STEPPING UP
STEPPING UP
A CALL TO COURAGEOUS MANHOOD
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FAMILYLIFE®
Little Rock, Arkansas
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When I was twelve years old, I experienced a “defining moment.” Don’t get me wrong; it wasn’t some uncommon, extraordinary experience. It wasn’t a brush with death. I hadn’t contracted some debilitating disease. Neither had I been traumatized by some predator. It was what my father did and what my mother stopped doing that marked me deeply for the rest of my life. And it happened in less than five minutes.

It all had to do with painting. The family who rented a property my parents owned moved out, and there was some “fixing up” and painting that needed to be done before the new tenants moved in. My father thought this would be a great project for the entire family to tackle, so on a Saturday morning, my dad, my mother, my two older sisters, and yours truly reported for duty. Mom and my sisters were working on the first floor, and my job was to help Pop paint on the second floor. And that was the problem. I never did like to paint. I didn’t then, and I don’t now.

So I had to somehow figure out a way to be free of what I thought was an unnecessary burden. My “ace in the hole” was my mother. Mom was always more sympathetic to her precious little boy than Dad was, and I knew that if I pressed the right buttons, she would rescue her one and only son from spending his Saturday doing something he didn’t want to do. So under the guise of having to use the bathroom, I went downstairs and began to complain to Mom.

While I was in the middle of convincing my mother that I needed to take off and play with my friends, Pop showed up. As I write these words, I am vividly remembering and reliving that moment.

My mother said to my father, “Crawford, CW (my childhood nickname)
is only twelve years old, and he doesn’t need to be here with us all day. He needs to be enjoying himself with his friends.”

Then my father said, “Sylvia, I got this. That boy one day is going to be somebody’s husband and somebody’s father. There are going to be people depending on him. He has got to learn how to do what he has to do and not what he wants to do.”

To my mother’s credit, she looked at me and then at my father, nodded in agreement, and turned away. Pop then turned to me and said, “You take yourself upstairs and paint until I tell you to stop.”

And I did.

Even at twelve years old, I knew that something important had just happened. It wasn’t that I had just lost a little skirmish, and this time I wasn’t going to get my way. The words “somebody’s husband . . . somebody’s father . . .” and “He has got to learn how to do what he has to do and not what he wants to do” kept replaying in my mind. Of course I wasn’t fully aware of the weight of what had happened. In fact, it would be years before I fully appreciated the significance of that Saturday morning. But I did have the sense that what just happened was a game changer.

My mother knew that in order for her boy to become a man, the most important man in his life needed to shape him. Pop knew that in order for his son to provide leadership and stability to those who would count on him one day, “CW” needed to embrace core lessons in manhood, obligation, and responsibility.

A transition took place that day, and I’m so glad it did. In a very real sense, it was what some would call a “rite of passage.” My dad knew that in order for me not to become a fifty-year-old adolescent, I needed to make some intentional steps toward manhood. I can’t tell you how grateful I am
to God for the gift of Pop’s courage, and that he wasn’t passive when it came to my development.

Some years back when I heard my good friend Dennis Rainey give a talk that formed the outline of this book, not only did it bring to mind that Saturday morning almost fifty years ago, but it resonated deeply within me. The message that Dennis unpacks in this compelling book is core and critical to the direction of our families, our churches, and our nation. Perhaps you think that statement is a bit overblown. I can assure you that it isn’t. As a pastor, I witness daily the void and dysfunction caused by men who don’t really know who and what a man is. They’re not to blame. When men do not step up to and embrace the seasons of their lives, it damages hope for those who are following and limits the impact these men will have during their moment in history.

All of us need help in this journey toward authentic, intentional manhood. Thank you, Dennis, for giving us such a powerful, engaging resource that helps us and inspires us to keep moving with courage toward being the men that we can be and that indeed God has called us to be.

—Crawford Loritts
Atlanta, Georgia
WHAT DOES IT TAKE
TO BE A MAN?
I CALL IT COURAGE

Courage is not the absence of fear,  
but rather the judgment that something else is more important.  
—Ambrose Redmoon

It lasted only twenty seconds, but in that short period of time, Gene “Red” Erwin embodied the courage of an ancient warrior.¹

Gene—called “Red” by his buddies because of his wavy auburn hair—was part of an eleven-man crew on board the *City of Los Angeles*, a B-29 Superfortress. On April 12, 1945, their plane was part of a bombing raid on a Japanese chemical plant in Koriyama. One of Red’s jobs was to launch white phosphorous smoke bombs to help the other planes on the raid draw a bead on and follow the *City of Los Angeles*, the lead bomber on the mission.

This was Red’s eighteenth mission, so he knew the drill: open the chute, pull the pin, and release the canister. Eight seconds later, the bomb would ignite when well clear of the aircraft.

But not this time.

For some unknown reason, the first smoke bomb exploded in the drop chute, caroming back into the hull . . . back into Red’s face. White-hot phosphorous, burning at 1,300 degrees, blasted smoke throughout the cabin and raised torturous havoc on Red’s eyes and skin.

Red was literally on fire, and the entire crew was in danger. The smoke bomb itself was eating through the metal of the bulkhead, where the real
bombs were stored. There were two options: watch the fire spread to the other munitions in the bomb bay, or crash into the ocean before everything totally blew up.

Or maybe there was a third alternative, if a man had the courage.

Grabbing the white-hot canister in his right hand, Red Erwin stumbled to the front of the aircraft, weaving blindly by instinct toward the cockpit window. Suddenly, he collided with the navigator’s table that blocked his path to the cockpit. Still afire, he wedged the bomb between his forearm and rib cage, grappling with the spring latch on the table that required both hands to release and lift it. With a last surge of energy, Red scrambled into the cockpit and flung the glowing fireball through the open portal and out into the waiting waters of the Pacific. And then he collapsed in a sizzling heap.

_EVERY MAN ON BOARD WAS SAVED, BUT RED ERWIN’S LIFE HUNG BY A THREAD._

By the time the smoke subsided enough for the cockpit panel to become readable again, the instruments confirmed that the plane was a mere three hundred feet above the ocean’s surface. A few more seconds, and any attempt to pull out of the nosedive would have been too late.

Every man on board was saved, but Red Erwin’s life hung by a thread.

A month after the accident, his body was still smoldering, the phosphorous reigniting from oxygen exposure each time doctors scraped another embedded fleck from his skin. He spent a solid year with his eyes sown shut and endured more than forty surgeries.

Even with a Congressional Medal of Honor hanging around his neck, he would always bear the limitations of a body seared by unimaginable heat.
Yet Red Erwin would live to father four children and hold seven grandchildren in his lap. He would also coach Little League teams, follow Alabama Crimson Tide football, go to church on Sundays, and retire from a long career with the Veterans Administration.

**DUTY UNDER FIRE**

I’ve always loved stories about courage. My favorites are those about men who executed the impossible on a dangerous battlefield or accomplished great things despite obstacles and indescribable hardship—*men who do their duty under fire*.

I believe there’s something in the chest of a man that responds in a unique way to stories of courage. There’s a piece of every man’s heart that longs to be courageous, to be bold and gutsy and etch a masculine mark of bravery on the human landscape. In our hearts, we know that a part of the core of true manhood is courage.

But many men don’t realize that although most of us have not fought on a grisly, smoke-filled battlefield, all of us face battles in life that demand courage.

When you read books or watch documentaries about men who, like Red Erwin, were presented the highest award a soldier can receive—the Congressional Medal of Honor—you notice that the phrase most often repeated by these decorated warriors is “I was just doing my duty.” They don’t consider themselves heroes. They just did their duty in the face of danger. They were scared, but they acted anyway.

“Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do,” said World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker. “There can be no courage unless you’re scared.”

Real courage is doing your duty under fire. And we all face situations
throughout our lives that require that type of courage. Valor at home, protecting our wives and children. Moral courage in the marketplace. Becoming the men God created us to be, despite whatever pressures we face in the world.

**STEPPING UP MEANS OWNING UP**

It’s never too late to step up, even when that means—especially when that means—facing our own failures and setting things right with the ones we’ve wounded. No one knows this better than Michael.

Married less than eighteen months, Michael was already cheating on his wife. He hadn’t held high expectations when he and Angela married; he only hoped their marriage would last longer than his parents’ had—seven years. But he was on course to break that record, in a bad way.

Michael knew his life was a wreck, so he decided that suicide was the way out. Only he couldn’t go through with it. He made it to the bridge, and to the railing, but looking at the swirling water below, he changed his mind and went home.

But his heart hadn’t changed. Soon after his near-suicide attempt, Michael announced he was going to leave. “I told Angela that I didn’t want to have anything to do with her or our marriage,” he says. “I just really wanted to end it.”

Michael moved out, and the next time Angela saw him was when they met at the courthouse to file the divorce papers. They discovered that a paper was missing, so they didn’t file for divorce that day. And then, instead of continuing with the divorce proceedings, Michael started visiting his wife at the apartment.

“We talked a lot,” Angela says, “and he shared more of what he was feeling.”
Michael ended the affair. Angela forgave him. They gave their marriage another try. They even moved to another city to begin a new life together. Angela was confident that her husband’s infidelity would never happen again.

Sadly, she was wrong. Angela was six months pregnant when Michael confessed his second affair in two years. It had been going on for about four months. He said, again, that he wanted a divorce and that she should go live with her mom and dad.

A month or so after Angela and Michael separated for the second time, Angela’s mother heard a radio advertisement for our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway and offered to send Michael and Angela. At first Michael said he didn’t want to attend. The divorce papers had already been completed. He just wasn’t interested. But a few days later, after seeing the ultrasound pictures of their baby girl, Michael agreed to give it a try. The realities of fatherhood awakened something in him, calling him to stay rather than run.

At the conference, “the walls came down” for Michael. He had allowed pent-up resentment to form a barrier between himself and his wife. “I didn’t understand a lot of what God’s purpose was for my life,” he says, “and I definitely couldn’t understand what His love meant.” When the speakers discussed the difference that Christ can make in a person’s life, Michael recalls, “For the first time I decided to trust Jesus Christ with my life and marriage.”
Michael began taking steps of courage, one after another. On the Saturday night of the conference weekend, he called Angela’s parents and apologized for the poor decisions he had made and for what he had put them through. Then, several months later and after intense rebuilding of trust, he and Angela renewed their wedding vows. Sometimes it takes courage to do what’s right.

Red Erwin’s and Michael’s stories are about courage. Both men stepped up. Red’s bravery might be more obvious and celebrated, but Michael’s is no less heroic. Despite his failures, Michael owned his responsibility and rescued his marriage. Asking forgiveness and becoming a responsible husband and father was a brave, bold step, and it worked.

AN INVITATION TO THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

In the pages that follow, I’m going to give you a very simple yet powerful vision for what it means to be a man all the way to the finish line. I’m going to challenge you with critical decisions that every man must make during five distinct stages or “steps” of manhood. For those of you who are stuck on one of the “lower” steps, I’ll share practical ways you can get unstuck and step up to the next level. And I’ll talk about what every boy and young man needs from a dad, a grandfather, an uncle, a brother, or an older man.

I’m even going to talk about a sensitive subject for some of you: how a man is designed to relate to God.

Be prepared for some conflicting thoughts and emotions as you wade through this book. A friend who read an early version of this manuscript wrote to tell me that reading it “forced me to walk down four parallel paths at the same time.”
The first path, he said, involved looking at his own life and his father’s interactions with him. On the second path, he thought about “the man I was, the man I am, and the man I hope to be one day.” The third path required examining his relationship with God. He realized where he fell short but was reminded of God’s love and forgiveness.

The fourth path, he said, was the most important for him. It meant looking at the legacy he would leave behind. “What will my children say about me, my life, my purpose, and my relationship with God? The question is, am I living for me, money, or God? Do I really put Him first, or is that just religious talk?” He realized he was living too much for himself—and he was grateful to learn that lesson before it was too late.

You may find yourself digesting this book in much the same way. You will think about your own childhood, about your father, and about the good and not-so-good choices you’ve made over your lifetime. My hope is that by the time you finish, you will be encouraged to step up and be the man on your battlefield.
A few years ago, I was sitting at dinner with about eight other men who had invited me to their duck-hunting club. Everything about the lodge oozed with rustic manhood. Thick four-foot logs blazed and snapped in the fireplace. Above the massive mantle, a half-dozen mounted mallards were “cupped,” ready for landing in a watery thicket. The meal set before us was—what else?—meaty, succulent servings of waterfowl. A glance in any direction revealed a whole roomful of boots, belt buckles, and boisterous laughter.

The group at our table, like most of the others, consisted of guys who didn’t know each other. Many hadn’t met before this night. So the conversation, not unexpectedly, gravitated toward thoughts on the next day’s hunt to highlights of previous exploits, embellished with all kinds of noises and sweeping arm gestures, the stories growing bigger with the telling.

Sure, there was some male bonding going on. We were partners in forks and knives, soon to be shotguns and hunting vests. And though the conversation was a little more interesting than everyday talk, it was still exactly what you’d have predicted. Bring any bunch of guys into this same setting, and the only difference would be in the details. Different faces talking the same stuff.

Maybe it’s because I’m in my sixties and can get away with it, or maybe
it’s because I’ve heard all of this before, but I’ve found that as I grow older, I tire of disposable small talk much more easily. So after asking permission of our host, I popped out with a question I knew would change the tone around the table. It’s a question I love asking men: *What’s the most courageous thing you’ve ever done?*

When a man pulls back the veneer and asks a penetrating question like this, an awkward silence can suddenly descend, sucking the words right out of the room. Men’s brains sort of catch and hang up. You can almost see them spinning and searching, trying to process. And yet I’ve discovered that even though the responses are often slow in coming, it’s a question men truly love to answer.

I’ve heard stirring stories of men doing their duty at key points in their lives. Being faithful to their wives when nobody was looking. Giving up pornography and confessing to their wives. Tackling difficult issues with their children. Doing what is right in the workplace, even when it’s not convenient or profitable.

THE MAN WHO CLAIMS HE’S NEVER DONE ANYTHING COURAGEOUS DOESN’T UNDERSTAND WHAT COURAGE REALLY IS.

Many men have told about conquering their fears to step up and square their relationships with their fathers: looking a father in the eyes and forgiving him, honoring a father who didn’t always deserve it, disagreeing with a father on a major decision, and standing their ground.

And yes, I’ve heard some phenomenal stories of war—heroic soldiers who grabbed grenades in midair and threw them back at the enemy!
I’ve determined that the man who claims he’s never done anything courageous doesn’t understand what courage really is—or how often he faces decisions that require courage.

It takes courage to step up.

**FIVE STEPS OF A MAN’S JOURNEY**

A number of years ago, I was asked to give a “man-up” wheel alignment to a group of 125 guys. A number had been acting like teenagers, and I was asked by the leadership of the organization that they were part of to call them to step up to their responsibilities as men.

I spoke to these men about the five stages of a man’s journey through life—boyhood, adolescence, manhood, mentor, and patriarch—and his responsibilities at each stage. Sensing that these men needed a visual illustration of my message, I decided to talk about the first stage—boyhood—while standing on the first step of the stairs that led upward to a platform behind me. As I continued through my message, I moved up a step when I described each new stage.

As I spoke I could tell that the men were really connecting with this concept of stepping up. By the time I finished my message with a challenge to continue leaving a legacy even during the final stage of life, I found myself standing on the top step. Without having planned it, I’d given these men a simple visual illustration and vision for being a man.

The group morphed before my eyes. Slouching men were now sitting up straight. Heads up. Jaws set. Chests out. Somehow these good guys were being encouraged to become better men. Courageous men.

In the remainder of this book, I will talk more about these five stages of manhood. Each step offers its own set of challenges and opportunities, but
one thing remains the same: no matter where you are in life, God calls you
to do your duty, sometimes under fire. He calls you to courageously set
aside any obstacle—your fears, your insecurities, your selfishness and sin—
and step up to fulfill the responsibilities He has given you.

A NORTH STAR

As I’ve studied the subject of manhood over the past three decades, I’ve looked
for the very finest definitions of true manhood. If a man is going to step up to
manhood, he needs to understand what he’s stepping up to be and do.

Two of my favorite definitions offer men a “North Star” to navigate
through life. The first is from my friend Robert Lewis, founder of Men’s
Fraternity, a modern-day men’s movement being used in thousands of
churches, businesses, and prisons. Robert provides a working definition of
manhood as the foundation for his curriculum: “A real man rejects passivity,
accepts responsibility, leads courageously, and expects God’s greater reward.”

The other definition comes from pastor and author John Piper: “At
the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to
lead, provide for, and protect women in ways appropriate to man’s differing
relationships.”

Note that each writer emphasizes that a real man is active in fulfilling
his responsibilities. Initiative is at the heart of manhood.

That’s why I talk about stepping up to your responsibilities as a man.
When you step up, you assume responsibility for your family and for the
assignment God has given you. It means you are an initiator, setting aside whatever inhibits you and passionately seizing your assignment.

What’s the opposite of stepping up? Standing still . . . lying down . . . becoming a couch potato. Male passivity is a disease that robs a man of his purpose while it destroys marriages, ruins families, and spoils legacies. A passive man doesn’t engage; he retreats. He neglects personal responsibility. At its core, passivity is cowardice.

Interesting, isn’t it, that we don’t talk much about cowards? No man wants to be labeled a coward. Instead, we instinctively value and appreciate men who seize the moment and take action—men who step up to responsibility and inspire others in the process. We cheer the quarterback who leads his team to a comeback in the fourth quarter, the firefighter or police officer who rescues others at his own peril, the businessman who elevates integrity over profit, and the dad who takes a stand and protects his family.

**MANLY MEN**

In the days that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, I was impressed by the stories of courageous men who ran toward those burning twin towers and risked or sacrificed their lives to help others. Peggy Noonan nailed it in her piece for the *Wall Street Journal* when she wrote that “men are back”:

> A certain style of manliness is once again being honored and celebrated in our country since Sept. 11. . . . I am speaking of masculine men, men who push things and pull things and haul things and build things, men who charge up the stairs in a hundred pounds of gear and tell everyone else where to go to be safe. Men
who are welders, who do construction, men who are cops and firemen. They are all of them, one way or another, the men who put the fire out, the men who are digging the rubble out, and the men who will build whatever takes its place.

And their style is back in style. We are experiencing a new respect for their old-fashioned masculinity, a new respect for physical courage, for strength and for the willingness to use both for the good of others.

You didn’t have to be a fireman to be one of the manly men of Sept. 11. Those businessmen on flight 93, which was supposed to hit Washington, the businessmen who didn’t live by their hands or their backs but who found out what was happening to their country, said goodbye to the people they loved, snapped the cell phone shut and said, “Let’s roll.” Those were tough men, the ones who forced that plane down in Pennsylvania. They were tough, brave guys.

Those days didn’t last long, but for a time, men were revered and honored for being manly. We had been attacked, and men did what men do: They protected and defended, and they took on the enemy. They enlisted. They fought. Many gave their lives.

Bob Peterson, my father-in-law and a World War II veteran who earned a Purple Heart, wanted to go fight the enemy. Even at age eighty he said, “I wish I could re-enlist and go fight for my country.”

**SEIZE THE MOMENT**

Men today are realizing that another crisis is upon us. There are no bullets or bombs, but we are on a battlefield all the same. It’s a fight for our families
and our future. And for this fight we need men who are willing to bravely step up and be the tough, courageous men God has designed them to be.

Winston Churchill is often quoted to have said, “There comes into the life of every man a task for which he and he alone is uniquely suited. What a shame if that moment finds him either unwilling or unprepared for that which would become his finest hour.”

Every man has a task for which he is uniquely suited. You may have already discovered this—or you may be yearning for purpose or direction. Whether you are a young man or are nearing the end of your life, my charge to you is this: press into the battle, fill your lungs with smoke from the front lines, and finish strong. Be prepared to shine when presented with your finest hour.
WHAT ROBS MEN
OF COURAGE?

Most of our obstacles would melt away if,
instead of cowering before them, we should make
up our minds to walk boldly through them.

—Orison Swett Marden

In 2003, Hurricane Isabel slammed into the East Coast of the United
States, lashing North Carolina and Virginia, then moving northward all
the way to Canada, leaving sixteen dead and cutting power to six million
homes. The edges of the hurricane passed through Washington, DC,
prompting the president and members of Congress to find safer quarters.

That was not the case at Arlington National Cemetery, where guards
have relentlessly stood vigil at the Tomb of the Unknowns every hour of
every day since July 1, 1937. When the hurricane hit, the soldiers remained
at their posts even though they were given permission to seek shelter.¹

That’s what a soldier does. He acknowledges the storm, but he doesn’t
give in to it. He stands firm.

As a friend told me, “If these men can stand guard over the dead, how
much more important is it that I stand guard over the living—my wife and
children?”

Like these soldiers, we are called to stand and do our duty while staring
down the very storms that seek to rob us of courage, taunting and tempting
us to neglect our duty and abandon our post. These storms are packing some power. Are you ready for them?

**STORM NO. 1: DAMNABLE TRAINING BY FATHERS**

I once met a man who grew up in a remote section of our country. He admitted that the only advice he received as a boy from his father about women was

- Get ’em young.
- Treat ’em rough.
- Tell ’em nothing.

I wonder how that advice worked for him in his marriage.

You could say this is a legacy of the “strong, silent, tough man” image often passed down from father to son. This is the type of misguided training in manhood that has corrupted so many men as the leaders in their homes—selfish men who control their wives and children so that their own needs are met.

And that’s just one part of the problem. Many boys grow up with fathers who are distant and passive. Fathers who rarely engage their families, and when they do, their half-hearted attempts to train their sons may promote irresponsible, or even immoral, behavior. Like the father whose idea of sex education for his twelve-year-old son was to take him to a strip joint. There they sat for three hours as the women did their thing onstage. No words were spoken. When they arrived home later that night, the dad told his wife, “There, I did it! Now I’m going to bed.”

Another son told me about the knock at his door as he packed to go to
college. His father handed him a small paper bag with this sage advice, “Don’t be foolish son—use ’em.”

You could likely tell your own story of how you were trained or abandoned by your father. Too many men today were raised by fathers who didn’t step up to their responsibilities. Is it any wonder we have a generation of men who feel lost and aimless, not knowing how to face their fears or think rightly about themselves, women, and their own passions?

**STORM NO. 2: FATHERLESS FAMILIES**

The relentless, howling winds of a culture of divorce have uprooted the family tree, and with it at least two generations of men. With our high divorce rates and the increasing number of births to single women (nearly four out of ten children are born to an unwed mother), the number of children in the United States who live in a single-parent household has more than doubled since 1978.

*The greatest predictor of a child dropping out of high school, committing a crime, and going to prison is a home without a dad.*

Children are the innocent victims of this raging storm. The bottom line: dad is AWOL in far too many homes today. This phenomenon has prompted David Blankenhorn, founder of the Institute for American Values, to pronounce that the fatherless family “is a social invention of the most daring and untested design. It represents a radical departure from virtually all of human history and experience.”
The social implications of fatherless families are endless. For example, the greatest predictor of a child dropping out of high school, committing a crime, and going to prison is a home without a dad. Many young people grow up today in areas where the only adult male role models they know are live-in boyfriends or gang leaders. The fallout has only just begun: a crop of weak young men and frustrated women who are looking for real men.

One of the greatest challenges any boy could endure is trying to become a man without a father to show him how. How can a boy know what it looks like to behave as a man, love like a man, and be a man in the battle if the main man in his life has abandoned him?

My friend Crawford Loritts works with young men to build their skills as leaders. He writes that the issue of courage keeps coming up in their conversations:

Many of [these young men] grapple with fear. . . . I think that the dismantling of our families over the past fifty years or so has almost institutionalized fear and uncertainty. Divorce, the rise of single-parent households, and the tragic assortment of abuse and dysfunction in our families [has] produced a generation with many young people who are afraid of risk, and afraid to make mistakes.

So many of our young men grew up in homes in which they had limited or no contact with their fathers, or they had dads who were detached and didn’t provide any meaningful leadership. We are left with a legacy of men who in varying degrees have been feminized. They are uncertain about who and what a man is, and how a man acts and behaves. They are fearful of assuming responsibility and taking the initiative in charting direction.
STORM NO. 3: A CULTURE OF CONFUSION

My son came home one weekend from his university—a large southern school not exactly known for being the center for liberal thought—and shared with me that he had been taught in class that there weren’t two sexes but five: male, female, homosexual male, homosexual female, and transgender. No wonder young men are confused and young women are left wondering where the real men are! We’re living in a multiple-choice culture: are you an A, B, C, D, or E? Male sexuality and identity have become a bewildering array of options.

Think of what it must be like for young boys growing up today. Media outlets and educational elites attack the traditional roles of men and claim that a man who seeks to be a leader in his family is actually oppressing his wife and children. Our culture is permeated with sexuality, where children are exposed to explicit messages and distorted images at a far younger age than their parents were. The educational system doesn’t seem to know how to teach boys, and as a result, girls are leaping ahead in test scores, college enrollment, and graduation rates. Boys are increasingly medicated because their parents don’t know how to channel their masculinity, adventure, and drive.

Is it any wonder that boys grow up so confused?

“I DON’T KNOW HOW TO DO FAMILY”

In the wake of these storms lies a generation of men who don’t know how to be men. They don’t know how to have real relationships—with women, with their children, or with other men. And many grow up with what I call a courage deficit—they have little idea what courage looks like in a man, or
what types of courageous choices they need to make as they move through their lives.

One of these men came to my front door one Saturday morning. I’ll never forget him standing sheepishly in the doorway. “Mr. Rainey, in the past couple of years, I’ve gotten married and had two children,” he said, “and I’ve determined that I don’t know how to do marriage. And I don’t know how to do family. Could you help me?”

This young man articulated what millions of young men are feeling today—inadequate, fearful, angry, and in desperate need of manhood training and vision.

**Stepping Up**

The Bible tells many stories of good men behaving badly—single men, married men, and fathers gone mild or gone wild through compromise, lust, murder, jealousy, anger, passivity, or cowardice. Scripture paints men as they really are, hiding none of their blemishes or barbaric ways. The honesty of Scripture is one of the reasons I knew that the Bible would be the place to go to learn what a real man should be and do. I began looking through the Scriptures, focusing on passages that talk about men and manhood, and along the way, I discovered five prevailing themes.

1. *A man controls his emotions and passions.* Whether single or married, a real man tames his passions. He doesn’t abuse women and children; he protects them. He keeps his hands off a woman who is not his wife, and he treats his wife with love, respect, and dignity. He keeps his eyes off pornographic images. He protects a single woman’s virginity and innocence. He’s not a jerk defined by his exploits below the waist. He’s a man with a heart, head, and conscience.
2. **A man provides for his family.** First Timothy 5:8 tells us, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” I find that most men feel a natural sense of responsibility in this area, but many don’t seem to understand that providing for their families means more than meeting physical needs. It also means taking responsibility to provide for emotional and spiritual needs. A father should train his children and prepare them to become responsible adults who know how to negotiate the swift and sometimes evil currents of the culture.

3. **A man protects his family.** Borrowing an illustration from John Piper and Wayne Grudem pictures the essence of masculinity: When you are lying in bed with your wife, and you hear the sound of a window being opened in your kitchen at 3:00 a.m., do you shake your wife awake and say, “The last time this occurred, I was the one who took our baseball bat and investigated to see if someone was breaking into our house. Now it’s your turn, sweetheart. Here’s the bat!”? No! That’s when the man gets up.

But being a protector calls for more than ensuring physical safety. Proverbs 4:10-15 describes a father who protects his son by passing on wisdom, helping him build godly character, and teaching him to reject the lies and temptations of the world. This father is protecting not only his son but the generations to follow as the wisdom he shares gets passed on and on.

4. **A man serves and leads his family.** Those two words—serve and lead—may seem like a contradiction, but they are inseparable according to Scripture.

The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is the head of the wife,….” But he quickly puts to rest any notions that this leadership allows any form of selfish male dominance as he completes the sentence.
with “as Christ also is the head of the church.” Then the passage goes on to say that husbands should love their wives “just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (verse 25).

This paints a picture of leadership that is contrary to how the world views it. A man is called to be a servant-leader—to take responsibility for his wife and children and to put their needs ahead of his own. He is called to demonstrate selfless, sacrificial love—the type of love we see in God toward His children.

5. A man follows God’s design for true masculinity. Micah 6:8 tells us, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The core of a man’s life should be his relationship with God. The man who walks humbly with God is motivated and empowered to step up and assume the difficult responsibilities that come his way.

You see, a courageous man is never off duty.
1. What is your favorite story about courage, either true or fictional?

2. Do you agree with Eddie Rickenbacker, “There can be no courage unless you’re scared”? What does fear have to do with courage?

3. What events and circumstances in today’s world might make men afraid?

4. Like Michael (in chapter 1), men must sometimes show courage by “owning” their personal mistakes and failures. Why is it especially difficult to be courageous when we’ve brought hardship to ourselves and our loved ones?

5. Why is it important to own up to our mistakes and failures?

6. What is the most courageous thing you’ve ever done?

7. What makes passivity so cowardly?

8. Three “storms” that rob men of courage were identified in chapter 3. Which of these storms do you relate to? What other storms would you add to the list?

9. What effect does a man’s relationship with God have on his ability to live courageously?
Chapter 1


Chapter 2

3. Several variations of this quote have been attributed to Sir Winston Churchill, 1874-1965.

Chapter 3


Dennis Rainey is the president and a cofounder of FamilyLife (a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ) and a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. For more than thirty-five years, he has been speaking and writing on marriage and family issues. Since 1976, he has overseen the development of FamilyLife’s numerous outreaches, including the popular Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. He is also the daily host of the nationally syndicated radio program FamilyLife Today. He and his wife, Barbara, reside in Little Rock, Arkansas, and have six adult children and sixteen grandchildren.
For years, Dennis Rainey’s favorite question to men has been . . .

“What’s the most courageous thing you’ve ever done?”

As men, all of us face decisions in life that demand courage. Big or little, complex or straightforward, these choices—let’s call them battles—matter a great deal. One courageous choice leads to another; tomorrow’s integrity depends on today’s bravery.

Renowned author, speaker, and radio host Dennis Rainey tackles the call to living, breathing manhood head-on, offering a simple yet powerful vision for what it means to be a man who truly conquers, and truly wins.

Rainey identifies five stages of a man’s journey through life—boyhood, adolescence, manhood, mentor, and patriarch—and examines a man’s responsibilities at each step. He calls men to reject passivity by embracing courage.

You do have what it takes.