



One of the most important things a father can say to his son is *You got this*. As important as it is for a boy to hear that from his mother, it is even more important to hear it from his dad. It's been said boys can only become men by the instruction and example of other men.

Author Richard Rohr tells a story about two young African bull elephants in a national park that lose control. The young males were adolescents who didn't stick with the herd; they'd push over trees, SUV's, trample other animals, even baby elephants if they were in their way. The young males were causing chaos in the park and some wildlife experts came in to find out why. They realized for some reason the area had lost all the mature male elephants through old age or poachers and these two young bulls were the oldest males left in their territory. But they never learned how bull elephants were supposed to act. So they brought in a couple of older bulls and within weeks the chaos ceased! The older males would flap their ears, stomp their feet and growl when the young males started to act up, and the young bulls quickly learned how a mature bull was meant to behave. Only older males could teach them how to do that.

You see, we guys are born male, but we have to learn to be a man, and we learn that from being with other older men.

But before we can talk about how a boy becomes a man, we need to understand what true manhood is. What's true masculinity? There's a lot of confusion about that today and that's why we've made this one of our Trending Now topics. Skye Jethani asks, "What is biblical masculinity? Because it seems that the men in the Bible, like men today, represent a wide spectrum of gifts, personalities, interests, and callings. Some are warriors, some are artists, some are both. Some lead, others follow. Some are the pinnacle of virility with thousands of wives and concubines, and others are castrated eunuchs affirmed for their faith and courage. Some get naked and dance (David), and others get naked and drunk (Noah). Some defend themselves with swords (Peter), and others remain silent before their accusers (Jesus). Some cry (Jesus), others sing (David), and some even sew dresses for other guys (Bezalel). Some are hunters (Esau), others chill out in tents (Jacob), one made his brothers jealous with his fashion sense (Joseph). So what is biblical masculinity?"

One thing most everyone seems to agree on is there's a crisis of manhood today. This is seen in a variety of ways.

We see it in the whole phenomenon of what's called delayed adolescence in young men. There's an increasing amount of guys in their 20's and 30's stuck in a confused no man's land between boyhood and manhood. They're experts at video games. They don't take responsibility for much at all and have no defining purpose. They prefer hooking up instead of committing to one woman. They coast along without building a career, mooching on friend's couches.

We also see a crisis of manhood in the growing numbers of fatherless homes. About one-third of American children today live without a father compared to just 11% in 1960. The poverty rate in those homes is over four times the rate for children living with dads.

Finally, we see it in the blurring of the lines between male and female. Christians have always believed God created two distinct genders—male and female—both genders equal in dignity and worth, but distinct and complementary. God even points to the differentiation of humans into male and female as that which reflects His image. When we confuse male and female in humans, we're messing with the image of God.

So this is a crisis, and we need to ask the question, What does it mean to be a man? To answer that I want to look at one of the great *You got this* stories in the Bible in 1 Kings 2:1-9. It's the story of King David passing the baton of leadership over the nation Israel to his son, Solomon. David is old and infirmed. One of his sons, Adonijah, asserted himself as King. But David had already promised the throne to his son Solomon. David finally musters up the energy and strength to publicly appoint Solomon his successor. And that happened just in time because soon after that it was time for David to die, and so he calls Solomon to his bedside to give him some last words.

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel'" (1 Kings 2:1-4).

Manhood Involves Being Strong

There are several things here that help us understand what true manhood is all about. Notice David charges him to “be strong, act like a man.” Solomon is to demonstrate his manhood; to do the things men are supposed to do. And that starts with being strong. This was an expression especially used by soldiers to encourage each other before going to battle. When Joshua was tasked with bringing the Israelites into the Promised land, which was inhabited by some very scary people, God repeatedly said to him, *“Be strong and courageous...”* (Joshua 1:6,7,9). Ironically, the same phrase was used by Israel’s enemies, the Philistines, when they realized they were about to be attacked by Israel. They cried out, *“Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”* (1 Samuel 4:9). You can see these are fighting words: “Be strong! Be men, and fight!”

True manhood involves recognizing we’re in a battle, and we must step up and fight. We mustn’t be cowardly and back down. We must be strong. To be a man means you accept the responsibility you have to protect and to fight for what’s right, good and just. You may need to fight for your marriage. You may need to fight for the soul of your children. You may need to fight to provide for your family. You may need to fight for the poor and the weak. We have a group of men in our body who are being very courageous and creative in fighting the sex trafficking industry here in the Bay Area. That’s true manhood!

This means to be a real man you must reject passivity. In fact, this is where the first man (Adam) made his big mistake. You know the story:

God created Adam first. He placed him in a beautiful garden to work it and care for it. He told him he could eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Then God said it’s not good for man to be alone, he needs a helper. So he put Adam to sleep, took one of his ribs and fashioned it into a woman. He brought her to Adam, and he was thrilled to say the least.

But one day the serpent came to Eve and tempted her to eat from the forbidden tree. It says, *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it”* (Gen. 3:6). Did you notice something there? Adam was with her the whole time, but he said nothing and did nothing! That defines passivity—saying nothing, doing nothing. God gave **him** the command about the tree. He should have spoken up and said, “No! Don’t eat that fruit. God warned us about that!” He should have fought. He should have stood in front of his wife, grabbed the snake by the neck and thrown it out of the garden.

That’s why, when God came looking for Adam and Eve, who were hiding from him out of shame, God held Adam accountable. It says, *“The Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’”* *The Lord then said to the man, ‘Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’* Adam tried to blame his wife, but God wouldn’t let him pass the buck, *“What is this YOU have done?”* God said. Adam wasn’t strong. He didn’t fight. He was passive. (Gen. 3:8-13)

Now as men who follow Jesus our strength isn’t in ourselves; it’s in the Lord. So this is a very different kind of manhood than one that puffs out its chest and asserts its own strength. Paul told us *“to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might”* (Eph 6:10). He said, *“I can do all things through him who gives me strength”* (Phil. 4:13). Isaiah wrote, *“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak”* (Is. 40:29). So in an almost paradoxical way we as men must learn to embrace our weakness in order to find our source of true strength.

Not only that, the strength of a man isn’t to be used in the service of self but to unselfishly serve others. What we witnessed last Sunday morning in Orlando wasn’t masculine strength, it was twisted and cowardly. This strength isn’t expressed in abuse, bigotry, authoritarianism or self-aggrandizement, but in true benevolence. When Paul calls men to fight for their marriage in Ephesians 5 he says, *“Love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* This is a strength which serves and protects rather than dominates.

Manhood Involves a Resolve to Obey God’s Word

This leads to the second thing we see here about true masculinity—it involves a resolve to obey God’s word. David says, *“Observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the law of Moses.”* This strength is directly connected to a resolve to obey God. And David says there’s **no** mystery about what God wants you to do; it’s written right there in the law given to Moses. Today, of course, we have more than just the law of Moses. We have the both the Old and New Testaments; not just the law but the gospel as well. All of this is what we men are called to observe and obey.

One of the things David says to motivate Solomon is that by doing this you’ll prosper and the Lord will keep his promise to always have a descendant of David on the throne of Israel. So often as men we think our family will prosper if we just work harder, or if we get that promotion, or if our kid gets into the right college, or if we’re able to buy that house. We do what needs to be done but we compromise or ignore God’s word in the process. When we do that we fail to invest eternally. As men, it’s our responsibility to keep our family on track with God’s word.

Now of course you can say women are called to obey God’s word, too. God held Eve accountable for her sin as well. But, as

I pointed out earlier, Adam had to give the first account. Adam bore a unique and primary responsibility for his family's obedience. There's a leadership responsibility men have in this regard that's different from women. I know that's not a popular thing to say these days, but it's true. And that leadership is always subservient to the word of God. So a man must be in the word, feeding himself from it, letting it judge, correct, guide and encourage his life. If he's married, he bears the primary responsibility to lead his family in a way that's consistent with the word. How does my family spend its money? How do we spend our time? Do we pray together? Are we a committed part of a church community? We did a little research here at CPC and discovered the average family at CPC shows up to church on Sunday about 37% of the time. A little over one-third of the Sundays our families get up and come to church. I'm not trying to make anyone feel guilty here, but I do want especially our men to think about that in light of your family's need for the word of God and the encouragement that comes from other believers.

I know all of us men are a work in progress. David didn't do this perfectly. In fact, in chapter 1 verse 6 it says this regarding his rebellious son Adonijah: *"His father (David) never rebuked him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?'"* And Solomon wouldn't do any better. God's law instructed Israel's kings not to acquire lots of horses for war, or take many wives, or accumulate large amounts of silver and gold (Deut. 17:16-17). But that's exactly what Solomon did. Yet what differentiated David from Solomon is David kept coming back to God. David learned through his failures that God is pleased with a heart broken over sin.

We know as men we often fail. We can be lazy. We can ignore God's word. We disobey him. We hide behind our Eve and blame her. My kids are grown and gone with their own families now. I'm so proud of them but there are mistakes I made and regrets I have. But there's always a way back to God, and that's through repentance and faith. We have more than what either David or Solomon had—we have the gospel. We have Jesus, the One who paid for our failures to lead our family, and the One who sends His Spirit to empower us to keep at it.

Manhood Involves Leading, Providing and Protecting

The third thing that helps us understand what true manhood is all about is found in what David says to Solomon in verses 5-9.

"Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood he stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace."

"But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom."

"And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."

Obviously David is trying to prepare his son for some of the challenges he'll have to face immediately as king. We talk about "unfinished business" and that's what David points to: "Solomon, there are some things you'll need to attend to right away. If you ignore these things you'll pay for it."

First there's Joab. He was David's military general, but he unlawfully killed two of his commanders. He's a loose cannon and Solomon will need to deal with him.

The second case was far happier. The sons of Barzillai took care of David while he was running from Absalom. David is to show kindness to them by letting them eat from the King's table. It's like a royal pension for loyal service.

Finally, David reminded Solomon that Shimei is still around. Again when David was forced to flee Jerusalem, Shimei came out and pelted David with stones, cursing him all the while. The law of Moses forbids Israelites from cursing any other Israelite ruler (Ex. 22:28). To do so was considered a capital crime.

David is saying, "You need to be very intentional and very wise about dealing with both enemies and friends. You need to lead. You need to protect and provide. You need to act. You got this!" And I'm sure this was kind of scary for Solomon. At times, we men have to press through our fears and step out in courage and faith. I like what John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway."

This is particularly masculine. Imagine David giving his last words to a daughter. He certainly would have told her to obey the commands of God, but this part would have been different. When a couple is lying in bed and hear a noise outside, men don't nudge their wife and say, "Honey, go out and see what that is." At least I hope not! And that's because we instinctively know men are called to lead, provide and protect. Solomon had to move toward these pressing challenges and not be passive, and so do we. Instead of ducking out, or standing by, or procrastinating, we need to move toward the action. We need to have a burden of awareness and keep asking ourselves, "Is there any manly leadership needed in this situation?" That doesn't mean being a fool who rushes in, but simply a leader who cares and is willing to act.

Again, this applies not just to the physical but to the spiritual. Paul called Timothy to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12).

- This might mean taking the initiative to befriend neighbors who you'd love to share the gospel with.
- It might mean volunteering in CPCKids or student ministries; we need more men to step up in these ministries.
- It may mean finally dealing with a long standing conflict in your extended family.
- It may mean taking your kids on a mission trip that stretches your collective faith.
- It may mean having a heart-to-heart with your adult son about what it means to lead his own family.

Manhood is Perfectly Seen in the Man, Jesus

All of this talk of manhood reminds me of Jesus. Do you know Jesus was the ideal man? If anyone can show us what true manhood is, it's Jesus.

The Bible says Jesus grew into manhood. He would have gone through all the normal stages of growth and maturity. Remember when he was twelve he was found in the temple talking with the rabbis, who were amazed at his wisdom. Soon after he'd go through a ceremony, his bar mitzvah, where he'd become a "son of the commandment." At this crucial turning point in his life, Jesus shows his insight into the commandments was extraordinary, and his relation to God was unique.

Jesus spent the next 20 years or so in Nazareth, working with his father in his carpenter's shop. Years later, when Jesus came back to Nazareth and taught in the synagogue, the people he grew up with were amazed, *"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"* (Matt. 13:54-55). How often do we think of Jesus as a carpenter with sweat and dust caked on his face, an aching back, and hardened muscles—a man!

The next great event in Jesus' life was his baptism. That was the ultimate *You got this* moment in his life when his Father said to him, *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"* (Luke 3:22). That's what every son needs to hear from his father: "You're my son. You can do this. You've got what it takes. I love you."

After his baptism, Jesus began his public ministry. And as you watch him, you see he didn't always fit all the stereotypes of masculinity.

- He felt things deeply and expressed his feelings. He wept at his friend's grave (John 11:35).
- Unlike the typical male of his day, he honored and protected women. You name it: the woman at the well, the one who poured perfume over his head, the woman caught in adultery, and of course his own mother.
- He also loved children. In a day when children were totally powerless and without rights, he said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"* (Mark 10:14).
- But still, he was a man who moved toward the action. He took on the devil in the wilderness, using the word of God as a sword.
- He took on the religious leaders, calling them wolves in sheep's clothing.
- He confronted his own disciples, calling one of them "Satan" when he tried to deter him from his purpose.
- He cleared out the moneychangers from the temple with a whip.
- Then with infinite courage and faith he took on sin and death by enduring the most painful death imaginable out of obedience to his Father and love for mankind. That's a real man!
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What I want to say to you men today is *You got this!* Reject Passivity. *You got this!* Accept Responsibility. *You got this!* Lead Courageously. *You got this!* Invest Eternally. *You got this!*

Let's now take a moment and pray that the spirit of this same Jesus will shape us as men, as fathers and brothers and sons and uncles.

Our Father and our God, help us to be strong, not in ourselves but in the strength and courage that you provide. Shape us into men who accept responsibility and reject passivity. Help us to move toward that which needs correction, or kindness, or just our presence. Help us be brave, wise, and bold. Help us to be men who love your word, who meditate on it both day and night, and who teach it to our sons and daughters. Keep us from what is a false manhood; one that's driven by selfish pride and hatred and violence. Mold us to be men like Jesus, both strong and meek, both tender and tough. Thank you that we have His Spirit to live within us and to shape us into His image. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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