

# Men on FIRE

**RESTORING THE FORCES  
THAT FORGE NOBLE MANHOOD**

STEPHEN  
MANSFIELD



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To  
Jonathan Sandys,  
great-grandson of Winston Churchill and dear friend,  
who died during the writing of this book.  
Everything in these pages,  
particularly the references to his heroic ancestor,  
are dedicated to him.  
Goodbye, Jonathan.



*Go forth to meet the shadowy future,  
Without fear and with a manly heart.*

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW,  
*HYPERION: A ROMANCE* (1883)



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# Foreword

Scott Hamilton

I remember years ago watching a movie in which comedian Paul Rodriguez had a line he repeated time after time: “It’s tough to be a man, baby!” I laughed every time I heard him say it and found ways to repeat it in an attempt to be funny. The crazy thing is—it’s tough to be a man!

In my sixty-plus years, I’ve witnessed how our evolving culture has coerced men to act in certain ways. At times, I feel like I’m back in high school: today we are expected to dress, speak, and live according to whatever our culture tells us is right and acceptable. It’s almost reactive being a man today, not intentional. We “stay in our lane,” stay out of trouble, and try to stay on course in a world that keeps changing the rules of engagement.

So what does it mean to be a man in our time? The answer to that question is as different for each of us as we are from each other. We all have a distinct identity that gives our lives purpose and allows us to live joyfully and productively. The definition of what it is to be a man will be unique to every one of us. But even saying that, I know that there are parameters to successful manhood.

Culturally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and psychologically, we need to connect with who we are as men and live it boldly and unapologetically.

For me, growing up the smallest, weakest, and sickest kid in my class, I never felt the power and strength of approaching manhood. I believed I was always going to be bullied and did everything I could to get along with just about everybody. It didn't help that I ended up in the female-dominated sport of figure skating, and you can imagine the challenges I had with my manhood in that world.

So much of our identity as men comes from our earliest days of childhood. In my case, I was adopted by two schoolteachers from northwestern Ohio. My father was a PhD and a professor of biology at Bowling Green State University. He was studious, serious, and an incredibly demanding instructor. He would always say, "No one is taking my class for the grade."

My father's reputation was well known. Once, when I was at a fundraising event for Kristi Yamaguchi's Always Dream Foundation, basketball legend Nate Thurmond was in the audience. I knew he had gone to Bowling Green, so from the stage I asked him if he would answer a question: "Mr. Thurmond, you went to BGSU, didn't you?" He said yes. I asked him if he ever had my dad for biology. There was a long pause, and then he said loudly, "Twice!" It was a very funny moment for the audience, and it reminded me to apologize to anyone who ever took a class with my father. The truth is that my father was strict and difficult to connect with. I loved him, but I definitely feared him too.

My mother was the opposite. She was very much the nurturing type, and I loved her more than anyone in the world. Beloved by everyone in my community, she gave and gave and gave some more. She was the definition of sacrificial. Even while she was going through cancer, she would never give up an opportunity to positively impact everyone around her. She was the one who gave me my view of the world, and I am so grateful for her.

But a man's earliest influences aren't only his parents. In my case, I spent most of my time with my coaches. From the funny and energetic Rita Lowery I learned the value of laughter. Giuliano Grassi was short-tempered, demanding, and ultimately not a long-term coach; sometimes a life lesson is about changing what doesn't work. I idolized coach Herb Plata, but he had health issues—so then I began lessons with 1932 Olympic champion Pierre Brunet, who taught me about integrity and the honest pursuit of perfection. After he retired, I started working with the team of Evy Scotvold and Mary Ludington. Evy was by far the toughest coach I ever had, moderated by Mary's unconditional love. I learned that love tempers everything, even work.

When my parents could no longer support my skating, world-famous coach Carlo Fassi found a sponsor for me, and I moved to Denver to take lessons from him. Later Don Laws guided me to my first Olympic Games, then four US and World titles, and an Olympic gold medal in 1984. Don became family to me but not really a father; he was a private man. This, too, is a valuable life lesson, though perhaps not one I appreciated until later.

From these varied and changing role models, I was forced to sort of make it up as I went along. I didn't know how to approach my life with any real understanding of what it meant to be a man. A real man. The man I was meant to be. There was no all-in example for me to follow. No father figures. Nothing healthy to base my manhood on. Ironically, cancer cured all of that.

Cancer will open your eyes to truth about your life. It wakes you up, strips you down to nothing, and exposes all the junk that's been thriving in time-honored dysfunction. I knew how to do a lot of things at a very high level, but quite honestly, until cancer I didn't know I desperately wanted to be the man God created me to be.

The next chapters in my life have come with a determination to correct my path and become that man. The man I have to be for my wife and four children. And like most men, I remain a work in progress.



*Foreword*

Being a man isn't about the illusions mass media presents to us as the way we all should live our lives. Stephen Mansfield is going to make this clear in the pages that follow, and he's going to call you to be the man you are meant to be. You will have to decide, then, if you want your life to be something more authentic, something more beautifully masculine than it is. Here is what I have learned: everything results from a decision. A choice. And this choice is an important one. It can determine the rest of your life.

Dive into the pages that follow. Let the fire come. Then never let it die. Be the man you are made to be.

Scott Hamilton, four-time national and world champion  
and Olympic gold medalist

# Gentlemen, We Begin . . .

*It is not the light that we need, but fire; it is not the  
gentle shower, but thunder.  
We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.*

FREDERICK DOUGLASS<sup>1</sup>

My goal in this book is to ignite fires in your soul. I want to recover what has been lost. I want to set on fire again what has been doused. I want to see you live out manhood on fire.

I should tell you what I mean by *fire*. You’ve likely heard the phrase “fire in the belly.” Robert Louis Stevenson gave us these words. He was the author and adventurer who also gave us the classics *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He was using an image probably taken from the practice of stoking a fire in a cast iron stove. The fire was in the “belly” of the stove, and you worked to keep it roaring hot. Today, the phrase describes passion or heartfelt commitment to a cause. A politician, we are told, has a fire in the belly if he carries his campaign to the end. An athlete has the same if he trains hard and gives his all on the field.

I’m grateful for Stevenson’s epic phrase, and I want to encourage passionate living wherever I can. Yet when I speak of fire in this book

I mean something more than emotion or passion. I mean something like what the ancients did when they recounted their myth of Prometheus, the titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity. I'm referring more to the kind of fire that fell upon the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. I mean fire from heaven. Eternal fire that burns in the human soul. Fire that was meant to be a part of us from the beginning and that must be stoked and tended if we are to be what we were created to be.

Let me tell you what you already know. The fire of righteous manhood is threatening to die out in our generation. I will leave debates over the reason for this to other books and to better minds than I possess. Yet I see what you see. I see empty souls. I see men without fire. Men who do not know who they are or what they are meant to be peer back at me on the streets. Sometimes this kind of man also peers back at me from my mirror.

We can blame this on our times if we wish. Manhood is derided as nearly a disease in our day and as the source of many of our societal woes. This taints us. We can also blame our fathers, most of whom failed to pass the lore of righteous manhood on to us or to call out from us the manly heart that is there but sealed away. We have a destiny to fulfill as men, but we were seldom told of it by those who came before us. We have noble purposes to serve, but usually no one sounded the trumpet call, no one demanded that we rise to our manly best.

Still, I do not blame our times or our fathers and certainly not women, who have taken nothing from men that men have not abandoned in the first place. No, I blame us. I blame men. I believe our tribe is at fault for allowing righteous manhood to decline and for allowing masculinity in general to become an object of scorn. I also believe that if we have the power to lose righteous manhood, then we have the power to reclaim it. I believe we will, and in our generation. This is why I am writing these words.

This book is written out of both an anger and a vision. I am angry because of the meager thing manhood has become. I turn

on my television and there seem to be two types of men filling the screen. One is IdiotMan, the kind of guy who does a happy dance in a TV commercial because he finally found the remote control in the couch. His wife and children roll their eyes at his stupidity. You get the impression that they can barely endure the fool that he is. This fellow has brothers. They appear in nearly every television program or movie today. They are the way manhood is perceived these days. IdiotMan is too stupid to live, and he ruins his life and everyone else's with his simpleton ways and his self-centered living.

The other man who makes a frequent appearance is DogMan. He's driven by his lusts and his bodily needs. He spends much of his free time watching some scantily clad woman dance around a pole. The highlight of his day is when he can jam a twenty-dollar bill into her underwear. Then he sniffs the air in search of yet another pleasure, yet another sexual moment, yet another place to vent the canine lusts that define his life.

I feel nothing but anger toward these distortions of manhood, because this is what society tells me I am: IdiotMan and DogMan. One is a fool. The other is a wolf.

I am neither. I imagine you are neither too.

What I am is an incomplete man in search of a manly life. What I am is a man determined to find and live masculine greatness before I die. What I am is resolved to slay IdiotMan and DogMan before a watching world and then to gloriously reveal what righteous, noble manhood really is.



It may offend you that I blame men for the demise of true masculinity in our generation. I cannot apologize. Men who do not know who they are and who do not understand the power of noble manhood and the duties of a righteous man are terrorizing our age and destroying themselves. Consider.

- We talk much about the threat of Islamic terrorism today. Yet in the United States it is largely young, white, middle-class, even Christian-associated young men who do the most damage. Men like these are responsible for most high school shootings. It is men like these who have shot up college campuses in recent years. Unfathered, untethered, immoral, angry young men.
- We talk about the plague of erectile dysfunction in our age, and yet much of this is self-induced. Recent studies have shown that much of the increase in erectile dysfunction is due to the use of porn. There is even an acrostic for it: P.I.E.D.—porn-induced erectile dysfunction. Some men are so addicted to the exotic fantasy world of pornography that they can't get aroused on their wedding night when a normal, loving woman awaits. They have brought the sewer into the marriage bed with them. They have rewired their brains through hours of viewing porn and the secret life of masturbation that naturally attaches to a porn habit. Hear me. This wasn't foisted upon men. They did this to themselves.
- Then consider this: the US government tells us that 20 percent of college and university women are sexually abused. Who's doing this? Men. Those same unfathered, untethered, immoral, angry young men. You see, when men don't know who they are, when they are empty and aching and angry, they become predators. They try to force others to fill the hole in their soul. Usually their targets are women. Sometimes they are other men. This has produced a plague of abuse in our generation. It is no wonder that many women do not think of the word *masculinity* without putting the word *toxic* first. Can you blame them?

I could go on for pages, but my goal here is not to merely catalog the crimes of men. I don't believe you can guilt a man to greatness,

and this book is all about restoring greatness to modern men. My goal is, however, to get men to stop blaming their times or their fathers or women or whomever for what has befallen them and get on with becoming the righteous men they are called to be.

So, yes, I am angry at what manhood has become in our time. I also have a vision. I want you to have it too. It is a glorious thing to be a man. It is an even more glorious thing to be a man among men. When a man knows his strength and his gifts and uses them to ennoble others, when he understands his needs and satisfies them in righteous ways, he is a thing of beauty. He reflects the glory of God. He assures the magnificence of women. He summons destiny from the hearts of the young. He makes communities safe and nations good and demonstrates virtuous power to the world. Evil-doers cower. Weak men recover themselves. Women and children rejoice.

Let's not get too airy here. It's also a blast to be a man! Still, this is true only when that man knows who and what he is and lives masculinity in its full God-ordained power and service.

So we need a restoration of what has been lost. We need to push back on the bilge our dysfunctional age is handing us. We need to stop living from the crotch and start living from a heart where God rules and righteous fires blaze.



A few important thoughts before we get started. You will notice a degree of ferocity in these pages. Embrace it. I'm not angry at you; I'm angry for you. I'm like a coach who knows how good his players can be and rages against anything that keeps them from their best. I will hit hard here. I will be blunt. I'm not out of control or incapable of any other tone. I'm not adopting a style to be entertaining. I'm using a tone that good men understand and hunger for. I'm speaking to men about men in manly terms. Don't back away just because my words may not sound polite or conventional to your ears. Polite and

conventional aren't getting us anywhere these days. Perhaps we need some friendly raw and hard-hitting words for a change.

A word to women: don't be afraid of this. You have likely been damaged by soulless, demanding, predator males in your life. I'm sorry. Truly. Yet if you will encourage the men in your life toward the vision of noble manhood championed here, it will mean only good for you. You will be loved. You will be served. You will be protected. You will be encouraged and cheered as you fulfill all you are made to be. Toxic masculinity is a disease of our age. Noble masculinity is its cure. That's what we are about here.

Now, about faith. I have spoken around the world with men of nearly every major religion about the need for valiant manhood. I have found Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Yazidis, Sikhs, and men of a dozen other faiths who resonated with me in an eagerness to see a restoration of righteous manhood in our time. They are all concerned about the decline of masculinity in our age. They are all hopeful for the men of the next generation. They are all eager to reach across religious lines to summon men to their best. I say this because each man I talked with knew I was a Christian, was glad I had been open about it, and was eager to learn what my faith had to say to men. So in these pages, it will be the same as it has been in all my conversations with these men. I will be writing as a follower of Jesus. I will be quoting Scripture. I will sometimes be speaking in distinctly Christian terms. Yet I will also be speaking broadly to men in such a way that every faith, ethnicity, race, and background will hear a trumpet call and will, I trust, learn something of the ways of men. Welcome to you, whatever your faith. I'm eager to learn from you too. I'm glad you are here.

One final thought. We sometimes make a mistake when we talk about fire. It is common to list earth, water, and air along with fire as though all are elements in the universe. Fire isn't an element, though. Earth, water, and air are forms of matter. They are made up of atoms. Fire isn't matter. It is a side effect of matter changing forms.

I'll leave further explanation of this to the experts. For our purposes here, let's keep this in mind: fire comes when change happens. It occurs when the right combination of elements takes place and a transformation begins. So it is with your soul. If you, like me, want divine, manly fire burning in your soul, then welcome the change and embrace the transformation that fire brings. Once an ignition has occurred, protect the fire, feed the fire, and tend it as you must so it will engulf your heart.

Let the fire come. Let our hearts be set ablaze. Let manhood in our time be ignited with righteous fire.

So let's get to it.