

PLAY THE MAN

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Mark Batterson



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INTRODUCTION

February 23, 155 AD¹
Smyrna, Greece

Like a scene straight out of *Gladiator*, Polycarp was dragged into the Roman Colosseum. Discipled by the apostle John himself, the aged bishop faithfully and selflessly led the church at Smyrna through the persecution prophesied by his spiritual father. “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer,” writes John in Revelation 2:10. “Be faithful, even to the point of death.”

John had died a half century before, but his voice still echoed in Polycarp’s ears as the Colosseum crowd chanted, “Let loose the lion!” Then Polycarp heard a voice from heaven that was audible above the crowd:

“Be strong, Polycarp. Play the man.”

Days before, Roman bounty hunters had tracked him down. Instead of fleeing, Polycarp fed them a meal. Perhaps that’s why they granted his last request—an hour of prayer. Two hours later, many of those who heard the way Polycarp prayed actually repented of their sin on the spot. They did not, however, relent of their mission.

Like Jesus entering Jerusalem, Polycarp was led into the city of Smyrna on a donkey. The Roman proconsul implored Polycarp to recant. “Swear by the genius of Caesar!” Polycarp held his tongue,

held his ground. The proconsul prodded, “Swear, and I will release thee; revile the Christ.”

“Eighty and six years have I served Him,” said Polycarp. “And He has done me no wrong! How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

The die was cast.

Polycarp was led to the center of the Colosseum where three times the proconsul announced: “Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian.” The bloodthirsty crowd chanted for death by beast, but the proconsul opted for fire.

As his executioners seized his wrists to nail him to the stake, Polycarp stopped them. “He who gives me strength to endure the fire will enable me to do so without the help of your nails.”

As the pyre was lit on fire, Polycarp prayed one last prayer: “I bless you because you have thought me worthy of this day and this hour to be numbered among your martyrs in the cup of your Christ.”² Soon the flames engulfed him, but strangely they did not consume him. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before him, Polycarp was fireproof. Instead of the stench of burning flesh, the scent of frankincense wafted through the Colosseum.³

Using a spear, the executioner stabbed Polycarp through the flames. Polycarp bled out, but not before the twelfth martyr of Smyrna had lived out John’s exhortation: *be faithful even to the point of death*. Polycarp died fearlessly and faithfully. And the way he died forever changed the way those eyewitnesses lived. He did what the voice from heaven had commanded.

Polycarp played the man.

In this four-week video series, we’ll explore what it means to *play the man*. Sessions 1 and 2 will focus on rediscovering what it means to be a man—the seven virtues of manhood. Sessions 3 and 4 are practical resources for fathers, helping you create a Discipleship Covenant and Rite of Passage for your sons.

SESSION 1

REWILDING

Before watching Session 1 of the *Play the Man* DVD, read the introduction and chapters 1–4 in *Play the Man*.

Read, pray, and meditate on Matthew 19:16–20:

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Write down your reflections. Like the rich young ruler, is there anything you’re holding back? Is there something missing from your relationship with Christ?

SESSION 1

3. When have you felt most like a man? Where were you? What were you doing? What made you feel so manly?

4. Mark says our culture has left us “insecure and unsure of our manhood.” Has that been true for you? In what way? How do the cultural and biblical definitions of manhood differ?

5. When you hear the phrase “man of God,” who comes to mind?

6. Is there an area of your life that has become too tame, too predictable, too safe? How do you need to be rewilded?

SESSION 1

7. Jesus was fully God, fully man. In your opinion, when was Jesus most manly?

Personal Reflection

In chapter 4 of the book, Mark shares the story of John Muir climbing a Douglas fir tree in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during a winter storm. Eugene Peterson called Muir an “icon of Christian spirituality.” Muir was “a standing rebuke against becoming a mere spectator to life, preferring creature comfort to Creator confrontation.”⁴

How about you? Are you a creature of comfort, a creature of habit? Or are you seeking out Creator confrontation?

Muir’s vision was “saving the American soul from total surrender to materialism.”⁵ Like John the Baptist before him, Muir saw himself as a prophet crying out in the wilderness, crying out for the wilderness. His goal? To immerse everyone he could in what he called “mountain baptism.”

Have you ever experienced a mountain baptism? If so, what did that experience teach you about yourself? How has it defined who you are, how you think about God, and how you approach life?

Take a few moments to reflect on your life journey.

When have you felt most alive? Most like a man?

How has your manhood been cultivated and celebrated?

Have you lost some of your manhood along the way?

In what areas of your life have you been tamed?

How do you need to be rewilded?

The rich young ruler asked the question “What do I still lack?” Can you identify with the rich young ruler? Is something lacking or missing in your life? Is there something that makes you feel like less of a man?

Take ten minutes to do a stream-of-consciousness writing exercise. Using the questions above, write your reflections.
