon next to the dugout, I wish I could say I rushed home for some deep soul-searching, but I didn’t. The discomfort I felt did not find a settled place in me, but the disruption sowed enough seeds to bear fruit along the rocky path of my heart, weeks later, while I

read through the Gospels. As I worked through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I encountered the perfect man, Jesus the Nazarene.

This was not my first encounter with Jesus. I grew up learning about Him on Sundays and Wednesdays at my Baptist church and every school day at my private, fundamentalist Baptist academy. I knew a lot about Jesus, even winning the “Best Christian Example” award a few years in a row. That sounds even more impressive considering that I wasn’t actually a Christian at the time. But God, in His grace, did not allow me to stay in that condition. In His great mercy, when I was seventeen, God opened my heart to receive the gospel. I was forgiven, made new, born again.

With this new life in Christ came an insatiable desire to learn more about this God who saved me. I read almost everything I could get my hands on. Before my conversion, I’m pretty sure the only book I had actually read from cover to cover was Matt Christopher’s *Return of the Home Run Kid*. But that changed when God redeemed me. My love for reading came out of nowhere, and my favorite author outside of the Bible became (and remains) John Piper.

The first sermon I ever remember really listening to was a Piper sermon on marriage and the glory of God. It was glorious. I wore out that cassette tape (yes, I’m dating myself). While I did not listen to many of his sermons,

I owned a John MacArthur study Bible with its copious notes. The Sunday school curriculum for my youth Sunday school class was R. C. Sproul's VHS series, "Dust to Glory." When I wasn't using my JMac study Bible, I read R. C. Sproul's *New Geneva Study Bible*. I listened to sermons constantly, albeit they were burned on CDs and carried around in a three-ring, zipper binder (again, admitting my age). I even took Shane & Shane songs and mashed them up with sermon clips. I was making my own sermon jams and sharing them with my like-minded friends. I say all this merely to explain my history as a student of all things related to conservative, Protestant theology. Maybe I was a "TheoBro" before the TheoBro term existed.

I fancied myself a defender of biblical truth. I created a now-defunct website titled "No Compromise Ministries," named in honor of my musical hero, Keith Green. It was a lot like a modern-day discernment blog in that it was a blog with little discernment. I warned everyone about everything. I considered myself to be fearless, which was easy when you are living with your parents and hiding behind a keyboard. No one was safe from *my* apologetics. I was a Gen X Martin Luther with the same stomach problems, more sobriety, and less profanity.

On one occasion, I vividly recall debating a young lady at a Christian concert. She told me, "I don't believe in the doctrine of election." Providentially for her, the concert

was being held at a bookstore. So I walked to the Bible section, turned to Romans 9, pointed at the word *election*, and said, “Then you don’t believe in the Bible.” She cried. I laughed. As the kids today would say, I “owned” her, which is to say I won through a method of shaming. I didn’t care if I was a jerk to my sister in Christ. It only mattered I was right.

Miraculously, I matured. Somewhat. I secured a great job in IT, got married, moved out of my parents’ house, and bought my first home. I soon started seminary and began preparing for ministry.

As God blessed my wife and I with sons, I attempted to form them into what I perceived to be a sanctified vision of masculinity. I don’t mention the theological influences, that I have to say, were responsible for my poor vision of masculinity. To the contrary, I mention MacArthur, Piper, and Sproul to say that while I thought I had my theology right, it didn’t impact my life and parenting the way it should have. I should have known better. While I could recite the fruit of the Spirit, they were not very evident in my own life. I had a head knowledge that needed to be relocated to my heart. My boys had to be tough, but it wasn’t the kind of toughness you found in God’s Word. It was a worldly toughness. Tenderheartedness was for girls. Until it wasn’t anymore. My idea of what it meant to be a man started to come apart beside that dugout in south Arkansas, but my reformation



went into full-speed mode when I started thinking through how to disciple my children to follow Jesus.

For the entirety of my boys' young lives, I had been teaching them that men must keep their emotions in check. That was not in a healthy, "be self-controlled" kind of way but an apathetic, stoic way. They were not allowed to cry unless they were genuinely hurt. I taught them they needed to do well in school to get an excellent job with a good salary, find a wife, and raise a family. I taught them to throw the first punch if they were ever bullied. These were the things that would make them "real men." Yet there was Jesus, single and chaste His whole life, encouraging us to turn the other cheek while preaching good news to those oppressed by the powerful (Luke 4:18–19). He wept at his friend's funeral and described Himself as "gentle and lowly" (Matt. 11:29–30). He even applied motherly language to Himself, describing His desire for Jerusalem's repentance like a mother hen who longs to gather her chicks (Luke 13:34–35).<sup>3</sup>

Some respond to this description of Jesus by first demarcating between Christ's humiliation and His glorification. Humiliation refers to Christ's status during the incarnation, when He gave up certain elements of God's glory. Glorification is as it sounds: Christ's restoration of His glory upon His resurrection (John 17:3–5). A response, therefore, to the gentle and lowly Jesus is to say those

attributes were true of His humiliation but not necessarily about His glorification. In other words, they argue against those characterizations of Jesus and their significance for our lives by insisting that the descriptions no longer apply because Jesus is no longer in a state of humiliation but rather glorification.

I do not completely disagree. Jesus is glorified now. Yet we are not. And the example Jesus left us to follow is not His glorified state but His life on the earth. Yes, we can and must anticipate the glorified state that awaits all His followers. This is the hope of glory disciples possess in Christ. Yet the hope of what is to come empowers us to persevere and endure in the now while we have the same mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5–11), which Paul takes to mean Christ's humility.

This is not to deny that God's kingdom has broken into the present world in such a way that those who are in Christ are not truly "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). But it is to remind us that there is an undeniable "not yet" to our enjoyment in the new creation. If we are not careful, we will, as theologians describe it, "overrealize" our eschatology. Make no mistake, we will share in His glory and be made like Him as He is when He appears, but that time is not yet here (1 John 2:28–3:3). We look forward to that time, but we must remember that to be His disciples in this world means to take up a cross. It means to follow Him in

humble service. It means patiently enduring evil. It means being known for our love. It means putting on compassion like a garment. It means leaving room for the vengeance that belongs to God, not us.

Here is where my breakthrough occurred. As I reflected on what I was teaching my sons, I realized I was instilling in them a vision of what it means to be a man who would eventually undermine their respect of and commitment to Jesus. Without realizing it, I was teaching them that Jesus wasn't a real man. Was He fully human? Sure. But was He an actual man? Well, that depended on how I defined what it means to be a man. If they brought the vision of masculinity I had taught them into their gospel readings, they would either misread or miss Jesus altogether because He just didn't fit the paradigm.

What my sons and I were experiencing was similar to many in the first century who maintained certain expectations about the Messiah. They knew He would descend from David, but their vision of what He would be was more of a warrior than a poet. He would throw off Rome and restore Israel. Yet, when Jesus did not fit their expectations, they quit listening, quit following, and eventually killed Him.

Make no mistake: Jesus is absolutely a warrior. It's just that His enemy and means of conquering that enemy are different than people imagined. In their minds, the Messiah would never be someone who could be conquered.

Such a Savior was a scandal and a stumbling block. There was no way the Messiah would be crucified.

Jesus corrects our imbalance of what it means to be a man. For some, this means Jesus needs to be seen more as a warrior than a poet. We need to see the Jesus who turned over tables in righteous anger because of injustice. We need to see the Jesus who confronted Pharisees with strong words for their misunderstanding and application of God's law. We need to see the Jesus who was not afraid to pronounce judgment over unrepentant cities. But for others, correcting the imbalance means Jesus needs to be seen more as a poet than a warrior. We need to see the emotional and relational life of the Son of Man who weeps, sings, serves, and eats with the lowly and the outcast. As Justin Bailey writes, "For though Jesus is not averse to flipping tables (John 2:13–17), his more common practice is to sit at them, asking penetrating questions."<sup>4</sup> If you don't believe me, just read the Gospel of Luke and note how often Jesus is either headed to a meal, at a meal, or leaving a meal.<sup>5</sup>

We need Jesus to rebalance our vision of what it means to be a man in this world, living according to God's will. We need Jesus to correct our overrealized vision of masculinity that longs for a crown without a cross. We must be reminded that Jesus told us if any person would come after Him, they must deny themselves and take up their cross.

## When Poets Were Warriors

To illustrate this idea of a rebalanced vision of what it means to be a man, I have chosen the image of the poet-warrior. The most obvious example of the poet-warrior in Scripture comes from the life of David. As a poet, David composed songs on his harp. He wrote and sang of the beauty of the Lord. He danced undignified in the joy of the Lord. He expressed his affections for his God in ways that would likely make many men uncomfortable. Yet David was also a mighty warrior. His fingers could play a harp and also wield a sword. He was fearless in the face of opposition. He was a great leader of the people of God. David did not have to cease to be a poet in order to be a warrior. There was a balance to his life. So, why not write this book from the perspective of David's life?

For all the good that can be said about and drawn from David's life, Christian men are not called to imitate him or have his mind. In fact, there are things about his life that no man should emulate. Even at his best, King David was a shadow of the Messiah who was to come in Jesus Christ. But now that the substance of the shadow is here, it is better for us to consider Jesus, great David's greater Son. In Jesus, the balance of the poet and the warrior is perfectly seen. We see tenderness and toughness in appropriate expression. We see a man gentle and meek enough to welcome children but strong enough to bear a cross.

We see what a perfect man looks like. So, while we will consider what the whole of Christian Scripture says about being a man, we will do so through a lens that recognizes Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of what a man ought to be in this world.

## Two Caveats

I want to be clear about two things from the get-go. First, I consciously wrote this book for men. Men, you are the audience. While I am happy for women to read this book, my intended audience is Christian men. That means I have avoided some of the caveats and nuance I would include if writing for a broader audience. The temptation with a book like this is to write in such a way as to make it applicable for everyone because this book is filled with reflections on Scripture and Scripture is for everyone. Many of the passages we will review in the coming pages have relevant application and theological insight for men and women, but my purpose is to make the applications and insights geared toward men. While everyone is welcome to buy, read, share, and give this book to others, please be aware I have a specific audience in mind who needs to hear a specific message. If there are men in your life you love and care about, you will understand why I have narrowed my audience. Join me in praying that

God would use the truth of His Word to strengthen men through the message of this book.

Second, and most important, I intend to look at the life and teaching of Jesus as a model for a renewed vision of what it means to be a man. To do this, I draw broadly on resources of theologians who have written on the person of Christ, often titled “Christology.” With that said, this book should not be construed to communicate that the significance of Christology is primarily about how we ought to live as Christians or, in particular, as Christian men. What do I mean by that? I mean that while Jesus’s life and teaching provide us with a pattern of living, a moral example, that is not the sum of His life and work as Lord and Savior. Furthermore, while I highlight the example of Christ, I am not suggesting that His atoning work is merely a moral example. I believe and wholeheartedly confess that Jesus’s work was one of penal substitutionary atonement. I love this doctrine! I could sing “In Christ Alone” and “Before the Throne of God Above” every day of my life until I see Him face-to-face and not get tired of these truths! So, while Jesus’s life and teaching do provide us with a moral example, there is more to Jesus than providing us with a paradigm for living as Christians in the world. But there is not less.

As the hymn writer would put it, I believe with all my heart that the sinner’s “hope is built on nothing less than

Jesus' blood and righteousness," and that we ought not "trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name."<sup>6</sup> The danger with a book like this is to instrumentalize the life and teachings of Jesus in such a way that leads to a moralism that guts the gospel of its efficacious nature. We will not get to heaven or be born again by being better men. What we need more than anything in the world is the transformation of our sinful selves by the power of the gospel of Christ.

So, as you read this book, know that much of what you will find in these pages is "downstream" from the fountainhead of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Studying the person and work of Jesus as an example of what it means to be a Christian man depends first on having a life-changing encounter with Jesus as Lord and Savior. If all you gain from this book is a list of characteristics you can implement in your life, then I've failed. Jesus is more than an example of masculinity, though He is not less. I want you to walk away from this book not only with a greater understanding of what it means to be a man according to God's will but also with a greater love for Jesus Christ, who provides the greatest example of what it means to be a man while doing what only He could do: redeeming humanity from sin through His life, death, and resurrection.





## Chapter 1



# WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

If I'm being completely honest, it feels a little weird to write this chapter. I'm writing it while watching my oldest son play a high school baseball game. During a mid-inning break, I ran to the restroom so that I wouldn't miss any of the game. When walking up to the restrooms, I looked for the door labeled "Men." Next to the word *Men* was a symbol of what society has recognized as representing a man for ages. As I approached the door, I thought to myself, *Well, I know which door I am supposed to enter.* I did not suffer any sort of existential crisis. I knew which restroom door to enter because I inherently know that I am a man. I'm not confused about it. Neither are most men in society.

We know what it means to be a man from a biological perspective. We have XY chromosomes. We typically have higher levels of testosterone, more bone density, greater muscle mass, external sexual reproductive organs, and deeper voices. This is just the natural outworking

of our genetic difference with women. God has fearfully and wonderfully made us as men. Men and women are different. And there is nothing evil or wrong about those differences. This is how God made us. To paraphrase theologian John Kleinig, we do not make our bodies; they were given to us and remain with us as the “foundation” for life here on the earth.<sup>1</sup> We should embrace the bodies God has given us. They are a gift from God and should be celebrated.

The physical differences between men and women are part of God’s good creation. They are not the result of the fall of man. If we are going to understand anything about what it means to be a man, we must be clear on the givenness of our created bodies as men. We don’t need to be embarrassed by this reality. Our differences are not bad.

But this is not a book about mere biological realities. Nor is this a book about the current language game being played in our society regarding issues like transgenderism.<sup>2</sup> I’m not going to argue for the recognition of the differences that are already clearly seen by those who have eyes to see them. Men and women are biologically different, and the differences are good, not because it’s better to be one or the other but because God has made us “male and female,” in His image (Gen. 1:27). So, if this book is not about mere biological realities, what is it about? This is a book about the theological realities that men are mandated

by our Creator to reflect in the world as men. In other words, what does it mean to be a man as God intended?

## What We Observe in God's Word

To frame our consideration of what it means to be a man as God intended, I want to start with an overview of what we observe in God's Word. This overview follows the grand story of the Bible from creation, to the fall of man, to the redemption we have in Christ. When I say *overview*, I've tried to provide a fast-paced and simplified look at key biblical themes related to our discussion about Jesus and manhood. It won't take long. But before I begin, I want to speak to the guys who might be inclined to put the book down at this point because they were looking for something immediately applicable to their life.

Men, the impulse to jump to the application without the theology is not good. Why? Because if we move to the *work* of our calling without understanding the *purpose* (or *telos*) of our calling, we risk the perversion of our work. We will get to the *work* of our calling in due time, but if you desire the most benefit from that work, you need to understand how it fits into the story God is telling in the world. So let's begin with creation.

*Creation: Created Masculinity*

If we are going to understand anything about what it means to be a man, let alone being a human, we must understand something of creation. Timothy Tennent says, “The central theology of the creation account is summarized in Genesis 5:1–2, *which says*, ‘When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “mankind” when they were created.’”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, as another scholar puts it, “If we leave God’s reality out of account, we cannot know whether we are real. But if we accept God’s Word about that, we can know that we are. Conversely, that declaration affirms that the world does not exist in or of or for itself, independently of God, but only because God willed it.”<sup>4</sup>

Creation establishes our entire existence in relationship to God’s will. We know what we are and how we are to live because God has revealed and reinforced His will for us in Scripture. Let’s begin with Genesis 2:5–7, which says,

“When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering

the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

There are a few things we can observe from this passage about what it means to be a man. First, we would not exist if God did not will for us to exist. We are not self-sufficient beings. Only God is self-sufficient. Humanity is not. As men we need God. He does not need us. Another way of stating this would be to say that we are stewards of our bodies and the rest of the created world, not owners.

While God does not need us, He, in His sovereign wisdom, chose to create us and employ us in His work. Note what the passage says: “The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” We are creatures formed of dust but filled with the breath of God to live and work in His creation. Thus, we observe that we possess life and purpose because God created us, which gets at what I mentioned earlier about the relationship between our work in the world and God’s purpose for us. Have you ever felt like your work was meaningless? Like the things you do, day in and day out, are all done in vain? Part of the reason this is the case is because we have divorced our work in the world from God’s purpose for us.

Much of the reason our work feels in vain is because we do not view ourselves as stewards but as owners. And tragically, when stewards begin to think they are owners, we end up being thieves. Instead of managing God's creation, we exploit it. Instead of marrying and rejoicing in the wife of our youth (Prov. 5:18–19), we end up being “half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”<sup>5</sup> A proper understanding of creation and God's purpose for us as men in that creation can deliver us from the thievery of joy that happens when we think we own ourselves and the world we live in.

Men, we must grasp something of the weight and gravity of our creatureliness. John Calvin put it this way: “We cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accompanied by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves. This knowledge of ourselves is twofold: namely, to know what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam.”<sup>6</sup> We will get to the fall of humanity shortly, but for now, we need to reflect on “what we were like when we were first created.”

If we are creatures, then it follows that we are not the Creator. This distinction is crucial for living in humility before God and others. Again, Calvin makes a great point about the importance of remembering who we are as creatures. On Genesis 2:7, he wrote, “First we must realize that when he was taken from earth and clay [Gen. 2:7; 18:27], his pride was bridled. For nothing is more absurd than for those who not only ‘dwell in houses of clay’ [Job 4:19], but who are themselves in part earth and dust, to boast of their own excellence.”<sup>7</sup>

Men, you are not God. Despite what the influencers on social media say, we are not self-made. We are creatures, not Creator. Any creative work you do is ultimately empowered by and a reflection of God’s ultimate work in creation.

Men, it is so important for us to remember who we are. We are of dust, but we are also more than dust. We have a unique relationship to God as those who have received His breath.<sup>8</sup> While animals were created by God, humanity was created by God and filled by Him that we might become a “living being.” So, while we need to be humble by remembering that we are dust, we also need to see the uniqueness of bearing God’s image. What is an image? Again, Timothy Tennent is helpful: “An image is a reflection or representation of something else. . . . The biblical authors use the words *image* and *likeness* to convey that God endows



humans with certain capacities that will enable them to “reflect” or “image” God in the world. . . . God created us to “image” or reflect something of His divine life.”<sup>9</sup>

We are not animals. We are image bearers, vice-regents of the Lord God, tasked with the responsibility of extending His glory throughout all of creation.

Taken together, we can conclude with Gregory of Nyssa, who said, “In this world I have discovered the two affirmations that man is nothing and that man is great. If you consider nature alone, he is nothing and has no value; but if you regard the honor with which he has been treated, man is something great.”<sup>10</sup>

This is a great starting place for us. Some of us need to be reminded that we are but dust. In and of ourselves, there are no naturally great men. This should humble us. However, when adequately humbled by seeing who we are before God, we can then begin to walk in the honor God has bestowed on us.

This means that because of your relationship to God, you don’t have to prove your worth in this world. You don’t have to prove your manliness in the world because you are as God created you. Your manliness doesn’t depend on how much you can bench press, how many deer you have harvested, how many women you have slept with, how much money you earn, or how much others admire you. I love how one theologian described this aspect of creation.

He said, “That a male human is manly simply by being male, and that this is good, seems obvious. Yet it is often not accepted as a given, a good gift which a man should be glad to receive and live out. Many men have an apparent need to achieve being manly, to ‘prove’ that they are men, typically expressed in a conquest approach to male sexuality.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, when we fail to see ourselves as God has created us in relationship to Him and the rest of His creation, things start to go poorly, which is what we see in the chapters of Genesis that follow the account of creation.

### *Fall: Broken Masculinity*

While God declares His creation of man and woman to be “very good” and subsequently unites the two together in marriage, it does not take long for things to go bad. Theologians call this the “fall of man,” which refers to Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God and their expulsion from the garden of Eden and God’s presence. I won’t rehearse all of the details of this account in great depth here, but there are some important things that we need to see for the sake of our study of biblical masculinity.

First, we see Adam and Eve given to each other in marriage. They have a responsibility to subdue the earth and fill it with offspring. They are given one prohibition: do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil. Shortly after receiving this prohibition, a serpent, later identified in Scripture as Satan, deceives Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the presence of Adam. There is no indication that Adam was not there. Instead of obeying God, Adam and Eve questioned what the Lord had told them. Eve ate the fruit and then gave it to her husband Adam, who also ate of it. Immediately their eyes were opened to their nakedness. They hid in shame from each other and from the Lord. Yet the Lord came to them in the garden, and while faithful to His promise to curse them with death if they ate of the forbidden fruit, He also clothed them with animal skins and cursed the serpent who had deceived them.

The result of this fall into sin in the garden of Eden would be that man's labor on the earth would get substantially harder. Note that the passage does not say Adam would have to start working, as if work itself were a result of the fall. No, work itself is good. Yet work in a fallen world would be harder than previously imagined. For Eve, her labor in rearing children would be harder. Because of sin, Adam and Eve's relationship would become more difficult. Desires of the flesh would rule over them, making the bliss of marriage something harder to maintain. Finally, the couple would be removed from the garden of Eden to sojourn in the wild country until a day would come when the Seed of the woman would finally crush the

head of the serpent and free them from their bondage to sin and death. Even in the sadness of their rebellion, God gave them hope that things would not always be as broken as they currently were. At this point, we could spend a lot of time detailing the way sin impacted the whole world, but we are focusing on how sin impacted men and their view of masculinity. So I want focus on how the fall of man is reflected in the broken masculinity we see in Scripture.

One of the first glimpses we get of broken masculinity is in Genesis 4 with the account of two brothers, Cain and Abel, born to Adam and Eve. Cain was the oldest son. In fact, some commentators note that Eve's words, which are recorded in Genesis 4:1, indicate that she may have thought this child would be the Seed who would deliver them from the curse. Tragically, the son she thought might be her deliverer would actually compound her grief. Cain worked the ground, and Abel worked with the sheep. When it was time to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, Abel's sacrifice was accepted while Cain's was rejected. Cain was outraged with the Lord and decided to exact revenge on Abel. Cain murdered his own brother because of his jealousy. Here in Cain we see an example of broken masculinity. Instead of using the strength God had given him to obey the Lord, he used his strength to commit fratricide.

As a result of Cain's sin, he, much like his father Adam, was cursed and banished from the land. To be sure,

the Lord swore to protect him. He did not end Cain's life immediately, but Cain's life was filled with sorrow. Cain moved, married, and was blessed with a son. Cain built a city for his growing family. And eventually, he had a descendent named Lamech, who is a tragic example of broken masculinity.

Lamech is the first person in the Bible who is described as taking more than one wife. This is significant since the creation order revealed that a man should marry one woman and build a family with her alone. Lamech, however, is given to excess. He marries two women instead of one. Furthermore, Lamech is a violent man. In Genesis 4:23–24, we read the record of Lamech's song of excess. He brags that he has two wives, then glories in his disproportionate response to being wronged by others. He kills those who merely wound him. And he sings about it! Lamech glorifies his godlessness.

When I read about Lamech, I cannot help but see parallels between what some in our day consider the marks of a "real man." Here is Lamech, a man wealthy enough to take two wives for himself and a man who shows no restraint in his responses to those who harm him. Lamech knows this is not honoring to God. He basically confesses this when he says if "Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24). Lamech is a broken man who thinks his gratuitous lust and violence are

things to admire. To paraphrase what one scholar said of Lamech, “He is a self-secure man,”<sup>12</sup> or at least he thinks he is.

Men, we were not made to be like Lamech, yet I see so many of us looking to “influencers” who basically live a life much like Lamech’s. Maybe a good test for how we’re doing in terms of judging our masculinity would be found by asking ourselves, “Whom do I admire more—Abel or Cain and Lamech?” Do I regard Abel as weak because he was a victim of his brother’s violence? Or do I regard him as the author of Hebrews did, “righteous . . . and through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Heb. 11:4)? Let this comparison confront the disposition of your heart.

We could follow this kind of pattern throughout Scripture, and I’ll do my best to point it out as we encounter it. For now, I want you to see how sin has this tendency to take the good things about man and turn them for evil. Strength is not bad. God made men to be strong. Yet we must remember why He gave us the strength. It was not to exact disproportionate violence on those who wrong us. Furthermore, as God blessed us with the ability to earn income and build wealth, He did so that we might be generous toward others, blessing them as God has blessed us. He did not bless us that we might make a name for ourselves but that His name might be great. What needs to happen for men to use their gifts as God intended them?

We need the transforming grace of God, which we begin to see more clearly in the redemption that unfolds next.

### *Redemption: Redeemed Masculinity*

While the world was moving from bad to worse (Gen. 6:5–7), one man found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Through the obedience of Noah, a people would be carried safely through the judgment waters of the flood. Once the ark found a resting place, Noah and his family were given a mandate similar to the one given to Adam and Eve. They were to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth again (Gen. 9:7). Noah’s family would do just this, though not without some major dysfunction (Gen. 10–11).

At the end of Genesis 11, we are introduced to an important man named Abram, who would eventually be called Abraham. God called Abraham and promised to make his name great as the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:1–3). But there was a problem. Abraham and his wife Sarah (Sarai) were old, past childbearing age. If the promise was going to be fulfilled, then God would have to do it miraculously. And, of course, God did. Despite Sarah and Abraham’s reliance first on the flesh—their own plan apart from God (Gen. 16; cf. Gal. 4:21–31)—God allowed Sarah to conceive and bear a son named Isaac, the son of promise. His existence depended on the work of God in Abraham and Sarah’s life.

The giving of Isaac clues us into the fact that God is the God who works in seemingly impossible circumstances. Such a God demands our faith. And, as the story unfolds, God fulfills the promise that He called Abraham to embrace by faith. By this faith Abraham was justified—that is, declared righteous before God (Rom. 4:1–5:11; Gal. 3:1–29). By trusting God instead of relying on the flesh, Abraham had Isaac. Then Isaac had Jacob. Jacob’s name would eventually be changed to Israel, and he would have twelve sons. The descendants of those twelve sons would eventually become the people of Israel.

In keeping with the promise God made Abraham, Israel was to become a blessing to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:2). These descendants would multiply and mature into a nation who would eventually ask the prophet Samuel to anoint a king for them so they could be like the other nations (1 Sam. 8). In spite of the prophet’s warnings, rooted in the Lord’s rebuke of His people for wanting a king other than Him, Israel got what it wanted. And his name was Saul.

First Samuel 9:2 describes Saul as “a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.” In other words, Saul was a man’s man. Handsome, young, tall, and powerful. The kind of guy a pastor search committee is hoping they will



find to lead their church. The type of guy who just looks like a leader from central casting. Yet Saul, while a man, was not a good man.

Saul was rebellious, violating the commands of the Lord regarding sacrifices (1 Sam. 13:8–23). He made rash decisions that jeopardized the well-being of others (1 Sam. 14:24–46). And he was man of what I would call “selective” use of force. Sure, he could lead an army into battle, but when the confrontation called for the possibility of personal loss, he was a coward (1 Sam. 17). Israel needed a new king; someone who would obey the Lord.

When the Lord called Samuel to anoint another king to replace Saul, He explicitly told him that when looking for the one the Lord had chosen, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, . . . for the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). This was in response to Samuel’s initial enthusiasm at finding a man who was much like Saul in appearance. But God would accomplish His purposes in a manner that would confound the wisdom of man once again.

Enter David, a lyre-playing poet-shepherd who was a somewhat forgotten son of a man named Jesse. Jesse had not thought to invite his youngest son to the king-making party. He was busy with the sheep, fighting off threats to the family’s livelihood, and probably passing the time

with his instrument. While Scripture describes David as having “beautiful eyes” and being “handsome” (1 Sam. 16:12), these were not his most important qualities. David feared God. Oswald Chambers puts it this way: “The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”<sup>13</sup> Nowhere was this fearlessness on display more than on the battlefield with Goliath (1 Sam. 17). While Saul and the other Israelites feared Goliath, David feared God. Thus, the lyre-playing poet-shepherd struck down Goliath, the giant warrior.

In time, David became the king of Judah then Israel, uniting the twelve tribes under his leadership. Of course, this journey to the kingship was not without its obstacles. For one, Saul was threatened by David, which led him to try to kill the young man on multiple occasions. The Lord, however, protected David. Saul was eventually killed in battle, and David was officially made king. But we would be remiss not to mention David’s failures as well. David took multiple wives (1 Sam. 30) and stole another man’s wife while conspiring to have that man killed in the process (2 Sam. 11). While David was a good king, he was not a perfect man. He embodied many admirable characteristics, yet he was a complex character in the story God was telling. David would rule over Israel, but he would struggle to manage his dysfunctional household. If the nation of

people created from Abraham's lineage was to get the king they needed, God Himself would have to intervene.

In 2 Samuel 7:1–17, the Lord promised David, much as He had promised Abraham, that He would “make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth” (v. 9). But while David and many of His descendants like Solomon did some good, they could not change the hearts of the people. Thus, we see that the fulfillment of 2 Samuel 7:1–17 would have to come from above. God Himself would come to turn His people's hearts to Him, which is exactly what we see in Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, God with us (Matt. 1:1, 23).

The one man who could undo the devastation brought about by the first Adam would be Jesus, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). The one man who could ultimately build a great nation of renown was not one of the multiple descendants of Abraham but Jesus, the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). The one Man who could ultimately rule over God's people was not Solomon or Josiah or any other number of David's immediate relatives but Jesus the Christ, great David's greater son (Mark 12:35–37). By taking on flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14), Jesus makes God known (John 1:18) and fulfills all that He had promised for His people (2 Cor. 1:20). But as Jesus makes God known to us, He also shows us how to live. As such, Jesus is the perfect man, and if we would learn anything about

what it means to be a man, we need to be transformed by His grace, being given eyes to see and ears to hear that we might be saved and conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29).

This book is all about looking to Jesus for our answer to the question, What does it mean to be a man? In Jesus, we find the perfect balance of an authentic, sinless life before God and before others. We see a perfect example to follow in our pursuit of living as the men God created us to be in the world.

## Conclusion

Our most desperate need is to be transformed by God's grace in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. More than sex, violence, or power, if you want to be the kind of man God intends for you to be, then your old self must be put to death (Eph. 4:22–24). You need to become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). No degree of habit stacking, gym routines, supplements, biohacking, education, YouTube seminars, or Joe Rogan podcasts will make you the kind of man God desires you to be. While those things may have some value, ultimately we are changed through godliness by faith in Jesus Christ. His work in us creates contentment in our hearts (1 Tim. 4:7–8).

Men, the issue with our masculinity is not that it is too deep but that it's too shallow. Our vision of masculinity is

too superficial. To be sure, we are men simply because God created us as men. Yet there is also a nurturing and nourishing of our manliness as God intended it, which should be in keeping with what we see in Jesus Christ, the perfect man. So maybe we ought to reframe our initial question. Maybe it's misguided to ask, "What does it mean to be a man?" Instead, maybe we should be asking, "What does it mean to be the type of man God has revealed in Jesus Christ?"

In the chapters that follow, my hope is to expose us to Jesus's example and teaching on vital issues that impact us as men. My prayer is that it would be profitable for our growth as men created for God's glory and the good of others.



**WE NEED A VISION OF  
MASCULINITY THAT  
DOES NOT STUMBLE OVER  
JESUS, BUT INSTEAD  
IS SHAPED BY HIM.**

**A**LMOST EVERY CHRISTIAN MAN wants others to think of them as a “man’s man,” a “real man.” Yet, most of us would be hard-pressed to provide a clear, compelling, and biblically rooted definition for what it means to be a man.

Cultural stereotypes like toxic masculinity and gender confusion distort and oversimplify masculinity. In contrast, Jesus’s own life and teaching are emotionally complex and paradoxical.

Jesus is more than an example of masculinity, though He is not less.

*When Poets Were Warriors* studies the person and work of Jesus in order to retrieve a balanced vision of what it means to be a Christian man. Along the way, Jesus demonstrates how to live in conformity to God’s will as a man as He calls us to follow Him.

Readers will gain a greater understanding of what it means to be a Christian man and develop a greater love for Jesus Christ. After all, His life provides the greatest example of what it means to be a man while doing what only He could do: redeeming others from sin through His life, death, and resurrection.



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