

A MAN
in the
MAKING

Strategies to Help
YOUR SON
Succeed in Life

RICK JOHNSON



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To two special men—
one who *will* make a difference,
and one who *did*:

To George—
God has BIG plans for you, my friend.

To Dr. Edward M. Scott (RIP)—
you never knew how much difference you made,
and I'm still finding out.
Thank you.

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Still I have a favor to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing—then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, both I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

—Socrates, upon being sentenced to death for
“corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens”

“Carter had things like honor, things like valor. He was noble. Those used to be good words, right? But somehow they got . . . stupid-sounding, you know? Kind of—*ugh*—heavy and overbearing and even comical. How does that happen to a word? He can look on the TV”—she was talking about the boy now—“he can look at the TV, he’ll see all these men struttin’ around, all muscle and gold and guns. Struttin’ around like they somethin’ fine, like they tough, you know? Talkin’ about slappin’ they hos. Carter was nothing like that. Carter was a *man*. He treated me like . . .” She didn’t finish. She fought back her tears. She shook her head. “Even the word *man*,” she said. “How does that happen to a word?”

—Andrew Klavan, *The Identity Man*

I want to play a real man in all my films and I define manhood simply: men should be tough, fair, and courageous, never petty, never looking for a fight, but never backing down from one either.

—John “Duke” Wayne

Boys to Men

OVER THE YEARS IT HAS BEEN MY PERSONAL MISSION to advocate the importance of men and fathers in families, within communities, and around the world. I truly believe God anointed me with that message and has given me the ability and vehicles—my books and speaking ministry—to share it.

Because of my background, I have always been fascinated with what authentic masculinity looks like, its power to influence, and how it is acquired or transferred during the transition from boyhood to manhood.

After years of research, observation and study, real-life experiences, and operating ministry programs (such as mentoring fatherless boys, leading father-son campouts, and working with men in virtually every venue from churches to prisons), I have come to the conclusion that healthy masculinity is a somewhat fragile gift that must be intentionally passed down from one generation of men to the next. Any misstep or break in that transference can lead to a corruption of the process, resulting in skewed and damaged men. And damaged men typically do not make good leaders, husbands, or fathers.

Early last year I was convicted by God that while I was reaching thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of men and boys each year

with my books and my speaking ministry, my influence in their lives was somewhat wide and shallow. Even though I want to continue *those* efforts, I was compelled to start sharing my experience and knowledge through a deeper but narrower focus by individually mentoring young men. While I initially entered into that endeavor with some trepidation, it has turned out to be a truly invigorating experience. I currently mentor a young man from Nigeria in his mid-twenties whose parents were tragically killed when he was seventeen. His eagerness to learn about what it means to be a man and a leader has blessed me as much or more than our work together has benefited him. It has caused me to actually think about the process of becoming a healthy man and what teachings and experiences are important to be included in that process.

This experience has reinforced my belief that it requires a plan and a good deal of intentionality to effectively raise a boy to become a healthy man and leader. Without a plan and intentional effort, we settle for whatever we get. Let me give you an example. I married my wife because, not only was she incredibly hot looking, but she's such a fantastic cook that she could cook my garbage and make it taste good. But because of that, she doesn't always follow a recipe (a plan) for the meals she cooks. Most of the time this works out great and we have an excellent meal. Every so often, however, things don't quite work out as well as they could have. Thankfully, I'll eat about anything as long as it has meat in it, so it hasn't ever been too big of an issue. But her proficiency in her cooking abilities sometimes encourages her to be overconfident, and the result sometimes leaves something to be desired. In other words, her meals in those rare circumstances do not reach their full potential.

The same goes for making boys into men. When we don't have a plan—a recipe to follow—they *might* turn out great or they might turn out as men with something to be desired. Regardless, they seldom reach their full potential without a plan.

We are currently facing the phenomena of having a large percentage of our young males who have not had positive male role models intentionally bringing them into manhood. We are bereft of healthy male leadership in our culture today. As a result, we are seeing these boy-men delaying adulthood, underachieving, not going to college, being unemployed or underemployed, creating and abandoning children, and generally being unprepared to meet the world. I was raised in an alcoholic home with all the disadvantages that environment brings with it. I was raised to believe that religion was a crutch for weak people and that all Christians were hypocrites. By the age of forty, after attaining all that the world says should make you happy and successful, I found myself yearning for more. Something was missing. I had a hole in my soul that could not be filled by success, achievement, or materialistic acquisition. That chasm in my soul was destroying me.

In an attempt to find inner satisfaction and peace, I studied a number of religions and belief systems. Since at the time I did not have any real friends or other men I looked up to for advice, I decided to look at the lives of men throughout history whom I admired to see what they had that made them significant. Interestingly, the only common denominator I discovered between all these great and admirable men was the fact that they were all Christians—men of great faith. That epiphany was a mighty blow to the worldview I had been raised with. I personally had always been a bit contemptuous of Christianity. At the very least it just seemed inconsequential or insignificant in the bigger picture of things. I wasn't necessarily hostile toward it; I just thought it was a misguided philosophy designed and developed by perhaps earnest but intellectually weak or even ignorant men thousands of years ago to keep uneducated and ambitionless people content with their lot in life. Sort of along the lines of Karl Marx's quote, "Religion is the opium of the people."

However, upon making this discovery, I began to investigate the history and doctrinal foundations of Christianity. I set out

upon a yearlong study of anthropologic, geologic, and historical components of Scripture in order to disprove the validity of the Gospels. After that year I came to the conclusion that not only could I *not* disprove the truth of the Gospels, but that they were in fact true. After accepting Christ as my Savior, I felt a huge sense of peace, satisfaction, contentment, and most of all forgiveness that cannot be described or proven by any scientific method I'm aware of. I just knew in my soul that this was *truth* in its purest form. I felt fulfilled and whole. This then propelled me into the work I do today, which has allowed me to lead a much more fulfilling life than I ever thought possible.

The study of great men throughout history was what initially led me to be interested in pursuing salvation. Was it coincidence that every historically significant man I happened to study was a Christian? Probably not. But as I have investigated and researched further, it appears to be extremely difficult to find *any* men throughout history who have made a positive and significant difference in the world who were not Christians or at least men of great faith. (For example, someone such as Mahatma Gandhi could probably be considered a man who made a significant, positive difference in the world and, though not a Christian, had a deep religious and moral faith.) C. S. Lewis explains it this way: "I am very doubtful whether history shows us one example of a man who, having stepped outside traditional morality and attained power, has used that power benevolently."¹

With that in mind I have used great men throughout history and the character traits they were most famous for to illustrate the foundations we need to instill in young men in order to develop healthy and truly life-giving masculinity. Were these men perfect? No. They were ordinary human beings like you and me—flawed, imperfect, and prone to making mistakes. But they did not allow those imperfections to keep them from changing the world for the better.

Too many men in our culture either use the power of their masculinity to do harm or they neglect and waste it. If we are to teach boys and young men to wisely use the power God has endowed them with by virtue of their gender, we must be intentional. If we are to teach them to use that power to bless the lives of others, we must proactively develop and implement a plan, not just hope and pray for a positive outcome.

In the early nineteenth century, an idea called the Great Man Theory developed to describe how “great men”—through their personal attributes, such as charisma, intelligence, wisdom, or political skill—used their power to significantly influence history. A proponent of that theory, British essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle, believed great men—heroes—helped to make history with not just those personal attributes, but also with the help of God.²

For purposes of this book, I chose a number of men of faith whose lives were significant and who impacted the lives of many others. All of these men led exemplary lives on some level—not perfect, but significant. Each chapter contains a short bio on the man and how he exhibited the character trait he was known for, a section on why that specific trait is important to teach your son, and finally some practical ways to intentionally instill that character trait into your son’s life. These character traits are not in any particular order of importance, although I did try to put similar traits together in the chapter order.

These traits are not the only traits our boys need to learn, but they are a good starting point to begin to intentionally develop a plan to proactively teach our sons to become leaders and good men.

Additionally, you’ll notice that I did not discuss specific moral values such as sexual purity, honesty, faithfulness, or fidelity—not because they are not important, but rather I had hoped that parents who were interested in raising boys with strong character would instinctively know that a strong moral foundation is the essence of all character. Also, I did not discuss developing faith or spirituality

within your son. Again, not because I do not believe it is vitally important, but because I wanted this book to be one that will reach parents of all faith walks and belief systems. I wanted the focus to be on raising sons to become good men, not necessarily “religious” ones.

That said, all parents must have faith on some level or another. Faith is not the absence of doubt but persevering despite our doubts, just as courage is not the absence of fear but continuing on despite our fears. We need to have the courage to raise men of great faith and character. Our culture is at a crossroads. We need great men to once again lead and shape our culture through strong character and divine inspiration. I don’t think it’s any coincidence that only a few of the men I refer to in this book have been alive in the last forty years or so. We create great men by intentionally growing them from boys. As you go through this book, keep your eye on the ultimate goal—to create men who will change history. Without those great men . . . may God help us all.

1

Courage

Martin Luther King Jr.

Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

COURAGE IS THE QUALITY OF MIND OR SPIRIT THAT ENABLES a person to face uncertainty, difficulty, intimidation, danger, or pain with or without fear. In fact, true courage may be doing something we fear despite our fear. Courage is also generally considered interchangeable with bravery, which is the ability to stand up for what is right in difficult situations. Boldness, fearlessness, mettle, and fortitude are also considered to be courageous qualities.

Courage, according to Aristotle, is in between fear and recklessness. Cowards shrink from things they shouldn't be afraid of, and reckless men take unnecessary risks because they are overly confident. True courage requires us to act courageously despite our fears.¹

Courage can be exhibited in one of two ways—moral courage is the ability to do the right thing even when faced with popular

opposition, discouragement, or shame. Physical courage is courage in the face of pain, hardship, or threat.

Millions of men throughout history have exhibited courage in one way or another. But I believe one man exhibited both of those forms of courage better than perhaps anyone else.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—Courage in the Face of Adversity

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) was a Baptist minister and prominent leader of the African-American civil rights movement. Influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, he believed strongly in nonviolent social change. In 1964, King became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to end racial segregation and racial discrimination through civil disobedience and other nonviolent means.

Growing up in Atlanta, King excelled in school, skipping both the ninth and the twelfth grade before entering Morehouse College at age fifteen without formally graduating from high school. In 1948, he graduated from Morehouse and enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary, from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1951. King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954 when he was twenty-five years old. King then began doctoral studies at Boston University and received his Doctor of Philosophy in 1955.

Dr. King maintained a policy of not publicly endorsing a US political party or candidate, believing “someone must remain in the position of nonalignment, so that he can look objectively at both parties and be the conscience of both—not the servant or master of either.”²

Despite harassment from the FBI, King was convinced that non-violent protests against Jim Crow laws would eventually create a

wave of sympathy from the public. This strategy helped make civil rights the most important issue of the early 1960s.

Dr. King's main strategy was to organize and lead nonviolent marches to bring light upon issues such as blacks' right to vote, desegregation, labor rights, and other civil rights.

Protests in Birmingham began with a boycott to pressure businesses to offer sales jobs and other employment to people of all races, as well as to end segregated facilities in the stores. When business leaders resisted the boycott, King and his group began what they termed Project C, a series of sit-ins and marches intended to provoke arrest. During the protests, the Birmingham Police Department, led by Eugene "Bull" Connor, used high-pressure water jets and police dogs to control protesters, including children. King was originally criticized for using children in the protest. But by the end of the campaign, King's reputation was cemented, Connor lost his job, the Jim Crow signs were removed, and public places became more open to blacks.

Dr. King also participated in a number of high-profile marches and demonstrations, the most famous possibly being the March on Washington. The march originally was conceived to bring to light the desperate condition of blacks in the southern United States. The march made specific demands to the government including an end to racial segregation in public schools; meaningful civil rights legislation, including a law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment; protection of civil rights workers from police brutality; a two-dollar minimum wage for all workers. Despite tensions between the organizing factions, the march was a big success. More than a quarter million people of diverse ethnicities attended the event; at the time, it was the largest gathering of protesters in Washington's history.

King wrote powerfully and delivered a number of famous speeches that are still relevant and inspirational today. Dr. King's brilliant "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written in 1963, is a

passionate statement of his crusade for justice. I recommend you get a copy and read it aloud with your son—you will both have goose bumps. Then take it apart paragraph by paragraph and study what Dr. King says; there are some fascinating insights and words of wisdom contained in this letter.

His seventeen-minute “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered on August 28, 1963, called for racial equality and an end to discrimination. Along with Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Infamy Speech, it is considered one of the finest speeches in the history of American oratory. On April 3, 1968, the day before his death, King delivered his famous “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address at a rally.

Dr. King was assassinated by a gunman on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, on the second-floor balcony outside his hotel room. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 2004. Martin Luther King Jr. Day was established as a US federal holiday in 1986.

Like all the men in this book, Dr. King was a courageous, yet all-too-human male. Even with his faults, he never wavered in the courage and conviction of his faith. Dr. King had to know from early in his career that he was in danger of bodily harm or death. He received hundreds, perhaps thousands, of death threats; he was continually harassed; he was arrested multiple times; and he was subjected to intense pressure and stress. And yet that did not stop him from pursuing a noble goal—one that ultimately changed the lives of millions of people and made the world a better place. That kind of courage and commitment is rare today, which makes it even more important.³

Why Courage Is Important

Brave men are vertebrates; they have their softness on the surface and their toughness in the middle. But these modern cowards are

all crustaceans; their hardness is all on the cover and their softness is inside.

—G. K. Chesterton

Courage is one of the greatest virtues a man and a leader can have. Aristotle listed it as the top virtue of all in his famous work, *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is virtually impossible to be an effective leader without courage. Leading a family, operating a business, going to school, and even volunteering your time require courage in various degrees.

Unfortunately, it is difficult being a man in today's culture. The definition of manhood is evolving with no clear boundaries. Masculinity is devalued and even mocked in our feminized culture. (Just look how men are portrayed on sitcoms or in movies.) Not only that, but it is difficult being a husband and a father. Many women seem to *want* men to lead their families—as long as they lead them the way a woman would. Men get a lot of criticism (and rightfully so) for the problems they cause but seldom get much credit for what they are doing right. All that to say, it takes courage to stand by your convictions—to do what is right when those around you think you are wrong. It takes courage to risk being criticized. Generally, when men of conviction take a stand, many factions of our culture are quick to attack them. You can find many examples of this—from men who operate the Boy Scouts of America and refuse to allow homosexuals to infiltrate their leadership ranks, to men who try to pray in public. Those men are viciously attacked in the media. Any time you go against the prevailing wisdom of a culture you are subject to attack. It doesn't mean you are wrong and society is right.

Courage is not the absence of fear but the conquest of it. Courage (especially in males) is the willingness to fail. Courage is the defender and protector of all other virtues. It is essential in order to guard the best qualities of the soul and to clear their way for

action. To be afraid to the point of paralysis is to have no soul. But courage emancipates us and allows us to move with freedom and vigor. Author and educator Henry Van Dyke described the effect of courage: “Not to tremble at the shadows which surround us, not to shrink from the foes who threaten us, not to hesitate and falter and stand despairing still among the perplexities and trials of life, but to move steadily onward without fear.”⁴ When parents exhibit courage, they produce children with courage. Billy Graham once noted, “Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.”⁵

Teach your son that being “nice” isn’t the highest aspiration a man can live up to. (Mom, I know this goes against your nature, but bear with me.) In fact, sometimes I think niceness is the enemy of courage. Many times in life a man, husband, or father is forced to make decisions in the best interest of his family or society that do not appear to be nice on the outside. I’ve been forced as a father to make decisions that my children perceived at the time as heartless, mean-spirited, or just plain stupid. But they were always made with their best interest in the long run in mind. If my goal had only been to be nice (or to have been liked), I would not have been able to make the hard decisions that were important to their long-term healthy growth and development.

Our culture promotes being nice as the highest virtue a man can achieve. It is easier to drift along with the current of the culture than to try to swim against it. Many of the newer “guy” movies inspire males to be lovable, nice slackers, with no aim in life but to smoke pot, bed women, and get by without working. But the young men are very “nice,” so it’s okay. And many young women today seem drawn to soft, passive, quiet men who do not ruffle feathers and who do what they are told. It’s a nonthreatening but uninspired vision of manhood.

Niceness and meanness are feminine concepts. You seldom see men complaining that another man is mean or not nice. On the

outside, that desire for niceness in males would appear to be a noble goal. However, it's really a way of neutering masculinity. Being nice takes away the power of a man to lead. It removes passion, conviction, and courage from a man's soul. Nice guys might not always finish last, but they seldom run the race at all.

I recently had a discussion with two men—one older and one younger than me—about a recent church upheaval. They were both very “nice” guys. The older man made the comment that he really didn't want to know the details behind what was happening because then he would be forced to make a judgment. The young man agreed and said he would rather not have to face the problems because then he would be forced to choose a side. I was shocked and not a little disgusted by their responses. They'd rather stick their heads in the sand than have to take a stand and be perceived as being judgmental. They lacked the courage to stand up for what they believe in. When did *judging* the value of anything become such a sin in our culture anyway? Anything except whether a person is nice or mean, I guess.

You cannot be a leader without at least *some* people getting mad at you. In fact, you cannot accomplish *anything* important in life without having someone get upset with you. By its very nature, leadership will offend or upset a certain percentage of individuals. If your son grows up to care too much about what others think of him or whether he inadvertently upsets someone, he will never accomplish anything significant with his life, including raising exceptional children.

But I guess I should not be surprised. Our culture spends a great amount of energy trying to keep men from using their natural, life-giving passions and aggressions. Combine that with many men's natural hesitancy to face confrontation, and you have an entire gender that sits on the sidelines with their hands in their pockets and heads downcast, avoiding any kind of unpleasantness. Of course unpleasantness is a fact of life. Men who do not have

courage cannot (or will not) stand up for what is right. And so, for instance, when these men have teenage daughters who rebel in an effort to test their father's love for them, they choose instead to acquiesce and allow their daughters to make life-destroying choices.

Psychologist Michael Gurian comments on the attitude of our culture (especially within the social sciences) toward males and the messages we are sending them: “[The] psychological dialogue regarding ‘the changing male role’ is laden with minefields regarding how males must become more ‘sensitive about feelings’ and ‘do what women want’ and in that minefield are signs well displayed everywhere, signs that read something like: ‘Men no longer need to provide and protect. That’s traditional male role stuff. Men are needed for something else—though we’re not sure what it is. It definitely involves being sensitive and nice, though.’”⁶

The truth is, men *are* still needed to protect women and children from the dangers of the world. Gender politics aside, boys instinctively know that part of their role as men will be to protect and provide for their families, despite what our misguided culture may tell them.

It’s not that being nice is bad. Men should be nice, polite, kind, compassionate, empathetic, and understanding as often as possible. But when men are *only* nice, they live shallow, frustrating, and unfulfilling lives—as do those around them. To accomplish anything of significance in life requires us to offend at least some people. Men who are *only* nice are not willing to offend anyone—they never take a stand. A man can have many attributes that can make him successful in life. But if niceness is the most dominant character trait he has, he is probably not someone who can be depended upon to be a strong leader.

I know several very nice young men who are struggling with lust, faith, relationships, careers, and a variety of other issues. We talk about them and I give them some strategies and new perspectives on how to deal with these issues, but the truth is that all men deal

with these struggles. I think at some point it becomes a matter of courage (or lack thereof). Are you struggling with lust? Well, welcome to the club—all men struggle with lust. Don't mope around about it. Get some stones and deal with it. Good men struggle with sin and vice just as much as bad men—they just have the courage to deal with it in a productive manner. Don't sit around analyzing it to death. Lack of courage causes us to become paralyzed and not take the action needed to solve problems. I tell these young men to stiffen their spines. There are three billion men on the planet and almost all of them deal with the same issues, especially lust. Some deal with it productively because they love their wives and children; others deal with it by engaging in prostitution, viewing pornography, or having affairs. Which kind of man do you want your son to be?

How to Teach Your Son Courage

A nation or civilization that continues to produce soft-minded men purchases its own spiritual death on the installment plan.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

The need to take risks in order to feel alive, to do the impossible, to face one's fears and not back down is present in the warrior heart of every boy and man. But too often our culture teaches boys that this drive is bad or unnatural. We punish boys for being too aggressive, too boisterous, and too loud. We medicate them in school when they exhibit normal behaviors that are biologically driven.

Too many young (and old) men today are afraid to be the kind of men they want to be or were created to be because they are fearful of being criticized by a woman or a feminized man (usually sitting behind a news desk or teaching at a university). Since being mocked (especially by a woman) is one of a male's greatest fears, he avoids this at all costs. He alters his behavior to minimize the

potential for conflict and criticism. But a man who allows a woman to dictate to him what it means to be a man is all the less a man. Radical feminism has criticized and demonized most masculine behaviors without supplying any better alternatives except to be more like a woman. The truth is, masculinity bestows masculinity—femininity cannot.

Women are generally very poor judges of authentic masculinity. Lately, women seem to have chosen softer, more passive, less aggressive males to mate with, breeding those traits into their boys and making other men aspire to those virtues in order to get sexual fulfillment. This is partially due to a woman's natural inclination to usurp a man's leadership role (see Gen. 3), but also the result of several generations of feminist propaganda that has led many women to believe they *should* be the absolute leaders of their families and homes—even if they cannot consciously articulate that belief. So the woman seeks out and marries a “girlfriend” instead of a strong male presence who would challenge her authority and autonomy. Then she spends her life with a low-grade “fever” of discontentment, complaining she is dissatisfied and unhappy with her life. She insists that her husband take a leadership role, but then criticizes him if he does not lead as she thinks fit.

Lest some of you accuse me of being misogynistic or chauvinistic, I'm not talking about masculine domination. I'm referring to men using the God-given power they have to lift up those under their provision and protection to enable them to live lives greater than would be possible without their healthy masculine influence. To use that power takes courage.

So how do we teach our boys to have courage? First, teach your son to embrace failure. Fear of failure keeps most men from even attempting something. Most males feel humiliated by failure or inadequacy. But males learn best by trial and error; by attempting something, failing, and then persevering until they succeed. Boys who avoid anything they are not sure to succeed at live very limiting

lives. No one wins every time. But the only way you always lose is to not try at all.

Developing courage is usually a progressive endeavor. Unless we are faced with circumstances that force us to be courageous (life-or-death situations), it generally takes self-confidence and experience to become courageous. It often takes other males standing beside us (men seldom go to war by themselves). Hence if we can present opportunities to our sons to help them to succeed step by step and become confident, they will likely develop courage on their own. Start with small challenges and work your way up.

Here's a good way to *not* teach your son courage. The first time I decided to play catch with my son, Frank, he was about three years old (probably a little too young). I bought him a little mitt, showed him how to use it, and went out with him to the backyard. At that time in my life, I was a hard-nosed, "sink or swim" kind of guy. I just naturally figured if you learned a skill under the most difficult circumstances, you would be all the better when you tried it under normal conditions. I'm not sure why, but I decided to play catch the first time with a hardball. We stood a couple of feet away from each other and I very gently lobbed it underhanded to him. Of course it hit him square in the mug, causing him to throw down his glove and run into the house, crying for his mother. Frank never much took to baseball after that. Oh, he was a pretty fair little ballplayer through Little League, but he always seemed a bit afraid of the ball.

Modeling courage to our sons requires us to be courageous. Many times as men we avoid things that are unpleasant. In reality we are often afraid to do them and use our veto power as a form of cowardice. We justify not standing up and speaking our mind at school board meetings because we "don't like to speak in public," when in reality we are afraid someone might criticize us. We choose not to have a heart-to-heart conversation with our daughter's date because we don't want to seem un-cool or old-fashioned, when truthfully we are just afraid of confrontation.

We do not address issues in our relationship with our wives until they have become nearly irreparable problems because we fear emotional confrontation and self-examination. Our sons (and daughters) eventually see through this guise and come to believe that if Dad doesn't think anything is important enough to "put it all on the line," then why should they. We teach them to become cowards without even realizing it.

I can remember as a boy seeing several incidents that taught me about courage. I saw these acted out by people around me and observed them on television or in the movies. However, it took some time for those lessons to stick. I think if someone had spoken into my life *along with* that modeling, it would have been so much more effective. We can't brag about our own actions, only model them for our sons. But this is where a spouse, working together as a team, comes in handy. For instance, it would be really difficult and probably unproductive to tell our sons, "Hey, did you see how brave I was there?" But a father could say to his son, "Did you see your mom help that elderly person in the store? I've always appreciated how much courage your mom has that she can walk up to strangers and offer to help them. I'm usually a bit nervous that I'll embarrass myself somehow." Or a mother can say, "Did you notice how your dad always tells young men in public to watch their language because women and children are present? Don't you think that takes courage? That's the kind of bravery that all men should show." Look for opportunities to edify your spouse when they show courage, and always point those times out to your children. Tell your spouse in front of your son how proud you are of them for the courageous action they engaged in. That engrains in your son's psyche the value of acting courageously. He will grow up just naturally assuming that courage is a character trait that all people exhibit.

Your role in life is to shepherd your son into manhood. Shepherds do not produce sheep—sheep produce sheep. Shepherds produce

other shepherds. Being a shepherd requires you to have courage in order to protect your flock. Too many people in the church and in our country today are “sheeple”—those who voluntarily acquiesce to suggestions without critical analysis or research. They then lose their individuality and willingly give up their rights.⁷ They go along with just about anything as long as it doesn’t upset their little world or cause them to have to think too hard or make any difficult choices.

Be a shepherd for your son. Have courage in all you do. Don’t condemn him to a life as a cowardly sheeple.