

April 6, 2014

Act Like Men

1 Corinthians 16:13

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

On a crisp October day in 1555, Hugh Latimer and Nicolas Ridley walked out the doors of Bocardo Prison in Oxford, England. The morning sunlight was like a thousand October mornings before. This day, however, was a day destined to stand out among the thousands. These two men, refusing to recant their personal faith in Jesus Christ, would die a terrible death that morning. They would be burned at the stake. We can only imagine what crossed their minds that crisp autumn day as they were leaving their families and their friends to die a martyrs death in the fire. But we do know some of what they said in those last moments. We know as they approached the stakes set in the middle of the firewood piled high for their execution, Hugh Latimer turned to Nicholas Ridley and said, ***'Be of good cheer Ridley. Play the man! We shall this day light such a candle in England, by God's grace as I trust shall never be put out!'***

Paul says 'Act like men'. Hugh Latimer encourages us to 'Play the man'. What does that mean? How do we do that? What is it that makes a man? What does a real man look like? The sad truth is that most guys don't really know. The image of a man we get from the media and public opinion today is usually either a weak, compliant, slightly effeminate guy; or an aggressive, macho, beer-guzzling dictator. Adding to the problem is the current confusion over gender; as if there were more than two. In fact applications for social services and colleges now have boxes for male, female and other. Dartmouth college has a gender neutral policy for housing that says *'Dartmouth College seeks to provide a living environment welcoming to all gender identities; one not limited by the traditional gender binary. Gender neutral housing allows for same-gender, opposite-gender or other-gender identities to live together regardless of biological sex.'*

It's no wonder that men today don't know how to be a man; or women don't know what a real woman is. There is a cacophony of competing voices attempting to define the issue, but few compelling role models and no definitive explanation. One of the results of this is that young men today are prolonging adolescence. They're doing it residentially: one-third of men today in their 20's and 30's live with their parents. That's an increase of 100% in the last 10 years. They're doing it professionally: men ages 18 – 42 will change jobs or careers an average of 11 times. They're doing it recreationally: the average age of a video gamer is 35 years old. And when they stop fondling the controller, they turn to internet porn: every second of every day, \$3000 is spent on pornography.

Here's the deal: you get a computer, you get a manual; you get a car you get a manual; you get a chainsaw you get a manual. Think of the Bible as an owner's manual for masculinity. The measure of what it means to be a man is found within its pages. What is the measure of a man according to God? There are many, many things the Bible tells us; But this morning I want to focus on four biblical word pictures that describe what a man is. Four word pictures that first describe our heavenly Father. Four images that are reproduced in His creation who are created in His image and in His likeness. A king, a warrior, a priest and a shepherd. Real men, godly men, ought look like their father.

First of all He looks like a king. Our God is the King of kings and Lord of lords and His Son Jesus Christ is seated on His throne at God's right hand. Psalm 24:8 says, *'Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord, invincible in battle.'* He is a king. And Psalm 45 tells us that the King's sons are supposed to be kings like their father: *In place of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them [kings] in all the earth.* Psalm 45:16 And as this verse suggests, kings should have children – they're supposed to be **fathers** - with a father's heart. *Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.* Psalm 68:4-5

But that message is not getting through to men today. Fatherhood is in decline. In 1960, the percentage of children living in fatherless families was fewer 17%. Today, that total has risen to over 40%. Four out of ten children in America are being raised in homes without their fathers and soon it may be six out of ten. An article in Psychology Today in 2011 stated: *"America is rapidly becoming a fatherless society, or perhaps more accurately, an absentee father society. The importance and influence of fathers in families has been in significant decline since the Industrial Revolution and is now reaching critical proportions..."*

Almost 75 percent of American children living in fatherless households will experience poverty before the age of eleven, compared to only 8 percent of those raised by two parents. Children living in homes where fathers are absent are far more likely to be expelled from or drop out of school, develop emotional or behavioral problems, commit suicide, and fall victim to child abuse or neglect. The males are also far more likely to become violent criminals. As matter of act, men who grew up without dads currently represent 70 percent of the prison population serving long-term sentences. 60 percent of America's rapists, 72 percent of teenagers charged with murder, and 70 percent of long-term prison inmates grew up without fathers. Teenage girls are beginning to appear more often as the perpetrators of violence and the average age of youth appearing in court is decreasing from 15 to 13. In fact, ***father-absence is statistically linked to every negative social trend***. It is apparent that fathers, and father-figures where the original is not there, are not only highly desirable, they are indispensable for a healthy stable society.

How did this happen? Why are so many of our nation's children growing up without a full-time father? There are several reasons: a narcissistic world view that values self-gratification and self-fulfillment over sacrifice; a culture that promotes a me-first philosophy and values contracts over covenants; a society that embraces the idea that fathers are superfluous – their contributions to the family can easily be performed by two women, or two men, or super single moms. But I believe most of the blame can be laid at the door of the churches. A healthy, biblical view of manhood is not being passed down from generation to generation.

Men are not being taught how to be men. They've not had the biblical model held up to them and modeled for them in the church. They've not had men in their lives that actually believed that Jesus was the God-man who lived a perfect life, died a brutal death, and rose again, triumphant over sin and death and hell. Men who believe this, and believe it happened, understand that it has implications on their lives. That they are not their own – they were bought with a price. And they can't afford to waste their time by spending it on themselves. They have a higher purpose than self-gratification. They have a fatherhood to aspire to; they have children who need a father's hand and heart in their lives. And they have a mission on earth to fulfill given to them by their heavenly Father.

And don't make the mistake of thinking this just applies to married men. This father image goes beyond the family. Paul, as far as we know, never married – and yet he could tell the Corinthians, *For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul was a father to young men like Timothy, whom he calls his child. And he invested his life in Timothy by teaching and training and mentoring him. And he taught him to reproduce that in others: *'...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.'* 2 Timothy 2:2 One of the reasons the church loses its way and drifts off mission and stops being a salty influence in the world is because older men stop investing in younger men. We need men who know how to live godly, how to run well, how to finish well, how to stay married, who will father the next generation of boys and teach them how to be men.

The second thing about a king is that he is a leader. *Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought in Israel.* 1 Chronicles 11:1-2a A king leads. The back story here is that at one time Saul was the king – but he didn't lead. Everybody knew the real leader was David, even though he didn't have the position or title. It was David who led the armies of Israel out to battle. It was David who took the initiative. Saul just sat back. People need someone to follow and as we all know, everything rises and falls on leadership.

A leader leads, he takes charge, he is the initiator. In fact one of the Hebrew words for '**man**' means '**piercer**'. He pierces through the thick fog of the unknown where others are afraid or unwilling to go. He leads the way into previously uncharted territory. In his book, 'Tender Warrior', Stu Weber fleshes this thought out. In the old television show '**Wagon Train**', there was a steely-eyed, square-jawed buckskin-clad scout named Flint McCullough. Says Weber, 'He was the first to smell danger, dodge the arrows, hear the muted thunder of far away buffalo herds, and taste the bite of distant blizzards riding on the prairie wind. It was up to him to spot potential hazards, discern lurking enemies, and pick out the best and safest trail for the wagons to follow.' The writer of Hebrews gives us this picture of Jesus as the heavenly Flint McCullough, calling Him the **archegos** of our salvation – the initiator, the leader, the pioneer of our salvation. He went first, taking on sin and death and triumphing over them in resurrection power – and He paved the way for all those who follow.

Leaders are those who blaze the path for others to follow. Men are built to lead – not to cower in the rear. Men, you need to be leading in your relationships – you need to lead in your families, with your children. You need to be out front. You need to be the first to spot potential hazards, discern lurking enemies, and pick out the best and safest trail for the wagons to follow.

A king exercises authority. He is the governing authority and he is responsible for the correction and discipline of those under his authority. *'...for the LORD reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.* Proverbs 3:12 And Paul tells us: *"Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* Ephesians 6:4 What makes your children angry? They may get upset at your saying no to a particular thing; but what really sets them off is when you are either inconsistent or unfair, or fail to discipline at all. When you fail to discipline, your children have no boundaries and are at the mercy of their own self-will and appetites. And when that will is crossed, they blow up.

The Old Testament prophet, Samuel, was judged by God because the Scriptures record that he never disciplined his sons, Hophni and Phineas; and the judgment of Scripture was that: *the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.* The goal of discipline is that we might know God; not just behavior modification. King David's son, Adonijah rose up in rebellion against him and the Scripture tells us it was because David had never disciplined him at any time. Actually the Bible says David never **'crossed his son'**. He never subordinated his son's will to his will. Literally the word means pained or displeased. David never did anything that would have caused Adonijah to be displeased or hurt. He never disciplined him, never spanked him or restricted him or made him suffer the consequences of his actions. And the Scriptures make it clear that was not a good thing. Because the result of not crossing Adonijah when he was young was that when he grew up, David had to run for his life.

This is a crucial experience for children. If they are never crossed, if they are not pained or displeased by not being able to do what they want (*for their good, not just because we feel like it*) if that never happens, something crucial will never be formed in their character and children will never understand that life is not all about them. I remember when Michel-Ann was about 2, she wanted to get out of her playpen one day and so she held her arms out to her mom to be lifted out. Without really thinking about it, Kim asked her to say please – a word that she knew well and had said many times. But she wouldn't – so Kim left her in there – most of the day. Until with tears she broke down and finally said 'Please'. Her will had been crossed and a budding rebellion had been broken.

The second image we see is a warrior. *"The Lord is a warrior; yes, the Lord is His name!"* Exodus 15:3 In the heart of every man is a warrior. A warrior is a fighter. **He fights for his people.** John Eldredge put it this way: *'...at the heart of every man is the desire for a battle to fight, a beauty to rescue and an adventure to live.'* Back in the Old Testament, when Nehemiah joined the returnees from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, they found that they were surrounded by people who wanted them dead. They were few, the enemy was many, but their response was not to throw down their tools and run away. Nehemiah gave them a great half-time speech; *"Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."* Nehemiah 4:14 Men, real men fight for their families. A warrior is a fighter, because there is an enemy to fight and a battle to win. Everyday the assault goes on, and if we don't have that mind set, our children and our wives, and eventually we ourselves get picked off. We need men who are warriors – willing to fight for what is right, willing to fight for their wives and children, willing to fight to keep the enemy out.

The third image is that of a priest. The writer of Hebrews gives us the image of Jesus, the great high priest: *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* Hebrews 4:5 A priest is first a lover of God, a **worshipper of God**. Deuteronomy 6:5 lays it out: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* This is clearly not optional. We were meant to love God supremely. Everything in our lives flow from this. Listen to this: If both your parents worshipped God with you regularly while you were growing up, there's an 80 percent likelihood that you'll worship God regularly as an adult. If only your mother worshipped regularly with you, there's only a 30 percent probability that you'll worship regularly as an adult. But if only your father worshipped God regularly with you, the likelihood that you'll worship God regularly as an adult increases to 70 percent! Men, be lovers of God first.

Secondly, a priest is a worship leader – men lead their families in worship. Their job is to teach their families about God – who He is, what He has done, what it means to follow Him. Again, Deuteronomy tells us: *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* Deuteronomy 6:7-9 To not teach your family to worship God is the same as letting the world teach them to worship other things.

British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once had a discussion with a man who firmly believed that children should not be given formal religious instruction, but should be free to choose their own religious faith when they reached maturity. Children, he believed, should be free to express themselves. Coleridge did not disagree, but later invited the man into his somewhat neglected garden. "Do you call this a garden?" the visitor exclaimed. "There are nothing but weeds here!" "Well, you see," Coleridge replied, "I did not wish to infringe upon the liberty of the garden in any way. I was just giving the garden a chance to express itself."

Thirdly a priest is an intercessor. Look at the example of Job: *and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.* Job 1:4-5 Men, fathers, we need to pray for our children, diligently, regularly, earnestly. And not just for your family, but for all those that God has put in your path. This is what a priest in the Old Testament did: *And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance.* Exodus 28:12 As the high priest, Aaron had a chest piece, or ephod, that he wore as part of his daily uniform which had two onyx stones on it, engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Daily he was bringing them before God as he went about his business. He was praying for them. Nothing is as powerful as prayer because it brings the weight and power of heaven to bear on the lives of those for whom you are praying.

Finally, we have the image of a shepherd. *"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want."* Psalm 23:1 A shepherd is a **provider**. That is the image of our heavenly Father. Jehovah Jirah – our provider. In the New Testament the word is *pronoeo* which means to take thought for, to plan, to perceive beforehand, or foresee. In 1st Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to warn those who *'do not provide for their own family'*. The word means more than simply putting meat on the table and a roof over their heads. It is *'pro-vision'* – looking ahead to what is coming and preparing the way to go for your family. Real 'pro-vision' is in matters of character, heart, spirit, integrity, justice, humility, love – not just money, houses, and material well-being.

And the heart of a man's vision is his family, not his career. If you have a family, **that is your career**. The measure of a godly man is the spiritual and emotional health of his family. Ask yourself and God: How can I be a better husband to my wife? What are the top ten character traits I want to build in my children? What can I do to teach my sons/daughters about being godly men/women? How do I teach my kids to fear God? What kinds of things will they encounter in school and how can I prepare them? How do I manage my career so that my family comes first?

A shepherd is a teacher. He is a discipler who teaches and models what a godly man is made of. *He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.* Psalm 78:5-7a Men need to teach their children, and older men need to teach younger men. Every man needs a Barnabas and a Timothy in their lives. Barnabas mentored Paul when he was new in the faith; and Paul mentored Timothy. We need older men who will mentor us and we need to mentor younger men. We need to teach them about God, and about life.

Lastly, a shepherd is a man who knows the meaning of sacrifice – a good shepherd is ready to lay down his wants, his needs, his desires, for those under his care. Jesus said *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."* John 10:11 A good shepherd thinks first about those under his care.

Bill Havens was a shoe-in, I'm told, to win a gold medal in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. But a few months before the Games were held, he learned that his wife would likely give birth to their first child while he was away. She told him that she could make it on her own, but this was a milestone Bill just didn't want to miss. So he surprised everyone and stayed home. Bill greeted his infant son, Frank, into the world on August 1, 1924. Though he always wondered what might have been, he said he never regretted his decision.

Well, he poured his life into that little lad and shared with him a love for canoeing. Twenty-four years passed, little Frank grew up, and won the opportunity to compete in the sprint canoe event in the Olympic Games in 1952 in Helsinki, Finland. The day after the competition, Bill received a telegram from his son that read: "Dear Dad, Thanks for waiting around for me to be born in 1924. I'm coming home with the gold medal that you should have won." It was signed, "Your loving son, Frank." Many would question Bill Haven's decision to miss his big opportunity in Paris, but he never wavered. He wanted his family to know that they always came first, no matter what. And that made him a hero to a little boy named Frank.

So what is a man? He is a king, a warrior, a priest, and a shepherd. He is made in the image and likeness of the invisible God, and he is meant to bear His image and reflect His glory, and spread the fame of His name to his generation and the generations to come.

"He must be so tall that when he is on his knees, he reaches all the way to heaven. His shoulders must be broad enough to bear the burden of a family. His lips must be strong enough to smile, firm enough to say no, and tender enough to kiss. Love must be so deep that it takes its stand in Christ and so wide that it takes the whole lost world in. He must be active enough to save souls. He must be big enough to be gentle and great enough to be thoughtful. His arms must be strong enough to carry a little child." Ruth Bell Graham

Our gracious heavenly Father,

We thank You for the gift of Your Son who became a man and the archegos of our salvation. Strengthen our hearts and minds to play the man in the image of our heavenly Father. Forgive us for letting the world dictate what it means to be a man. Don't let us be molded into that image or let us compromise or look to satisfy our ourselves. Deliver us from passivity, apathy and complacency. Build in us the heart of a man who loves You supremely and loves our wives and our families sacrificially. Help us to be men of the Word who are strong and courageous. Help us we pray to be fathers who teach their children Your Word and inspire their hearts to follow hard after You. Grant us to know how to live godly, how to run well, how to finish well, how to stay married, to be men who will father the next generation of boys and teach them how to be men. O Father, we dedicate ourselves anew this morning to take courage and be a man. Ignite a fire within our hearts to worship You with abandon, serve You with passion and to live as men of God in the world, we pray in the precious and mighty name of Jesus, Amen.