



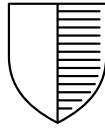
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

ACT LIKE MEN



RICHARD PHILLIPS

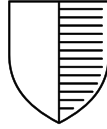
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: PRECIOUS THINGS EASILY LOST	4
PART I: PRINCIPLES FOR FAITHFULNESS	7
PART II: BIBLICAL MANHOOD IN MARRIAGE	15
PART III: BIBLICAL MANHOOD AS FATHERS	21
CONCLUSION	25
ENDNOTES	27



INTRODUCTION: PRECIOUS THINGS EASILY LOST

It is remarkable to me how easily precious things can be lost. An individual can quickly lose valuable possessions such as innocence, integrity, or a good reputation. The church can lose precious things, too, and this seems to be happening today. One ideal we may be losing is that of a strong, biblical, and confident Christian manhood. Not long ago, American men were told to get in touch with our “feminine side” (mine is named Sharon), and it’s this sort of cultural foolishness that has resulted in misconceptions about what it means to be a godly man, a loving husband, a good father, and a faithful friend.

I have little doubt that today’s problem with manhood arises in part from a broader problem in secular culture. So many young men grow up today without a father — or with a father who is inadequately connected with his sons — that there is bound to be confusion about masculinity. The secular media bombards us all with images and models of womanhood and manhood that are simply bogus. Meanwhile, in growing numbers of evangelical churches, the presence of strong and godly men seems to have receded in the face of a feminized spirituality. In the affluence of our post-modern Western society, guys typically no longer engage in the kind of struggle for survival that used to turn boys into men. Yet our families and churches need strong, masculine Christian men as much — or more — than they ever have. So how do we revive or recover our threatened masculinity? The place to start, as always, is God’s Word, with its strong vision and clear teaching on what it means not just to be male but to be a man of God.

The purpose of this field guide is to provide straight, clear, and pointed teaching on what the Bible says to men as men. What does it mean for us

FIELD GUIDE

to be the Christian men that we want to be, that our families need us to be, and that God has made and redeemed us in Christ to become? The biblical answers are quite simple, yet very far from easy. My hope is that through this study, you will be enlightened and encouraged and, as a result, the people in your life will be richly blessed.

What follows is a reminder that our first priority as men is our relationship with the God who made us. Then, flowing from God's design in creation, we note three vital principles from the Bible. Finally, we will apply these principles to the main relationships that God provides to men.

First Priority: Your Relationship with God Is Essential

We need to be clear from the start that the only way any man will live out the Bible's call to true manhood is through the blessings of his relationship with God. A biblical view of men begins with God as our Creator: "God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27). Men and women were created by God with equal status and value but different designs and callings. But the highest calling of both men and women is to know God and to glorify him.

We can see the special relationship between God and mankind in the way God created us. Prior to creating man, God brought things into being by his mere Word. But in creating man, God displayed personal investment: "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" (Gen. 2:7). The Lord formed the man with his own hands and created man for a face-to-face relationship of love. This covenant nature of man's creation tells you that God wants to know you and for you to know him. God wants a personal relationship with you. Just as God "breathed" life into the first man, Christians experience the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit that enables us to live in his righteousness. God created man in his own image, to spread his glory on the earth and worship him. Some men today consider worship as something a real guy is not excited to do. However, to know and glorify God is the highest calling and privilege of any man.

This being the case, the first priority for any discussion of biblical manhood is that we commit ourselves to the daily study of God's Word — the Bible — and to prayer. Just as the light of God shone onto Adam's face, God's Word is the light by which we know him and enjoy his blessing (Ps. 119:105).

Immediately after God created the first man, he put Adam to work: "the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man who he had formed" (Gen. 2:8). From the very start, men were to be

ACT LIKE MEN

productive in serving the Lord. After all, what is the first question most men are asked? “What work do you do?” This identification between a man and his work is consistent with the Bible’s picture. Men were created to know God, to worship God, and to serve God in their work. God thus commanded Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” over the other creatures (Gen. 1:28).

Let’s summarize what we learn about Christian manhood from the first chapters of Genesis:

1. God created man, meaning he has the right to tell us what to do.
2. We were made for a relationship with God. True manhood therefore flows from our knowledge of God and his ways.
3. God has placed his Spirit within us, so that we can live to glorify and worship him.
4. God immediately assigned the first man to work, showing that Christian men are to work hard and be productive.

We should never talk about the Bible’s teaching of creation without noting that the first man fell into sin (Gen. 3:1–6) by disobeying God’s command. As a result, we are all sinners who fall short of God’s creation design (Rom. 3:23; 5:19). It is for this reason that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin by dying in our place and rising from the dead to grant us new life. Christian men live not only according to God’s creation design, but also by God’s redeeming grace. However, we should realize that Christ saves us to fulfill the design that was revealed in the first chapters of Genesis for the glory of God and our own blessing. As sinners, our relationship with God is through his Son, Jesus Christ, by the grace that redeems us from sin and enables us to obey God’s Word.

From this first priority flow vital principles for faithfulness as men.

1

PRINCIPLES FOR FAITHFULNESS

The Bible Calls Men to Be Leaders

Most of what we have said is equally true for women as for men, but it is so important that we cannot skip it. But when we look for the distinct calling given to the man, God's creation order highlights our first principle: the masculine calling to *lordship*. In short, the Lord invests men with headship in their relationships, involving both authority and responsibility. God is, of course, the high Lord over all people and things. But men are called to serve God by exercising lordship in the spheres of responsibility he places under us.

With this in mind, one of the best summaries of biblical manhood occurs in a comment the Lord about the patriarch Abraham:

For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him (Gen. 18:19).

Notice that God expected Abraham to exercise authority over his children and household, which refers to everyone under Abraham's charge. Abraham was to lead in such a way as to ensure that his family kept "the way of the Lord" — that is, lived according to God's Word. Notice as well, that God says it is through Abraham's godly leadership "that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Here is a statement that highlights the vital importance of biblical manhood. If Christian men do not lead their families, the blessings that God has promised to believers are not likely to be realized. Of course, everyone is called to keep God's ways in faith and obedience. But the man is distinct in that he is charged to lead and command: he is given lordship by God.

Everything in Genesis 2, which focuses on life as God designed it, points to the leadership that God entrusted to the man. For instance, when God made a covenant with mankind, he gave the command to Adam and not to Eve

ACT LIKE MEN

(Gen. 2:16–17). Why didn't God give his command to both Adam and Eve? The answer is that God commanded Adam, and it was Adam's responsibility to make it known to Eve. Similarly, it was the man who gave names to the various species of animals (Gen. 2:19). If you have the right to name something, you are its lord! Adam even gave the woman her name, Eve, as an expression of God's call for men to serve him through lordship (Gen. 3:20).

Exercising godly lordship requires men to accept responsibility and exercise authority. We find a good example in Ruth 2, when a landowner named Boaz noticed a poor but virtuous woman gleaning in his fields (picking over the little that was left after the harvest). Boaz realized that women in her position were vulnerable and that not all of his men could be trusted. He made inquiries about Ruth and learned that she had a noble character. So he not only permitted her to glean in his fields but also charged his more reckless men not to bother her, and then made provision for her to have something to drink when she got thirsty (Ruth 2:9). This is godly lordship! The man accepted responsibility and exercised authority to ensure that a needy woman was cared for and protected. Boaz had learned the importance of mercy and righteousness through his study of God's Word; these are the very priorities that Christian men discover and learn in their own reading of the Bible. Boaz exercised his God-given lordship to govern his household so that God's will was done, the Lord was glorified, and people were cared for. This is an excellent picture of the kind of lordship to which God calls all men.

What happens when men do not lead? We have already seen God's comment that his promises to Abraham would not come to pass if Abraham did not command his household. Another example is the failure of King David when it came to his family. David is one of the great heroes of the Bible. He slew Goliath and was anointed by God to be king over Israel. He led God's people in battle, established Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and wrote a large portion of the book of Psalms. Yet David was an abject failure in his family, and this neglect of leadership would not only ruin David's life, but undo much of the good he accomplished for the people.

Consider the sons of David, who are a roster of famous scoundrels. The first one we meet is Amnon. This son was so infatuated with his beautiful half-sister Tamar that he sexually assaulted her and then publicly humiliated her. As you read 2 Samuel 13, it is obvious that David should have known his daughter's peril and intervened to protect her. When David did nothing about this crime, Tamar's full brother Absalom took matters into his own hands and slew his brother Amnon, throwing the royal household into turmoil. Again, David did not lead, but allowed Absalom merely to go into exile. From this exile, Absalom plotted a rebellion that almost overthrew David's

FIELD GUIDE

kingdom and required a great battle in which many soldiers died (see 2 Sam. 13–19). Even at the end of his life, David had another rotten son, Adonijah, who tried to usurp the throne from David's heir Solomon (1 Kings 1).

The sad truth is that the reign of David ended in turmoil and chaos because he would not lead his household. How do we explain such foolish behavior? The Bible gives two explanations. First Kings 1:6 includes a note about David's indulgence of Adonijah, which we can assume was true for all of his sons: David "had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?'" David did not take responsibility for his sons and he did not exercise authority over them. He did not find out what was happening in their lives (and more importantly in their hearts) and he did not correct or discipline them. Perhaps David was too busy fighting wars and writing songs to do his job as a father. His failure highlights the importance of men exercising lordship, especially in the home.

But there is another, more penetrating answer to David's failure of leadership. We go back before all these troubles started and discover David's great sin with Bathsheba. Second Samuel 11 provides a warning to Christian men who are tempted to shirk their duties at work and in the home. Israel's army was fighting a war, but David stayed home to relax. With his guard down, he was easy prey to the temptation of lust when he saw the beautiful woman bathing. In a short succession that marks his fall as a man, David called for Bathsheba and took her, even though he knew that she was the wife of one of his best soldiers. When Bathsheba got pregnant, David went so far as to conspire in her husband's death so that he could marry her and cover up his sin.

Do you notice that the sins David's sons later committed followed in the pattern of sins they had seen him commit? David assaulted a beautiful girl, and so did his son Amnon. David conspired against a righteous man and covered it up, laying the path that Absalom later would walk. What is the lesson? Christian men must lead. And our leadership begins with the example of faith and godliness that we set. If we sin — and we do — then we must repent and confess our sin, taking steps to change our evil habits. If we do not set an example of godliness, our calling to lordship in service to God is likely to end up as a sham. And, just like King David, God's blessing will be lost because the man who was called to lead failed to do so.

Before we move on, let's consider some of the things that a godly man does to lead his wife and family:

- He sets an example by believing in Jesus Christ and living sincerely according to God's Word.

ACT LIKE MEN

- He ensures that his family attends a faithful church where God’s Word is accurately taught.
- He reads his Bible, prays, and calls others in his household to do likewise.
- He takes responsibility for his wife and children, pays attention to them, and exercises his God-given authority to encourage them to live rightly.

The Bible Calls Men to Be Nurturers

The Bible is such a valuable resource to men. God’s Word not only tells us what we are to do but also gives us a pattern for how we are to serve and lead as husbands, fathers, and leaders outside the home. We noted earlier the value of what Scripture says about God’s design for men in creation. In fact, one of the most informative statements about biblical manhood occurs in Genesis 2:15, which I have elsewhere referred to as the Masculine Mandate.¹ This verse sets a pattern that we see all through the Bible, giving men two tasks that enable them to succeed as Christian leaders: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

The garden of Eden was a world of covenant relationships that the Lord had designed for mankind. Included was marriage, the family, the church, and even the workplace. The Lord put Adam into this garden and also into the relationships that God had designed for life there.

The two words I want to focus on are “work” and “keep.” Here is the *how* of biblical manhood. The *what* is God-obedient lordship. The *how* is work and keep, two words that set a trajectory for masculinity all through the Bible. The second of these — keep — means to guard and protect (we will consider it in the next section). The first of these commands is work, which means to invest one’s labor to produce a good harvest. In this case, where Adam is placed into a garden, work means that he is to cultivate the soil and its plants so that they grow and become bountiful. Here is the second biblical principle for manhood. The first is that the man is called to lordship. The second is that God’s Word calls men to be nurturers.

The biblical idea of working — meaning to cultivate and nurture — may be the aspect of masculinity that is most out of sync with traditional ideas in our society. Men are often seen as “the strong and silent type,” seldom communicating or showing emotion. This is, however, directly opposed to what God calls men to do in our relationships. Adam’s fingers were to be brown with the soil of the garden; likewise, the hands of Christian men are to be brown with the soil of their wives’ and children’s hearts. Whether a man is at work, talking to someone at church, or leading in his home, he is to take a personal interest and act in a way that is designed to bring them blessing and cause them to grow.

FIELD GUIDE

Have you ever had a male boss who you really respected, who shook your hand and told you that you did a great job? Perhaps it was a coach who told you that he believed in you, or a teacher who pulled you aside and told you that you have real potential. This is male “working” — a distinctively masculine ministry that goes straight to the heart.

My favorite summer job in college was working for a landscaper. Every day we would drive out to a job site — often someone’s home — to plant trees, build garden walls, and put in rows of bushes. It was hard but satisfying work. The thing I liked best was looking in the mirror as we drove away to see that we had accomplished something good and growing. It is this satisfaction God wants men to have in their relationships with people — especially those placed under our leadership and care. We are to take a personal interest in them, give them guidance, get to know their hearts, share our own hearts, and provide the inspiration and encouragement that so often will change their lives.

This mandate for men to cultivate and nurture explodes a serious misconception regarding gender roles. We have been taught that women are the main nurturers, while men are to be distant and uninvolved. But the Bible calls men to the primary responsibility of cultivating hearts and building up the character of people under our leadership. A husband is called to nurture his wife emotionally and spiritually. Likewise, a father is called to be intentional about plowing up and planting in the hearts of his children. Any counselor who has dealt with childhood issues can tell you that few things are more injurious to a child than emotional distance from his or her father. There is a reason so many people are hung up over their relationship with their father: God has given the primary calling of emotional and spiritual nurture to men, and many of us fail to do it well. It is the male arm around the shoulder or pat on the back that God allows to have the quickest access to the heart of a child or employee. It may not fit our preconceived ideas, but men who are seeking to lead according to God’s will must be nurturers.

With this in mind, my favorite verse in the book of Proverbs is Proverbs 23:26, “My son, give me your heart.” Of course, the man who speaks this way must first have given his heart to a son, daughter, or employee. I had the privilege of serving for many years in the United States Army as an armor officer. I look back now on my various commanders, some of whom I would (and did) crawl through glass for, and others who were totally uninspiring. What do I remember about the great commanders? They talked with their officers and soldiers. They laughed, they taught, they corrected and encouraged. They were present and worked hard, and very much wanted

ACT LIKE MEN

their troops to win. You felt like you knew them and they knew you. It is the same with male leadership in every arena. Children want the heart of their father, and when he gives it to them, they give him theirs in return.

Of course, leadership is never all fun and games. There are commands that have to be obeyed. There are corrections and punishments to be given. But a biblical man performs all the tasks of leadership with a personal interest in the good of those who follow and a passionate desire for them to reach their potential. You see such a father cheering his son or daughter during the ball game — not ridiculing or harassing them — having spent hours playing catch or teaching them to hit a ball, but then giving them all the credit when they succeed. When a Christian man “works” in the lives of others — nurturing and building up their hearts like Adam in the garden — the beneficiaries delight in his attention and grow under the influence of his love.

Another way the Bible describes a man’s calling to work and nurture is through the image of a shepherd with his sheep. Psalm 23 talks about a shepherd who is totally invested in the wellbeing of his lambs, leading them, serving them, and providing for all their needs.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (Ps. 23:1–3)

This is the servant lordship to which God calls men in the work of nurturing other people, especially our wives and children. It takes effort, attention, and passionate concern. Of course, these words were ultimately penned about Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). It is the man who can say these words about Jesus, the shepherd of our souls who leads us to eternal life, who has a heart for shepherding other people. Jesus is the greatest example of true manhood, laying down his life for the nurture and salvation of the people he loves so much, even dying on the cross to deliver them from sin.

As we close our discussion of this vital matter of working — nurturing and leading the hearts of those we love — let me give some questions to diagnose how we are doing (and how we want to do!):

- Am I close to my wife and children (or others in important relationships), so that I know and understand their hearts?
- Do the people under my care feel that I want to know them and do I speak to them in a way that encourages and teaches them?

FIELD GUIDE

- Do my wife and children (or others) feel that they know me? Have I shared my heart with them? Do they feel that they can join me in the things that I am passionate about? Do they feel that I am passionate about them and their blessing?
- As I look to the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, what things did he do to show that he cared, to connect with his disciples, and to lead them to spiritual growth that I experience and then imitate?

The Bible Calls Men to Be Protectors

The second part of the Masculine Mandate of Genesis 2:15 is to “keep,” meaning that a man guards and protects what God has placed under his care. This is our third principle for biblical manhood. When David thought about the Lord’s shepherding care of his life, he not only spoke of the Lord leading him but also protecting him: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4). Likewise, the *how* of male leadership involves not only nurturing and encouraging but also standing guard to keep people and things safe.

Another place in the Bible where we see both “working” and “keeping” — building up and making safe — is Nehemiah 4:17–18, when the men of Jerusalem were building the city’s walls. Nehemiah had the men carry a shovel or trowel in one hand and a sword or spear in the other. This is biblical manhood — building up and keeping safe.

Just as the Lord is a great model as a shepherd in Psalm 23, the Lord speaks of his guardian care in Psalm 121. There, the Lord promises that he watches over his people: “he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:5). The psalmist notes that “The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life” (Ps. 121:7). God watches over us to protect us and correct us so that we do not go astray. Here is our example as men who keep what has been entrusted to our care.

To be a man is to stand up and be counted on when there is danger or other evil. God does not desire men to stand by idly and allow harm or permit wickedness. Rather, we are called to keep others safe within all the covenant relationships we enter. In our families, our presence is to make our wives and children feel secure and at ease. At church, we are to stand for truth and godliness against worldliness and error. In society, we are to take our place as men who stand up against evil and defend the nation from threat of danger.

The sad reality, however, is that in many cases the greatest danger from which we need to protect our wives and children is our own sin. I remem-

ACT LIKE MEN

ber counseling a man years ago whose marriage was on the rocks. At one point, he boasted that if a man entered their home with a gun, he would protect his wife: “I would take the bullet for her.” But then, in a flash of insight, he admitted, “Actually, I am the man who enters my home and hurts my wife.” We need to protect people under our care from our own anger, harsh words, self-centeredness, and neglect.

Here are some questions for us to consider with respect to our manly calling to guard and protect:

- Am I aware of the main threats to my wife and children? What am I doing about them?
- Does my wife (or others under my care) feel safe when I am present? What changes should I make to make sure that she does?
- What are my sins that cause harm to other people, especially in my family? Do I care enough about them to deal with my sinful habits? Am I habitually angry? Do I speak abusively or harshly? If so, have I talked with my pastor about these things, seeking to change? Do I pray about these sins? What difference would it make to others if I were to repent of these harmful behaviors?

The Bible Calls Men into God-Designed Relationships

What we have seen so far is the basic biblical architecture for manhood. Men are called to serve and glorify God, exercising lordship in their relationships by “working and keeping,” that is, nurturing and protecting. All of these principles flow from the opening chapters of Genesis and then are reinforced throughout the Bible.

Our final topic in this field guide will consider the contexts in which manhood is lived out, namely, the God-designed relationships found in the Bible. Remember when we saw that God “put the man in the garden” God had created (Gen. 2:8)? We can think of the garden as the covenant world of God’s design in which men and women are to live and bear fruit to God’s glory. Primary among these relationships are marriage and fatherhood, although other relationships (like work, friendships, and the church) are also important. We have made applications to marriage and fatherhood, but let’s focus in a bit more in the next part.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Which part of this vision for manhood challenges the way you think about what it means to be a man?
2. In which of these areas do you need to grow most? Are any of them a strength for you?

2

BIBLICAL MANHOOD IN MARRIAGE

Genesis 2:18 makes an important statement when the Lord observed, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Until now in the creation account everything has been so good! God created and then looked on his work and “saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:25). But now the Creator sees something that is not good — this must be a matter of great importance. The problem God observed was not a flaw in his design but something incomplete. God designed men and women to live together in the holy bond of marriage; this is why the Lord went on to say, “I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). God created the woman not to be a competitor to man, but to be a complement to him.

This clear biblical teaching shows that men are to desire to be married to a godly wife. Unlike what is so common today, men are not to shy away from commitment, spending much of their lives “playing the field.” Instead, a man is to settle down, make a commitment in a relationship with a woman, and start a family. Obviously, there are exceptions when this does not happen, and I do not want to make men feel guilty if they have desired marriage and suffered discouragement. The point is that men are to be pro-marriage. We are to raise our sons with the expectation that they will be husbands, preferably sooner rather than later. Proverbs 18:22 sums up the Bible’s perspective: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”

It is no secret that our generation finds marriage hard to pull off, primarily because we are determined to keep our sins and still expect success. Christian men, who have been forgiven of their sins and who seek to live by God’s Word, should have confidence entering into marriage, so long as our wife is a committed Christian herself. To marry a non-Christian woman is to be “unequally yoked” (2 Cor. 6:14). This metaphor compares two mismatched oxen yoked together so that they cannot pull as a team. The same is true of a marriage in which one partner is a Christian and the other is not. It is one thing to come to faith in Christ while married to unbeliever,

ACT LIKE MEN

in which case we should pray for God to convert our wife while we serve and witness the gospel. But it is quite another for a man who is already a Christian to marry an unbelieving woman.

If we have found the Bible's basic teaching on manhood instructive, then we will find these principles to be vitally important to Christian marriage. The man is to lead by nurturing and protecting. It turns out that this framework fits exactly what the Bible says about husbands in marriage, making this teaching essential for a happy home.

Marital Lordship

First, the Bible is crystal clear that a husband is to provide leadership to the marriage, spiritually and otherwise. You can see this emphasis in what the Lord teaches to godly wives:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:22–24; see also 1 Pet. 3:1–6).

Our first response as men when we read this should be one of humility. God does not tell wives to submit to their husband's leadership because he is smarter, wiser, or more godly — in many cases, he is not! Instead, the reason for male headship in the marriage is God's design in creation. Men are designed to be assertive (think testosterone) while women are called by the Lord to come alongside a man and help him ("I will make a helper fit for him"). These are not personality traits, but a calling in which God designs men to lead in a strong-but-gentle, confident-but-humble, Christ-like way.

Male headship does not mean that the husband makes all the decisions about everything. Christ said that a godly marriage will above all reflect unity: "So they are no longer two but one flesh" (Matt. 19:6). A married couple should seek to come to agreement, and the husband should lead in this endeavor. For instance, a man and his wife should sit down together and talk through their financial goals. In many cases, the woman will have great input and will be better at managing money than her husband. But the husband should lead the financial decision-making, taking the burden off his wife and applying biblical principles about money and giving. A husband and wife should decide together which church to attend, with the husband insisting that a priority be given to faithful Bible teaching. So it goes with every area of married life, the husband is to lead with an aim to godly unity. All these decisions will require prayer, so leadership should

FIELD GUIDE

always be committed to joint prayer and obedience to God's Word.

When we think about “being in charge,” the same passage that tells our wives to submit also calls men to Christ-like, servant leadership: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). How did Jesus love his church? By dying for her! Likewise, a husband should put his wife's interests first, especially her spiritual and emotional needs. When a husband “puts his foot down,” calling his wife to submit, it usually should be to obey biblical teaching or wisdom or for the man to make a sacrifice on her behalf. A husband who leads in marriage with Christ-like self-sacrifice will not often find his wife struggling with submission to his headship.

Marital Nurture

Men are not only to lead their wives but also to “work” them. That is, they are to nurture them in a way that is analogous to Adam's cultivation of the first garden. This means that a husband is to have a plan for the spiritual and emotional blessing of his wife. He is to consider her growth and well-being one of his most important jobs in life. He does not just “marry her and then move on” to other priorities. Rather, he devotes himself all of his married days to building up his wife and encouraging her blessing.

You see this priority in what the Apostle Paul went on to say about marriage in Ephesians 5:28–30:

husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

Paul means that just as a man has an instinct for meeting his own body's needs — he eats when hungry, drinks when thirsty, and sleeps when tired — a husband should develop a reflex response to the needs of his wife. This will inevitably come through in the way that a husband talks with his wife. As a pastor, I have known husbands to speak with their wives in the same way they talked to guys in the football locker room. Don't do this. She is your wife! Men should think before we speak, above all to our wives.

The man's call to nurture his wife means that he needs to know what is going on in her heart. And since women are complete mysteries to men, the only way to learn this is to ask her. Just try this: approach your wife, tell her that you want to be devoted to her nurture, and you would like to know what is in her heart. You can be sure she will tell you what makes her anx-

ACT LIKE MEN

ious, what she is afraid of, what makes her feel beautiful and cherished, and what she prays and longs for. This is useful information for a nurturing husband. A good practice is to pray with your wife every morning, asking her sincerely how you can pray for her. Over time, she will more and more open her heart, trusting your loving ministry, and your nurturing care will bind the two of you together in marital love.

So far, I have mentioned the Apostle Paul's teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5. But the Apostle Peter also has valuable teaching in 1 Peter 3:7. This is in my view the single most valuable verse for husbands:

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

When Peter says we should “live with” our wives, he uses a verb that elsewhere means to “commune.” In other words, we are to share our lives with our wives, not just intersect at meal times and for sex. When he says that we are to be “understanding,” he means that we are to have knowledge about her, primarily the things of her heart. “Showing honor” means to cherish our wives — to say and do things that communicate that she is loved and valued. And we are to remember that our wives are God's beloved daughters — and, yes, if we neglect our wives, God says he will neglect our prayers.

My experience has shown that this principle of “working” — that is, nurturing our wives emotionally and spiritually — is often the missing ingredient in Christian marriages. Men simply do not know that they are supposed to cultivate the hearts of their wives. So for a Christian man to apologize to his wife for neglecting this calling and then to start doing it sincerely (and with her help) will often revolutionize the marriage and bind the couple together as never before.

Marital Protection

The second part of “work and keep” is for a man to protect his wife in marriage. In short, the way a husband acts and talks around his wife should make her feel safe. This, of course, includes physical safety, which a man should ensure for his wife. Christian men especially must protect their wives from their most obvious and harmful sins. For instance, too many men display an explosive anger or speak harshly to their wives, undermining the trust and security of the marital bond. Whether it is anger or some other sinful tendency, we protect our wives by turning to God's grace to replace vices with godly virtues.

FIELD GUIDE

“Keeping” also includes relationship protection and security, which is so important for a healthy marriage. For example, a wife should feel safe with respect to other women. A godly man will not make comments about how attractive and sexy another woman is, and she will not see him gawking at another woman. Paul’s teaching on sexual purity applies especially to husbands: “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Eph. 5:4).

If we want to be happily married, we will not develop close friendships with members of the opposite sex, and we will not get together one-on-one with another woman (this works both ways, as such behavior can only threaten the security of a marriage). If a man has a close work relationship with a woman, he will need to be especially careful to maintain emotional exclusivity with his wife. If he is a pastor (like me) and needs to minister to women in the church, he will be very careful not to become emotionally connected. I have practiced what used to be called “the Billy Graham Rule” and what is now known as the “Mike Pence Rule” for the Christian former Vice President. This rule says that I will never be behind a closed door with a woman who is not my mother, my wife, or my daughter. I will not ride alone in a car with a woman outside my family. I do not get together alone with women at all outside my family, and if I need to have a conversation I insist on a door being open or at least a window looking into the room. This is wise protection for yourself — both against temptation and slanderous accusations. And while some people will think you stuffy or old-fashioned, your wife will appreciate it very much. She will feel safe in the relationship.

Perhaps you are not married but only dating. Then let me encourage you that the biblical pattern for manhood in marriage works great in a relationship that is heading towards marriage. In fact, the best way to develop a marriage relationship is to start practicing now the principles that make a good marriage. This means that the boyfriend should lead the relationship in a sacrificial way. He does not wait for her to prompt a conversation about “where we are in the relationship,” but he brings it up and makes clear what his intentions are (and yes, sometimes this means he says they need to break up). When the couple is together, the guy does not spend all of his time talking about himself, his work, and his sports teams. Instead, he takes an interest in her and seeks to understand her heart. He asks her what things are interesting to her, what she is learning in God’s Word, what her prayer needs are, etc. And he makes her feel safe. This means that he does not pressure her sexually but takes the lead in sexual purity. He talks and acts in a way that makes her feel comfortable. Not only is this biblical pattern a good way to prepare for a godly marriage, it also happens to be the best way to get a Christian woman to fall in love with you!

ACT LIKE MEN

I mentioned earlier how Boaz took responsibility for the wellbeing of Ruth when she was a widow gleaning in his fields. He was kind to her, made sure she was safe, and generously took care of her provision. Is there any wonder that this story ends with the two of them marrying? We read about this in Ruth 3:9, when Ruth approaches Boaz and suggests that they marry: “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” Notice how she put it — she wanted to be Boaz’s wife because of his Christ-like conduct toward her. Obviously, no Christian man can ever take the place of Jesus in a godly woman’s life. But he can love her in a way that reminds her of Jesus. If we follow the biblical pattern of manhood in marriage, our wives will feel this way towards us.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Do you know any good examples of a faithful husband? Discuss what makes him a good example with your mentor.
2. If you’re married, what’s one area for you to grow as a husband? If you’re not-yet married, how can you be preparing to be a good husband?

3

BIBLICAL MANHOOD AS FATHERS

If marriage is the primary relationship that God has designed for a man, fatherhood is probably the most significant role that any man will fill. If a Christian husband is to love his wife like Christ loved the church, then Christian fathers are to imitate the loving character of God the Father in how they raise their children. Fortunately, since God the Father and God the Son read from the same script, the principles we have learned about manhood in general happen to be the keys to being a faithful and effective Christian father.

Fatherly Lordship

A father's authority to command his children is highlighted in the instruction of Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Notice that children should obey their fathers (and mothers) not because they are bigger and stronger and are able to punish but because "this is right." It is God's design for fathers to lead their children and they should be taught to obey on this basis. Moreover, the Bible teaches that learning obedience to parents is essential to a child's success in life. Children obey their fathers "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Eph. 6:3). While a father therefore must exercise authority to his children, giving and enforcing rules, for instance, he also should be tender-hearted and kind: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Fatherly Protection

When discussing the "how to" of male leadership, I have previously considered the "working" before the "keeping." In this case, I want to discuss the father's role in protecting and guarding children first because of the vital importance that we *discipline* our children.

Remember how King David never "displeased" his sons, with the result that they grew up to be rotten insurrectionists? The same thing happened to Eli, the high priest of Israel, with his sons Hophni and Phinehas. These worthless sons were so evil that they committed sexual debauchery outside the very tabernacle, so that God put them to death and Eli's line was

ACT LIKE MEN

cut off (1 Sam. 2:27–34). Eli at least tried to rebuke his sons, but he did nothing to restrain them and they died.

Given these examples, it is not surprising that the Bible commands Christian parents to discipline their children. This means that when they are little, they must be spanked for disobeying their parents (and other sins). Proverbs 13:24 provides both sides of the Bible's calling to discipline children. First is the negative: "Whoever spares the rod hates his son." Then there is the positive: "But he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." If we do not discipline children while their young hearts are still pliable, we are ruining them for later in life — they will not later be able to submit to proper authority. Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom." It is the tactile impression of pain on the bottom that teaches the heart to desire virtue.

I should not need to say that we must never physically hurt our children when spanking. The goal is not to do damage but to make a painful impression. For this reason, fathers must always discipline in self-control, dealing with anger before approaching their son or daughter. Private discipline is better than public spanking, so that we do not shame them. Our goal is for our children to connect what they did wrong with the painful consequences, so we will explain ourselves clearly and then reconcile with them after the discipline is finished.

As our children grow older, spanking loses its impression, so to speak. Some time before adolescence, fathers will start relying on verbal reproofs to correct disobedience and mold a conscience that is tender to God's Word. This reproof is far more effective if we have formed a strong bond of affection with our children. Particularly as our children grow older and can understand more, we should explain clearly the biblical basis for what we are demanding, as well as the life experience that informs our restrictions. Disciplining children is the primary way we protect them from the greatest danger they ever will face — their own sin and folly.

Fatherly Nurture

I wanted to address fatherly discipline first because it comes first, starting from the time our children are small. But disciplinary protection must be connected to fatherly nurture in the form of *discipleship*. Fathers must personally lead their children to faith in the Lord and in the path of growth through their lives. It is the father who first implores, "My son, give me your heart" (Prov. 23:26), who then gains a hearing when the time comes for reproof.

Just as a godly husband wants to know what is going on in his wife's heart, a godly father also is aiming for the heart of his sons and daughters. He

FIELD GUIDE

does not define success in terms of behavior only, but in terms of character and faith. The proverb does not say, “My son, give me your behavior,” or “give me your physical presence.” Discipleship aims at the heart: the desires, aspirations, sense of identity, and purpose. In the nurturing ministry of discipleship, a father seeks a relationship of trusting love and a shared bond of faith in Jesus Christ. It takes persistence, effort, and prayer to reach the hearts of our children. But if we do not aim at the heart, we will never gain it. It is for this reason that we give our own hearts to our children, spending time with them, enjoying good times together, handling adversity as a family, and worshipping the Lord fervently.

I have come up with a four-step approach to reaching the hearts of our children: Read – Pray – Work – Play.

1. Read

A father discipled his children by reading the Bible to them and talking about biblical truths. At its best, this will take place in times set apart for family worship, but also as we are going through our day. Paul says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The only way anyone can ever come to faith in Jesus is by the power of God’s Word. We also want to share the biblical truths that are so important to us with our children and walk with them in the journey of biblical discovery.

Far too many fathers make the mistake of trying to outsource their children’s discipleship. They take them to church, put them in a youth group, and have them attend Christian schools or home school. But no one else can take the place of a father! You don’t have to be a biblical scholar to read the Bible to and with your children (although if fatherhood makes you serious about biblical doctrine, so much the better).

A father who does not have time to read the Bible with his family needs to seriously reflect on his priorities. It does not take long to read a Bible passage at breakfast or after dinner and then discuss it. And as a father reads Holy Scripture to his children, God’s Word binds the hearts of fathers and children together in the unity of truth and conviction.

2. Pray

We nurture our children by praying for and with them. For one thing, a father has a lot to pray about when it comes to his children! His own heavenly Father wants to hear from him and is eager to answer prayers. Moreover, our children need to grow up hearing their mother and father praying for them. Our prayers should include adoration to God and thanksgiving for his blessings. We should be praying for the things we know they need and

ACT LIKE MEN

also for the things they feel. And there is nothing wrong with asking our children to pray for us — sharing with them some of the difficulties we face and expressing appreciation for their love towards us in and through prayer.

3. Work

A father should work with his children. I am not talking about giving them jobs in our workplace, but chores around the house and projects at school or at church. Children love to paint a room with their dad, and even if this means there is going to be mess, there also is likely going to be valuable bonding. Some of the most meaningful work our children do involves their schooling, as well as athletics and musical training. Every time I see a young father out in the yard playing catch with his son or daughter, or teaching them how to swing a bat, I wish I was a younger man and could go back to those golden days. The more we are involved in our children's work in a supportive, encouraging way, the more their lives will be intertwined with ours in a bond of love.

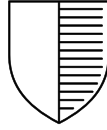
4. Play

Finally, a father connects with his children by playing with them. When they are younger, this means that we get onto the floor and work on a Lego project with them. Or we head out to the playset for a swing. We take an interest in the things they think are fun and we share with our children the things we think are fun. For instance, I happen to be a very fervent supporter of several sports teams, and I have shared this passion with my children (who all cheer for these teams, even if they ended up at a different school). We lament the losses and celebrate the triumphs together and enjoy it greatly.

This is my simple strategy to ensure I am actively and intimately involved in the life of my children: Read, Pray, Work, and Play. I must read God's Word to and with my children regularly. We must bear each other's burdens in prayer and worship the Lord together at his throne of grace. My children need my positive, encouraging involvement in their work (and they need an invitation into some of mine). And we need to bind our hearts with laughter and joy in shared play, both one-on-one and as a family. This all requires time, for time is the currency with which a man purchases the right to say, "My son, my daughter, give me your heart."

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What kind of relationship did you have with your father? What things do you want to emulate from him or other good men in your life?
2. If you're a father, what's an area for you to grow? If you're not-yet a father, how can you prepare to be a good one?



CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, marriage and fatherhood take up a large chunk of a man's relational space, but there are other relationships where the principles of biblical manhood also apply. For instance, we are called to be members of faithful churches. There, like everywhere else, a man is to exercise lordship when God places him in charge, following Christ as a servant leader who employs authority according to God's Word. As we relate to others, we "work and keep" in ways that are appropriate to those relationships. A godly man is an encourager to all sorts of people, and he stands guard over biblical truth and godly practice.

A godly man also has a job. And in the workplace the pattern of biblical manhood continues to prove fruitful. When placed in charge of workers or a department, he takes responsibility and exercises authority in a servant manner. A boss labors to build up his employees, similar to the way a husband nurtures his wife or a father discipless his children. And he takes steps to protect others from corruption, deceit, or toxic environments.

A godly man will often have close friendships, and the pattern for biblical manhood continues to serve as a model. If you examine, for instance, the covenant bond between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel, you will see how they encouraged one another and were there when help was needed. They guarded one another's wellbeing and reputations.

Remember what we said at the beginning about the biblical calling to manhood: it is simple but not therefore easy! Men are called to lordship over the spheres and people placed under them, and they exercise their leadership by "working and keeping" — building people up and keeping them safe.

I would like to conclude by telling the story of a man who made a big impact on me when I was a new believer. I met Lawrence on the night I heard

ACT LIKE MEN

the gospel and came to faith in Jesus. He was an older man serving as a deacon at the door of the church where I had visited. After my conversion, I started attending the church regularly, coming alone to hear God's Word and join in the worship. After a while, Lawrence came up to me, introduced himself, and asked about my faith. He invited me to breakfast where he shared his testimony and taught me how to read the Bible and to pray. Over several years we maintained a cheerful friendship, in which this older believer prayed for me and encouraged me as I grew as a Christian.

I will never forget Lawrence's funeral, after he died of cancer. He was not a prominent man and had little money. But the church was filled for his memorial service. For over an hour, testimonies were given about the impact that this one man had on so many people. Of course, his sons all spoke and his daughter told about how he had loved them and nurtured their faith. People came forward who had been helped by Lawrence, or, like me, who had been disciplined by this veteran follower of Christ. When the funeral was finally over, one of my fellow pastors made a comment that I will never forget. We were quietly reflecting on the solemn occasion we had just witnessed. My friend then said, "You know, it just goes to show what God will do in the life of any man who whole-heartedly consecrates himself to Jesus Christ."

These are the words I want to give to you in concluding this field guide on Christian manhood. Imagine what God will do in the lives of many people if you will trust in him and commit to the pattern of godly masculinity taught in the Bible. Perhaps when you die, the funeral will go on and on as people talk about the blessings they received from you. But we can be certain that while you live, taking up the Bible's calling to faithful men, many people — including those that you love the most — will have been blessed for all eternity because of the Christian man you became by the grace of our loving God.



ENDNOTES

1. Richard D. Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men* (Ligonier Ministries, 2016).



THE
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PROJECT

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