

SECOND EDITION

THE
MAN

CODE
10 TENETS OF BIBLICAL MANHOOD

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INTRODUCTION

“Act like a man.”

“**A**ct like a man.”

Those four words can start a fight in today's world. Say them out loud and someone is bound to get offended. You'll hear, *“That's toxic,”* or *“That's outdated,”* or *“You can't say that anymore.”* But here's the twist. Those aren't my words. They're God's. Before Solomon ever became king, his father David pulled him close and said:

“Be strong, and act like a man.”

1 Kings 2:2

This wasn't about flexing muscles or putting women down. It was about growing up. David was saying, “Son, you have a calling now, and it's too big for a boy. God needs a man for this assignment.” That's what this book is about: becoming the kind of man God can trust with great purpose.

Every Man Needs a Code

Every man lives by a code, whether he realizes it or not. The ManCode is built on Ten Tenets of Manhood: timeless truths that separate boys from men, talkers from doers, and followers from leaders. These standards make manhood clear again. They make it actionable, purposeful, and rooted in God's design.

Because when a man lives by God's code, everything changes. His marriage grows stronger. His mindset becomes sharper. His mission becomes clearer. And his legacy becomes eternal.

Now is the time to recover the code. Not just for yourself, but for the men who are watching you. For the sons who will carry your name. For a world desperate to see what real manhood looks like again.

Just as David challenged Solomon to act like a man and rise into his destiny, God is challenging you to do the same. He is still searching for men He can trust—men who will lead when it's hard, stand when it's unpopular, and stay faithful when no one is watching.

The world doesn't need more strong opinions. It needs strong men. Join me on a biblical journey through God's design for manhood. Let's discover God's ManCode for your life, so you can become the kind of man He can trust with great purpose.

T E N E T

1

Boys Make Excuses; Men Take Responsibility

When I was twenty-two years old, I landed my first job at a church. I started as a volunteer, but now I was official. In my mind, I was about to become the next Billy Graham. I pictured myself preaching to crowds, laying hands on people, maybe even walking across a lake if God really wanted to show off.

But my pastor did not hand me a microphone. He handed me a toilet brush. My first assignment was not preaching or standing on a stage. It was cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming carpets, and repainting kids' classrooms. If you ever want to find out how badly you really want to serve God, try scrubbing urinals on a Saturday night. That will sort it out fast.

One afternoon, I was in the kids' wing pulling down posters to prep for painting. There were Bible story charts, memory verse sheets, and then one picture stopped me cold. It was Jesus, or at least the version someone thought kids would like. He was sitting on a rock, wearing what looked like a white bathrobe from Bed Bath and Beyond, a sky-blue sash, and petting a sheep like it was his emotional support animal.

I stared at it, shook my head, and thought, Not today, Jesus. Straight into the trash. Because nowhere in the Bible do you see Jesus stroking a pet lamb. Yes, He is the Good Shepherd, but this had gone too far. Shepherds in His day were not sitting around in bathrobes humming lullabies to sheep. They were tough. They were protectors. They were responsible. They fought off predators with their bare hands.

That painting did not just annoy me. It disturbed me. What would young boys believe manhood looks like if that was their mental image of our Savior?

The Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:11

In the ancient world, sheep pens did not have gates. They were stone walls with a single opening, and the shepherd himself became the door. At night, he would literally lie down across that entrance. If a wolf wanted in, it had to go through him first.

Picture that. A man standing guard in the dark. Staff in hand. Dirt on his clothes. Eyes scanning the tree line. He is tired, hungry, and maybe a little afraid, but he is not leaving his post. His presence says, You want my flock? You will have to come through me. That is responsibility. That is manhood. No dodging. No blaming. No shrugging and saying, That is not my problem.

Jesus said the hired hand runs when danger shows up because the sheep do not belong to him. But the shepherd stays. He owns it. The difference is simple. One makes excuses. The other takes responsibility.

Excuses always sound reasonable, but they never protect anyone. They never build anything. They never inspire trust. Responsibility, on the other hand, is costly. It demands courage. It puts you in the line of fire. But it creates safety and strength for everyone around you.

When Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd, He was not painting a sentimental picture of cuddling lambs in a field of daisies. He was declaring war on everything that threatens His people. He was saying, I will take the hit. I will stand in the gap. I will take responsibility. That is manhood.

Stop Making Excuses

My father-in-law, Pastor Rudy, always says, Every excuse is just a lack of desire.

“I will get serious about my faith when life slows down.” Newsflash. Life is not slowing down. You are just getting slower.

“I would be in better shape if I had more time.” No. You would just watch more Netflix with a protein shake in your hand.

“I will be a better dad once I figure out my own stuff.” Translation. I am waiting until my kids are grown so I can start parenting when it is too late.

Let us be honest. Maturity does not happen by accident. You can either make excuses, or you can make progress, but you cannot make both. Men today are drowning in excuses. We blame our past, our parents, our boss, our schedule, our metabolism, our Wi-Fi speed. We will blame anyone and anything as long as it is not us. But God is not asking for perfection. He is asking for ownership.

Dumb Excuses We Keep Saying

IN RELATIONSHIPS

“I’ll treat women better when I meet the right one.”

No, you won’t. You will just bring the same nonsense into her life. How you treat women before you meet her is how you will treat her after you do. Respect is not practice for marriage. It is proof of manhood.

IN FINANCES

“I’m just bad with money.”

Then fix it. Learn. Read a book. Ask for help. Stop saying “I’m bad with money” like it is your Harry Potter Hogwarts house. Debt is not a destiny. It is a test of discipline.

IN FITNESS AND HEALTH

“I don’t have time to work out.”

You had time to argue about sports, reheat pizza twice, and play Call of Duty until your thumbs went numb. You do not need a gym membership to take a walk, drink water, or eat like someone who plans to live past sixty. Your body is the engine of your purpose. If you ignore maintenance, do not be surprised when it breaks down.

IN FATHERHOOD

“My dad wasn’t there for me.”

Exactly. So change the story. You do not need a perfect example to be a present one. Your kids do not need a superhero. They need a steady man who shows up, loves them, and stays.

IN SINGLENESS

“I’ll follow God fully when I settle down.”

No. The time to become the man God called you to be is now. If you cannot lead yourself, you are not ready to lead anyone else. Do not wait for a ring to develop discipline or a title to develop integrity.

Responsibility Prepares Men for Purpose

Not every act of responsibility looks like standing in front of a wolf to guard a flock. But make no mistake, God has already entrusted you with something to protect.

Most of the time it is not dramatic or headline worthy. It happens in small, ordinary moments when no one is watching. When you choose to show up. When you stay consistent. When you keep your word. When you do the right thing even when no one will ever thank you for it.

And if you do not have a flock yet, God has entrusted you with yourself.

He is watching to see how you handle what you already have before He gives you more. He is testing whether you will lead yourself with the same integrity and strength you want to lead others with.

That is where manhood begins.

Ten Everyday Steps of Responsibility

A responsible man:

- ♦ Gets up when the alarm goes off instead of blaming his schedule
- ♦ Shows up to work on time instead of blaming traffic
- ♦ Pays the bill instead of pretending he forgot his wallet
- ♦ Apologizes when he is wrong instead of pretending nothing happened

- ♦ Changes the oil in his wife's car without being asked
- ♦ Keeps promises to his kids, even when he is tired
- ♦ Admits mistakes at work instead of throwing a coworker under the bus
- ♦ Stays faithful to his spouse on social media instead of excusing temptation
- ♦ Tithes and gives generously instead of waiting until he makes more money
- ♦ Takes care of his health instead of blaming bad genetics

None of these are flashy. Nobody is going to hand you a medal for changing the oil, showing up on time, or putting down dessert.

But ordinary choices compound.

Step after step in the right direction builds a reputation. People begin to know they can count on you. And more importantly, God begins to see a man He can trust with more.

Jesus Took Responsibility

This is the heart of the Gospel.

Jesus took responsibility for sins that were not His. He did not shrug and say, "That is their problem." He stood in the gap for us.

At the cross, He carried the weight we could never carry. He paid the debt we could never pay. He absorbed punishment that belonged to us. He laid down His life so that we could live.

That is responsibility at the highest level.

And here is what that means for us. Every time we take responsibility in our own lives, even in something as small as showing up on time or keeping a promise, we reflect His character. We show the world what He has already done for us.

Excuses are cheap. They cost nothing in the moment, but they steal strength, respect, and influence over time. Responsibility is costly in the moment, but it builds trust, credibility, and strength. God is looking for men He can trust. He is scanning the earth, searching for those who will stand up, own their lives, and say, "Here I am, Lord. Use me."

The Challenge: No More Excuses

Maybe right now your excuse sounds like this:

“Justice, you do not know my story.”

“You do not know what I have been through.”

“This was not my fault.”

You are right. I do not know your story. But I do know this. If that is the attitude you plan to carry, you might as well throw this book in the trash can next to the toilet you are reading it from right now. Because nothing changes until you decide to take responsibility.

Say this out loud right now: “Just because it is not my fault does not mean it is not my responsibility.” That one sentence will change your life if you let it. When Adam sinned, he blamed Eve. He told God, “The woman You gave me.” In other words, “It is not my fault.” That excuse broke the world.

When Jesus came, He took the opposite approach. He looked at our sin, our shame, and our failure and said, “It is not My fault, but it is My responsibility.” That decision saved the world. That is why Jesus is the greatest man who ever lived. He is God who became a man so we could see the perfect picture of manhood.

Be like Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one excuse you have been leaning on recently? What would it look like to replace it with responsibility?
2. How does Jesus' example as the Good Shepherd challenge your understanding of manhood?
3. Which of the ten everyday steps of responsibility hit you the hardest, and why?
4. Who in your life needs you to stand in the gap for them right now?
5. What is one excuse you will stop making this week, and what responsibility will you step into instead?



TENET

2

Boys Make Promises; Men Keep Their Word

A few years ago, I was in Ireland speaking at a conference when I met a group of pastors from Northern Ireland. If you know anything about the history between the regions, you know the persecution some of these churches have faced has been severe. One pastor told me his church building had been bombed twenty-one times over a span of twenty-four years.

These men were hardened by reality. They did not play games.

One of the pastors mentioned he was having trouble with the venue he had rented for his church. My American instincts kicked in immediately.

“Well,” I asked, “what does the contract say?”

He looked at me and smirked.

“We do not have a contract. We shook on it.”

That floored me. Back home, we sign contracts for everything. Join a gym? Contract. Rent a beach scooter? Contract. Sign up for Disney Plus? Contract, blood type, and social security number. But in Northern Ireland, at least in that moment, a handshake was still enough. A man’s word carried weight. Trust was the contract.

Now, I am not saying they do not have lawyers over there. They do. But what I witnessed was a culture that still valued something deeper than paperwork. They valued integrity. They believed that when a man gave his word, it was binding.

And when I considered the backdrop of persecution and violence,

it made sense. In their neighborhoods, contracts meant nothing if the person signing them could not be trusted. Paper does not protect you when character is missing.

That moment forced me to ask an uncomfortable question. Have we drifted so far that we trust paper more than we trust people? Do we put more faith in ink on a page than in the character of the person signing it?

What I witnessed was a reminder of how things should be. A man's word should be enough. If you say yes, it means yes. If you say no, it means no. That is what Jesus taught. That is what Scripture affirms. That is what true manhood looks like.

There is something powerful about living in such a way that people do not have to second-guess you. They just know. If you said it, you will do it. If you said no, you meant it. No contracts required. That is the kind of man people respect. That is the kind of man God can use. And that is the difference between boys and men.

Boys make promises. Men keep their word.

The Words of Jesus

Jesus cut straight to the heart of this issue in Matthew 5:37. People in His day tried to back up their promises with oaths. They swore by heaven, by earth, or even by their own heads, all in an effort to sound trustworthy. In today's language, it would be like saying, "I swear on my life," or "I swear on my mama's grave."

Jesus shut it down. "Let your yes be yes and your no be no. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

In other words, stop dressing up your promises. Stop sabotaging your credibility. Stop giving people reasons to doubt you. Just be the kind of man whose word can stand on its own. When you say yes, mean it. When you say no, mean it. No exaggeration. No excuses. No verbal gymnastics. Just integrity.

Even the Little Things

I will never forget the early years of driving a minivan with my kids in the back seat getting rowdy. God bless those little screens on the backs of the headrests that eventually medicated them for long drives.

But I remember one day in particular. They were teasing each other, getting louder by the second, until it felt like chaos in surround sound. Finally, I snapped. “If you do not stop, I am going to throw that iPad out the window.”

Dead silence. Instant obedience. They knew I was not bluffing. They had seen me throw away toys before. I had a track record of doing exactly what I said I would do. They could trust me on that.

But it is not uncommon to hear parents make empty threats in moments like that. “I will turn this car around.”

We threaten, but we do not follow through. And without realizing it, we train our kids to stop taking our words seriously. We think we are managing behavior, but we are actually making empty promises.

People are always listening. Your kids are silently asking, “Can I trust him?” Your wife is wondering, “Does his word mean something?” Your friends are watching and asking, “Is he dependable?” When a man keeps his word, even in the little things, people feel safe around him. When he does not, his words become noise. And when your words become noise, your life loses power.

When Words Lose Weight

Here is the problem with broken promises. They pile up. It usually does not happen all at once. You do not lose credibility the first time you forget to mow the lawn when you said you would. But break your word enough times, and slowly, people stop believing you. And it does not even have to be a big thing.

Tell your boss you will finish that project by Tuesday, then slide into Friday with excuses. He smiles at you in the meeting, but deep down he is already writing someone else’s name on the promotion list. Tell your wife you will be home by six for dinner, then walk in at eight with no warning. She may forgive you, but she files it away. Tell your kids you will take them for donuts on Saturday, but Saturday comes and you are “too busy.” They do not yell about it. They just learn that Dad’s word is more like a weather forecast. Possible, but rarely accurate.

It is death by a thousand cuts. Every small broken word chips away at your reputation until your voice has no weight. People nod politely when you talk, but deep down they are thinking, “We will see if he

actually does it.” You might still be talented. You might still be charming. You might even be successful. But if your words are empty, people stop taking you seriously.

But It Works the Other Way Too

When a husband tells his wife, “I will take care of it,” and then actually does, it builds security. She does not have to carry the weight of wondering if she can count on him.

When a father tells his kids, “I will be there for your game,” and then shows up, their hearts grow stronger. When he does not, the message is just as loud. Kids might not say anything in the moment, but they remember.

Children have long memories when it comes to promises. They may forget what you bought them for Christmas last year, but they will not forget if Dad said he would be there and was not.

A wife may not expect her husband to be flawless, but she does expect his word to mean something. Trust in marriage is built not just on romance or grand gestures, but on thousands of small promises kept.

The same is true in friendships and community. If you are known as the guy who always flakes, people stop inviting you into meaningful opportunities. If you are the man who follows through, people see you as steady and reliable. One reputation shuts doors. The other opens them.

Keeping your word is not about being perfect. It is about being consistent enough that people stop second-guessing you. It is about creating a ripple effect where trust grows everywhere your words land.

The Weight of God’s Word

John’s Gospel says, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14). That single sentence changes everything. It means Jesus was not just a teacher or miracle-worker. He was the physical proof that God always keeps His word.

Think about it. God could have just sent down promises from heaven like text messages: “I’ll never leave you. I’ll never forsake you. Trust Me.” But instead of just sending words, He sent The Word. Jesus lived them out in front of people. Every miracle, every sermon, every time

He stopped for someone in need was God showing that He delivers on what He says.

When Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” they were forgiven. When He said, “Get up and walk,” people who had not stood in years stood to their feet. When He said, “I will rise again,” He actually walked out of the grave three days later.

That is why your word matters so much. As men, our words are not just about sounding reliable. They are about reflecting God Himself. When you keep your word, you are showing people a glimpse of the God who always keeps His promises. And when you break your word, you do the opposite.

Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.” You can build a bank account, a business, a body that looks like it belongs on the cover of Men’s Health. But if your word is garbage, none of it matters. People might admire your talent, but they will not trust you. And trust is the real currency of leadership.

That is why every “yes” and every “no” matters. Every small commitment, every little promise is an opportunity to prove that your words carry weight. And if they don’t, eventually your life won’t either.

The Challenge

Every promise you make is like laying a brick in the foundation of your life. Some bricks are big, like the vow you made to your wife on your wedding day. Some are small, like telling a friend you will call them tomorrow. But every brick counts. Keep stacking bricks of integrity, and your foundation becomes strong. Break your word over and over, and cracks start to spread.

Jesus said, “Let your yes be yes, and your no be no.” Simple words, but rare in practice. Boys make promises they never plan to keep. Men speak words they are ready to live by.

So here is the question: Do people believe you when you speak, or do they just smile and wait to see if you will actually follow through?

A man of God is not flawless, but he is trustworthy. If you want to be a man God can use, become a man whose word carries weight.

Boys make promises. Men keep their word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about Northern Ireland story. What's more powerful in your life, a contract or your word?
2. What is one small promise you tend to overlook but need to start keeping?
3. How have broken promises affected your marriage, friendships, or work relationships in the past?
4. In what ways does keeping your word reflect the character of God to others?
5. What is one specific promise you will keep this week to build trust with someone in your life?

T E N E T

3

Boys Reject Correction; Men Seek Out Discipline

I was standing poolside one afternoon, waiting to pick up my son from a birthday party. Another mom walked over and struck up a conversation. At first it was small talk about the weather, the snacks, and the usual parent chatter. Then she leaned in with that look that every parent recognizes. It was the look that said, “I need to vent and you are the next person who gets to hear it.”

She began telling me how upset she was with the school football coach. Her son had come home with burns on his arms after being forced to bear crawl across the turf. She described it like he had just returned from a Navy SEAL mission. “It was barbaric,” she said. “Torture. Can you believe they made him crawl across the field like that?”

I asked her why the coach made him do it. She explained her son had been late to practice, so the coach punished him in front of the whole team. She was furious. She said she had already called the principal and demanded that the coach be disciplined for “abusing” her boy.

At this point I was trying very hard to keep my mouth shut. I was nodding politely, but in my head I was thinking, Lady, your son didn’t survive torture. He crawled across a football field. He got a turf burn and a lesson in accountability. Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore. The words slipped out before I could stop them.

“Do you want your son to be a boy, or a man?”

She looked at me stunned and slightly offended.

“A man,” she said.

“Then you should thank that coach,” I encouraged her. “Treat a boy like a boy and he’ll act like one. Call him up like a man and you’ll be amazed how quickly he grows into it.”

Believe it or not, she actually liked my advice. I saw her at church for the first time the following week.

Why Discipline Matters

Here is the truth. Coaches who do not care about their players never push them. Fathers who do not care about their sons never correct them. Teachers who do not care about their students avoid discipline because it makes them uncomfortable. It is the ones who care the most who are willing to give correction.

If your kid never gets corrected, he will grow up soft. If he never gets disciplined, he will grow up weak. Correction is not abuse. Correction is proof that someone cares enough to prepare you for the real world.

We live in a culture that avoids correction at all costs. People do not like being told they are wrong. They do not like being coached. They do not like being disciplined. Boys resist correction because it bruises their ego. Men invite it because they know it produces growth.

Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

In other words, discipline stings in the moment, but it produces strength for a lifetime.

Why We Avoid Correction

Let’s be honest. Nobody enjoys correction in the moment. If you say you love being corrected, you are lying to yourself. Correction stings. It bruises your ego. It exposes areas of weakness that you would rather pretend are strengths. It is much easier to dodge it. Boys blame someone else. They make excuses. A boy will miss curfew and say, “Traffic was bad.” A man admits, “I should have left earlier.” A boy gets caught cheating on a test and insists, “The teacher didn’t explain it right.” A man says, “I did wrong, and I need to make it right.”

The difference is not who got caught. The difference is who is willing to own it.

Men understand that correction is not punishment, it is preparation. It may feel like punishment in the moment, but in reality, it is a gift. Correction is proof that someone cares enough to tell you the truth.

A coach who makes you run sprints because you slacked off is not being cruel. He is teaching you that your actions affect your team. A father who grounds you for lying is not trying to ruin your life. He is teaching you that integrity matters. A mentor who points out your pride is not trying to embarrass you. He is trying to save you from self-destruction. Correction is not the enemy of growth. Avoiding correction is.

God's Discipline is Love

One of the most dangerous lies we believe is that God's discipline means He is angry with us. Many people hear the word discipline and immediately think punishment. They picture God in heaven with His arms crossed, waiting to strike them with lightning every time they mess up.

That is not how discipline works in God's kingdom. Scripture is clear that discipline is proof of love, not proof of anger. Hebrews 12:7–8 says, “Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as His children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.”

Did you catch that? God's discipline is evidence that you belong to Him. If you never experience His correction, you should be more concerned, not less. It would mean He does not see you as a son. Discipline is how God trains His family.

A father who never disciplines his children is not a loving father. He is a lazy one. He is saying, “I do not care enough to prepare you for the real world.” A coach who never corrects mistakes is not helping the team. He is setting them up to fail later. A God who never corrected His children would be the worst Father imaginable. But the truth is this. God loves you too much to let you stay the same. His correction is not rejection. It is preparation.

Mojo the Dog

Let me give you a lighter example. A few Christmases ago, my family got a puppy. A mini Goldendoodle named Mojo. He was adorable, fluffy, and completely untrained. Before we brought him home, I gave my kids a speech.

“I am not going to be the one feeding Mojo, cleaning up after Mojo, or disciplining Mojo. That is your job. I already have three kids. I do not need a fourth.”

You can probably guess how that went. Mojo did whatever he wanted. He barked at the neighbors. He chewed up shoes. He left messes all over the house. And here is the truth. It was not his fault. It was ours. Nobody disciplined him. Nobody trained him. We thought we were being kind by letting him run wild, but in reality, we were failing him.

One day my daughter asked, “Dad, how come you do not discipline Mojo when he does something bad?”

Without even thinking, I said, “Because I do not love him like I love you.”

Her eyes got wide, so I explained.

If I truly loved Mojo the way I love my kids, I would train him. I would correct him. I would put boundaries around him for his own good. The reason I discipline my kids is not because I enjoy it. It is because I love them too much to let them grow up undisciplined. That conversation changed how they saw discipline. They began to understand that correction was not proof of anger. It was proof of love.

God works the same way with us. His discipline may sting in the moment, but it is His way of saying, “You are mine. I love you too much to let you stay stuck.”

And yes, eventually we got Mojo a collar with a remote so we could train him to stop before running into the street or leaving surprises in my kids’ room. Boundaries saved him. Discipline did not hurt him. It helped him live.

Mentors and Fathers

When I look back on my life, some of the most important turning points came when someone loved me enough to correct me. One of those

people is my pastor, Keith. For nearly two decades, he has been a voice of authority and love in my life.

When I first prayed for a mentor, I did not want a cheerleader. I wanted someone who would sharpen me, challenge me, and hold me accountable. I specifically prayed, “God, send me someone who will open the Bible with me and not be afraid to tell me when I am wrong.”

God answered that prayer through Pastor Keith. Has it been comfortable? Not even close. There have been moments when his correction felt like a punch in the gut. He has pulled me aside privately and told me hard truths. He has corrected me in meetings in front of other leaders. Every time, my pride wanted to push back, but my spirit knew I needed it. Looking back now, I can see those corrections were not roadblocks. They were shortcuts. They accelerated my growth.



I remember one particularly big and exciting day when we opened a new location for the Freedom Center, the church I pastor. We were coming off months of construction, budgets, tight timelines, and stress, and the grand opening had finally arrived. I was excited, but wound up tighter than a drum.

Pastor Keith had flown in to pray and dedicate the building. Maria and I got into a small argument about something I cannot even remember. It was probably insignificant, but because of the pressure, I spoke to her far too sharply.

Pastor Keith overheard me snap at her. Before I knew it, he pulled me aside and said, “Never speak to your wife like that.”

There was no sugarcoating, and I did not need any. I was not embarrassed. I was grateful. Pastor Keith had been my pastor for more than ten years at that point, and he was still willing to confront me when I was wrong.

That is what real spiritual authority looks like. A man who loves you enough to confront you when your attitude does not match your calling. So let me ask you a question. Do you have someone like that in your life? A pastor. A small group leader. A coach. Someone who challenges you when you start coasting. Someone who calls you out when you drift. Someone who refuses to let you settle.

Correction does not crush you. It shapes you. It is the weight that builds the muscle of character. And we cannot expect God to trust us if we refuse to be corrected.



That is what mentors do. They see what you cannot see. They expose your blind spots. They care more about your future than your feelings. Boys avoid mentors because they do not want to be told what to do. Men seek out mentors because they know they cannot grow alone.

Why Men Seek Discipline

Correction is not comfortable, but it is necessary. It is the difference between staying stuck and moving forward. You can be thirty, forty, even fifty years old and still be living like a boy if you never learn to accept discipline.

I have watched men who bristle at every bit of correction. Their boss gives them feedback, and they storm out. Their wife points out a blind spot, and they blow up. Their pastor preaches on sin, and they leave the church. That is what boys do. Boys run from correction.

Men, on the other hand, lean into it. They may not enjoy it, but they recognize it as a gift. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Sharpening is not quiet. It is loud. It creates sparks. It creates friction. But the result is a sharp edge that can cut through anything.

That is what correction does. It cuts away arrogance. It cuts away laziness. It cuts away the excuses that keep you small. The sparks are uncomfortable, but the sharpness is worth it.

The Challenge

Here is the simple truth. Boys hate correction because it hurts their pride. Men seek discipline because it builds their future.

So let me ask you: when was the last time you invited correction? Not just tolerated it, but actually sought it out? When was the last time you asked someone, “What do you see in my life that needs to change?”

If you cannot remember, that is your challenge. This week, ask someone you trust to correct you. Give them permission to tell you the truth, even if it stings. You might be surprised how much respect it builds, and how quickly it helps you grow.

God does not discipline you to punish you. He disciplines you to prepare you. The same is true of the mentors He places in your life. Stop dodging correction. Start seeking it. Correction is not a curse. It is a gift.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think back to the “poolside mom” story. Why do so many people confuse discipline with abuse?
2. How has correction helped you grow in the past? Can you remember a time when it shaped you for the better?
3. Why do boys avoid correction, while men welcome it?
4. Who in your life has permission to tell you the truth, even when it stings?
5. This week, what is one area where you will stop resisting discipline and start inviting it?



TENET

4

Boys Choose Playmates; Men Choose Allies

When I was a kid, friendship was simple. I would hop on my BMX bike, ride around the neighborhood, and whoever I ran into was my friend for the day. If I saw a group at the basketball court, I joined the game. If I heard the squeak of a trampoline spring, I climbed on. If I caught the faint Nintendo 64 start-up sound floating out of someone's house, I knocked on the door and grabbed a controller.

Friendship wasn't about loyalty, trust, or shared values. It was about fun and convenience. Whoever happened to be outside was automatically my buddy. That works fine when you're ten. Boys need playmates. But eventually life gets harder than dodgeball. The battles get bigger than who gets next on the controller. Suddenly you are not just worried about recess or who is sitting at your lunch table. You are worried about paying bills, keeping your marriage strong, raising kids, fighting temptation, and staying faithful in a world that constantly pulls you off track. That is when you realize playmates are not enough. You need allies.

Boys Have Playmates. Men Choose Allies.

Too many men grow up in age but not in their friendships. They are thirty, forty, even fifty years old, but they still pick friends the same way they did when they were ten. They hang out with whoever is around. They spend time with guys who make them laugh, but not with guys

who make them better. They choose friends based on hobbies, not on integrity.

Think about how this plays out. You can have golf buddies who never challenge you spiritually. You can have drinking buddies who will buy the next round but won't check on you when you start drifting away from your wife. You can have guys who will waste hours with you, but who will vanish the moment you hit a real crisis.

Playmates are easy to find, but they are not who you call at midnight when your life is falling apart. They are not the ones who will show up when your marriage is on the line or when temptation is knocking hard on your door. Playmates are fun to pass the time with, but allies are the ones who help you fight the battles that matter.

The truth is, your future will rise or fall on the kind of men you surround yourself with. If you settle for playmates, you will stay stuck in boyhood. If you choose allies, you will grow into the man God designed you to be.

Real Allies in Action

One of the clearest pictures of what it means to have true allies is found in Mark chapter 2. Jesus was back in Capernaum, teaching inside a packed house. Word had spread that He was in town, and the place was overflowing. People were crammed shoulder to shoulder. The doorway was blocked. The crowd spilled out into the street. You could not get in if you tried.

Now picture four men carrying their paralyzed friend on a mat. This was not a casual friendship. These men were not just bored playmates looking for something to do that afternoon. They were allies. They had one mission: get their friend to Jesus.

The problem was the crowd. There was no way through. A playmate would have shrugged and said, "Sorry bro, maybe next time." A playmate might have promised, "We'll pray for you later," and then gone home. But not these guys.

They spotted a staircase on the side of the house, carried their friend up to the roof, and started digging. Imagine being inside the house. Jesus is preaching. The crowd is hanging on His every word. Then you hear footsteps above you. A few seconds later, dust starts falling from

the ceiling. Then chunks of dirt. The roof literally starts opening up. People are shielding their eyes, trying to figure out what is happening. And then, in the middle of the sermon, here comes a man on a mat being lowered down by ropes, landing right in front of Jesus.

Can you imagine the owner of the house? “Seriously? You could not wait until I was done paying off this roof?”

It must have been chaotic, but Jesus was not irritated. The Bible says, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:5). Did you catch that? Jesus saw their faith. Not the paralyzed man’s faith. His friends’ faith. Their determination. Their refusal to quit. That is what moved Jesus to act.

That is what real allies do. They carry you when you cannot carry yourself. They get you to Jesus when you are too weak, too discouraged, or too broken to get there on your own.

Why Allies Matter

Now think about the difference between playmates and allies in this story. Playmates would have left the man sitting outside the house. They would have said, “Sorry, the crowd is too big. Let’s go grab lunch.” But allies found a way. Allies climbed the roof. Allies tore through the ceiling. Allies made a scene because their friend’s healing mattered more than their reputation.

Every man needs that kind of circle. You may be strong most of the time, but eventually you will face a season where you are paralyzed. Maybe not physically, but emotionally, spiritually, or morally. You will hit a wall of fear, doubt, temptation, or exhaustion. And in that moment, you will not need playmates who disappear. You will need allies who grab the corners of your mat and refuse to let you give up.

The Christian life was never designed to be lived alone. Even Jesus, the Son of God, gathered twelve men to walk with Him. He could have gone solo, but He modeled what real brotherhood looks like. If the perfect Son of God needed allies, what makes us think we don’t?

The truth is, you do not need a hundred friends. You do not need to be the most popular guy in the room. You need a handful of brothers you can trust with your weaknesses and your battles. Men who know where to find you. Men who will tell you the truth. Men who will not

just be playmates in the easy times, but allies when the fight gets real. The question is not whether you have friends. The question is whether you have allies.

My First Real Ally

When I first gave my life to Christ, I thought making Christian friends would be automatic. After all, we were all reading the same Bible and worshipping the same God. It should have been easy. It wasn't.

I moved into a Bible college dorm surrounded by people I didn't know. Trust did not come naturally. I had already learned that not everyone who calls himself your friend is really in your corner. So even though I was surrounded by Christians, I kept my guard up.

There was one guy in particular I barely noticed at first. He was not quiet, but he carried himself with a different kind of seriousness. He was disciplined, focused, and seemed to know exactly why he was there. One morning, as I walked past his room, I noticed the door was cracked. Inside, he was kneeling by his bed, Bible open, praying at six o'clock in the morning.

That image burned into my mind. Nobody else was watching him. There was no audience. He was just a man on his knees before God because that is who he was.

Something clicked inside me. I thought, *This guy is the real deal. He doesn't just talk about following Jesus. He lives it. I need people like him in my life if I am going to make it.*

We started talking more. Slowly, we built trust. Eventually, we pulled a couple of other guys together and started meeting every Wednesday night. No video games, no small talk, no hiding. Just four young men sitting in a circle, opening Scripture, confessing sin, and praying for one another. That little circle became my first experience of true allies.

Looking back now, I can see the difference clearly. My old friendships had been about convenience and fun. These new brothers were different. They did not let me coast. They challenged me to grow. They carried me when I was weak, and when they struggled, I carried them.

From Playmates to Brothers

Here is what I learned: you do not drift into allies. You choose them. Boys stumble into friendships based on convenience. Whoever lives on their street, whoever is on their team, whoever happens to be around becomes the crew. But men know better. Men understand that the people closest to you will shape the direction of your life. You do not stumble into allies. You seek them out.

That is why Jesus spent an entire night praying before choosing His twelve disciples (Luke 6:12–13). Think about that. The Son of God Himself did not wing it. He stayed up all night in prayer before deciding which men would walk with Him. If Jesus needed to be intentional about His allies, how much more do we?

The truth is, the stakes are higher than we realize. If you choose playmates, you will drift. You will stay stuck in boyhood. But if you choose allies, you will grow into the man God designed you to be.

My dorm brothers became the first men in my life who were not just fun to hang out with but were willing to fight for my soul. They were not impressed by my excuses. They were not afraid of my honesty. They did not flinch when I admitted my struggles. They prayed with me, pushed me, and reminded me who I was becoming in Christ.

That is the difference. Playmates pass the time. Allies sharpen your soul. Playmates laugh at your dumb jokes. Allies call out your dumb decisions. Playmates disappear when life gets hard. Allies dig in when the fight gets tough.

That little group of four taught me a lesson I have never forgotten. Every man will either surround himself with playmates or with allies. And that choice will determine the man he becomes.

Choosing Wisely

The reality is, you get to choose who is in your inner circle. Nobody chooses for you. You may not pick your coworkers or your neighbors, but you do choose your allies.

This means you need to stop wasting your best energy on men who do not care about your future. You can still have acquaintances. You can

still be kind to everyone. But your closest circle has to be chosen carefully.

You need men who know where to find you when you go missing. You need men who have permission to tell you the truth when you are being reckless. You need men who can carry the corners of your mat when you are too weak to move. And you need to be that kind of man for them in return.

Jesus modeled this for us. Out of the crowds who followed Him, He chose seventy-two to send out, then twelve to walk with Him, and within the twelve, three who were closest. He chose allies, and He chose them intentionally. If the Son of God built His life this way, how much more should we?

Every man needs brothers who will climb the roof, dig through the ceiling, and lower him to the feet of Jesus when he cannot get there himself. Without those kinds of allies, you will remain stuck in boyhood. With them, you will step into the kind of manhood God designed you for.

The Challenge

So here is the challenge: take an honest inventory of the men in your life. Are they playmates, or are they allies? Playmates are easy to find. Allies are harder to build. Playmates take little effort. Allies take intentionality, prayer, and vulnerability. But the payoff is worth it.

Ask yourself: Who are the three men in my life I can absolutely count on? Who will show up when I am in trouble? Who will call me out when I am drifting? Who has the strength to carry me to Jesus when I cannot walk there myself?

If you cannot answer those questions, it is time to start building that circle. Pray for those men. Seek them out. Be that man for someone else first, and you will find they start showing up for you. Boys have playmates. Men choose allies. And the choice is yours.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who in your life right now are more like playmates than allies? How do you know the difference?
2. Can you think of a time when someone carried you the way the four friends carried the paralyzed man to Jesus?
3. Why do you think so many men settle for fun friendships instead of building strong alliances?
4. What practical steps can you take this week to begin developing true allies in your life?
5. How can you take responsibility for becoming a better ally to the men God has already placed around you?



T E N E T

5

Boys Follow Their Heart; Men Guard Their Hearts (and Others)

I was about ten years old the first time I saw pornography. I was at a friend's house, and a group of us had just finished playing Street Fighter II on Super Nintendo. We were sweaty, loud, and completely locked in on pulling off Ryu's Hadouken. Then the game ended, and one of the boys grabbed the remote.

"Watch this," he said with a grin. He flipped the channel to what the neighborhood boys called "Skin-a-max."

If you grew up in the nineties, you know exactly what that meant. Cinemax had a reputation for airing movies late at night that were more about nudity than storytelling. And back then, this was before Wi-Fi, smartphones, or unlimited streaming. If you wanted to see something inappropriate, you had to work for it. There were scrambled signals you hoped would clear for a second, VHS tapes hidden in closets, magazines passed around like contraband. And here we were, ten-year-old boys huddled around a fuzzy TV screen, giggling like we had just cracked some secret code.

But it wasn't funny. Not really. I remember laughing along nervously with the group, but deep inside I knew this was different from a video game or a joke. It felt like taking a bite of forbidden fruit. It was as if something branded my mind in that moment. Innocence was replaced with curiosity, and curiosity quickly morphed into craving.

That one moment lit a fire in me that I couldn't put out. What I didn't realize was that I had just opened a door that would take me more than

a decade to close. That night planted a seed of addiction that grew into eleven years of struggle before I finally found freedom in Christ.

Why “Follow Your Heart” is Terrible Advice

The world loves to tell us to “follow your heart.” You hear it in movies, in pop songs, even in graduation speeches. “Follow your heart, and it will never lead you wrong.” It sounds poetic. It sounds inspiring. But it is terrible advice.

The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” That is not a Hallmark card. That is God telling us that our hearts lie to us. They tell us that what feels good must be right. They tell us that cravings are more important than commitments. They convince us to take shortcuts and justify them later.

That is exactly what happened to me. My heart told me that what I saw was exciting. It told me it was harmless. It told me nobody would know. And I listened. My heart convinced me to chase a feeling. But the problem with feelings is that they are not faithful. They change. They fade. They demand more.

Protecting your heart means understanding that not every desire deserves to be trusted. Some desires are dangerous. Some thoughts will destroy you if you let them grow unchecked. Protecting your heart means building boundaries before temptation has a chance to take root.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Boys treat their heart like a toy. Men treat their heart like a treasure. Boys follow every feeling. Men recognize that some feelings are a trap. **Boys follow their heart. Men protect their heart.**

Why Sexual Sin Hits Different

There are all kinds of sin, but the Bible makes it clear that sexual sin is in a category of its own. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.”

Do you notice the word Paul uses? He does not say “fight.” He does not say “stand strong.” He does not even say “resist.” He says flee. That

means run. Get out. Do not try to stare it down. Do not try to negotiate with it. Do not tell yourself you are strong enough to handle it. The only strategy Scripture gives us for sexual temptation is to turn and run the other direction.

That is powerful when you think about it. The Bible tells us to stand firm against the devil (Ephesians 6:13). It tells us to resist him and he will flee (James 4:7). But when it comes to sexual sin, the command is flipped. This time we are the ones who flee. We are told to run because if you try to fight this one on your own strength, you will lose.

How Sexual Sin Destroys From the Inside Out

Paul explains why. “All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.” Think about that. Gossip wounds someone else’s reputation. Theft damages someone else’s property. But sexual sin burns you from the inside out. It doesn’t just scar your conscience. It warps your soul. It does something deeper because it messes with how you were created to love.

I learned this the hard way. My eleven-year addiction to pornography didn’t just affect me privately. It shaped how I saw people publicly. It changed how I looked at women, how I treated relationships, and even how I saw myself. It made me selfish. It made me numb. It convinced me that chasing a quick feeling was more important than protecting my heart.

And like every addiction, it never stayed satisfied. My heart would lie to me and say, “Just one more time. Just one more look.” But that craving never got smaller. It only got louder.

That is what sexual sin does. It convinces you that you are in control while it slowly takes control of you. It promises intimacy but delivers isolation. It promises satisfaction but leaves you emptier than before. It does not just affect your body. It rewires your heart and corrodes your soul.

Protecting More Than Yourself

One of the biggest shifts from boyhood to manhood is realizing that your choices do not affect only you. Boys think in terms of me. Men think in

terms of we. Boys chase their feelings without considering the fallout. Men guard their hearts because they understand that the condition of their heart will either protect or wound the people they love most.

I learned this lesson the hard way as a father. A few years ago, my son and I were excited about watching a popular action movie together. We had planned it as a father and son moment. Loud scenes. Big visuals. Something we could enjoy side by side.

Before our planned night, I suggested he watch an earlier movie in the series so he would understand the story. In my mind, it felt harmless. I assumed it was just another action film. I did not think twice about it.

Later, as I walked through the house, I passed the living room and realized he was watching it alone. I glanced at the screen at exactly the wrong moment. What I saw was not violence or language. It was something more subtle and more dangerous. A sexualized scene designed to grab attention and stir desire. The camera lingered. The moment lingered. And there was my young son, sitting there, unsure where to look.

I froze. In an instant, I saw my own childhood reflected back at me. I remembered moments when curiosity met temptation long before I was ready to process it. I remembered how easily innocence can be interrupted. How quickly a line can be crossed without anyone saying a word. And in that moment, I knew I had failed him.

I was the one who suggested the movie. I was the one who assumed it was harmless. I was the one who left him unguarded. The man who was supposed to protect his heart had unintentionally opened the door and walked away. That is when it hit me. Manhood is not just about avoiding obvious evil. It is about guarding against subtle threats. It is about understanding that your freedom carries responsibility. It is about realizing that your decisions create environments where others either grow stronger or get wounded.

Men do not just ask, “Can I handle this?” They ask, “Who else might this affect?” Because leadership always involves protection. And fatherhood always involves responsibility. Growing into manhood means learning that your choices echo. They land in hearts you care about. And once you see that clearly, you stop living only for yourself. You start guarding what matters.

3 Areas of Our Heart That Must be Guarded

So how do you actually guard your heart? It sounds like a spiritual cliché until you get specific. Boys talk about boundaries but never set any. Men build real defenses and actually live by them.

The first battleground is what you watch. Entertainment is not neutral. Every show, every movie, every TikTok, every video game is preaching some kind of sermon. Boys say, “It’s just a movie, it’s not that big of a deal.” Men recognize that what you laugh at today you will tolerate tomorrow, and what you tolerate tomorrow you may excuse in your own life the next day.

Most men would never allow a stranger to walk into their living room, sit down next to their wife, and start seducing her. They would never allow someone to teach their kids how to compromise their values right in front of them. Yet many men invite that very influence through Netflix or YouTube and call it “just entertainment.” Guarding your heart means asking hard questions about what you consume and what you allow your family to consume.

The second battleground is money. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Money and heart are always tied together. How you spend, save, and give reveals what has your heart. Boys spend impulsively. They follow every craving. They swipe the card without thinking about the cost. Men learn to align their money with their values. They budget. They give generously. They use their money to train their heart to trust God, not possessions. If you want to know whether a man guards his heart, look at his bank statement.

The third battleground is relationships. Proverbs 13:20 says, “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.” Boys drift into whatever friendships are most convenient. Men choose carefully because they know their closest relationships shape their future. If you surround yourself with playmates, your heart will drift into foolishness. If you surround yourself with allies who love God, your heart will grow stronger.

The Ripple Effect of a Guarded Heart

When a man guards his heart, the benefits ripple outward. His wife feels secure because she knows she can trust him. His children grow up with stability because they see consistency instead of compromise. His friends respect him because his word means something. His church grows stronger because his integrity can be counted on.

When a man does not guard his heart, the opposite ripple spreads. His wife feels anxious because she cannot trust him. His children feel unprotected because they sense instability. His friendships become shallow because his word is unreliable. His church feels the weight of his inconsistency. Following your heart may feel exciting in the moment, but it always costs more than you want to pay.

One man who follows his heart into compromise does not just hurt himself. He hurts everyone connected to him. One man who guards his heart creates safety and strength for his entire circle. That is the power of a guarded heart.

The Challenge

Here is the challenge: do not trust your heart. Guard it. Your feelings are real, but they are not reliable. One day they tell you to fight for your marriage, the next day they tell you to quit. One day they tell you to pursue God, the next day they tell you to sleep in. Boys let their heart lead them in circles. Men guard their heart and lead it where it needs to go.

So ask yourself: Are you living like a boy who follows every impulse, or like a man who guards his heart and the hearts of others? Guarding your heart is not about legalism. It is about legacy. What you protect today becomes the environment your family lives in tomorrow. What you allow in today becomes the inheritance your children carry tomorrow. Boys follow their hearts, even if it wrecks their family. Men protect their hearts, because they know the cost of neglect is too high.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Looking back, how has “following your heart” led you into regret?
2. Why does Paul tell us to flee sexual sin instead of fighting it? How does that change your approach to temptation?
3. Which of the three battlegrounds — media, money, or relationships — do you need to guard more carefully right now?
4. What ripple effects have you seen in a family or community when a man failed to guard his heart?
5. Who in your life needs you to help guard their heart, not just your own?



T E N E T

6

Boys Tell Their Mommies; Men Tell on Themselves

I remember one of the biggest arguments I ever had with my wife. It wasn't even about something important. We were both tired, stressed, and the tension had been building over little things. The way I loaded the dishwasher. The way she left the light on in the bathroom. Nothing catastrophic, but enough tiny sparks to light a fire.

Pretty soon, the little stuff escalated into raised voices. It was loud. It was tense. I could feel myself getting defensive, so I tried to shut it down with two little words.

"Chill, Jenny!"

Except my wife's name is Maria. Time froze. The air got sucked out of the room. Maria stopped mid-sentence and tilted her head like she was trying to process what she had just heard. Her face was caught somewhere between confusion and fury. And in that silent split second, I realized I had just called my wife by the name of my ex-girlfriend.

My heart sank like a rock in my chest. So what did I do? Did I immediately own it? Did I confess the slip and beg for forgiveness? Not exactly. I scrambled. I panicked. I tried to cover it.

I mumbled something that sort of rhymed, like, "No, I said chill really." I threw it out fast and acted confident, hoping she would take it at face value. To my absolute shock, she did. She gave me a skeptical look, shrugged, and let it go.

I walked away thinking, Wow. Dodged that one. Smooth recovery, Justice. You're in the clear. But I wasn't in the clear. Not even close.

When the Holy Spirit Shows Up

I left the room as quickly and as nonchalant as I could, but the adrenaline was still pumping. On the outside, it probably looked like I had escaped. On the inside, conviction was already digging in.

Almost immediately, two voices started arguing in my head. One voice said, You covered it. Don't be stupid. Why reopen the wound? Why create drama? Just let it go. The other voice pressed back hard: Be honest. Tell her the truth. You will never build real trust on a lie.

I paced around the living room while that war raged in my head. Part of me wanted to leave it buried. I mean, she hadn't exploded. Things seemed calm. Why stir it back up? Why make it worse? But the more I tried to talk myself out of it, the heavier it got.

I knew what I had to do. That's when this tenet stopped being words on a page and became painfully real: Boys tell their mom. Men tell on themselves.

Boys Hide. Men Confess.

Boys cover their mistakes. They hope someone else will clean up the mess. If they get caught, they spin the story, minimize the damage, or shift the blame. Boys are terrified of being exposed, so they live in cover-ups.

Men do the opposite. Men step forward. Men confess before they get caught. Men take ownership because they know intimacy and trust cannot grow in the dark. So I walked back inside, sat down next to Maria, and said the words I had been dreading. "I need to be honest. I did call you Jenny. I panicked and tried to cover it, but I want you to know the truth."

There was a pause. I braced myself for the explosion. But it never came. Did it sting? Absolutely. Was she hurt? Of course. But instead of blowing up, she looked me in the eye and listened. And strangely enough, that moment drew us closer. Not because I messed up—but because I chose honesty over hiding.

Telling on myself rebuilt trust that would have been destroyed if I had kept it buried. That's the difference between boys and men. Boys run to mom. Boys run to excuses. Boys run to hiding places that make

them feel safe. Men take responsibility. Men tell on themselves. Men know confession is the only path to true intimacy and real freedom.

Hiding vs. Confessing

The very first man in the Bible shows us exactly what boys do when they mess up. In Genesis 3, Adam disobeys God by eating from the one tree he was told not to touch. When God comes walking in the garden and calls out, “Adam, where are you?” Adam does not confess. He hides. God gives him a moment. A chance to own it. A chance to step forward and tell the truth. Instead, Adam shifts the blame. “The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12).

In one sentence, Adam manages to blame his wife and God at the same time. That is the instinct of a boy. Hide. Then blame. “It wasn’t me.” “It wasn’t my fault.” “Someone else made me do it.”

And before we judge Adam too quickly, let us be honest. We do the same thing. When you lie to your boss and get caught, you spin the story to protect your image. When your wife asks a hard question, you dodge it or change the subject. When someone confronts you, you deflect and make it about them. That is hiding. That is boyhood.

Hiding always feels safer in the moment, but it is exhausting. It is like carrying a backpack full of bricks everywhere you go. You look fine on the outside, but inside you are tired, heavy, and weighed down by secrets. That is why boys tell their mom. They want someone else to fix the mess. They want to be rescued from the consequences.

Men tell on themselves. They know hiding does not heal. It rots. They know secrets do not protect. They poison. They choose confession because they want freedom more than comfort. Confession is not weakness. It is strength under control. Boys hide and hope they get away with it. Men step into the light and deal with it. That is the difference.

Why Confession Matters

The Bible makes this crystal clear. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Notice the two parts: forgiveness and purification.

Forgiveness deals with the penalty of sin. Purification deals with the pollution of sin. One removes the debt. The other cleanses the shame.

But God doesn't stop there. James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Did you catch that? Forgiveness comes from confessing to God, but healing comes from confessing to people.

That's why so many men feel stuck. They confess privately to God, but they never confess openly to a brother. And as a result, they carry shame even though they know they are forgiven. Forgiveness clears your record, but confession brings healing to your soul.

Boys don't want either one. Boys want to hide. Boys want to keep secrets. Boys want to run to mom, hoping she will protect them from consequences. But men know better. Men know forgiveness is worth it. Healing is worth it. Freedom is worth it.

What Lives in the Dark, Dies in the Light

Ephesians 5:13 says, "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible and everything that is illuminated becomes a light." Sin grows in the dark. Shame thrives in silence. The enemy whispers, "Keep this secret. Nobody has to know." Why? Because as long as it stays in the dark, he has power over you.

But the moment you confess, the moment you drag that thing into the light, it dies. Its power is broken. That's why Satan hates confession so much. Because confession is the doorway to freedom.

Boys hide because they are scared of the consequences. Men confess because they are hungry for freedom. Boys live in the dark. Men step into the light. And when they do, something amazing happens: what once brought shame now becomes a testimony. That sin that owned you yesterday becomes a story of God's grace tomorrow. That's the power of confession.

Guilt vs. Shame

One of the biggest reasons men hide instead of confess is that they don't understand the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt says, I did something wrong. Shame says, I am something wrong.

Guilt is about behavior. Shame is about identity. Guilt is specific. Shame is vague. Guilt is the Holy Spirit nudging you to repent. Shame is the enemy trying to chain you to despair.

Think about it. Guilt says, “You lied. You need to confess and make it right.” Shame says, “You’re a liar. That’s just who you are.” Guilt says, “You crossed a boundary. Own it, repent, and move forward.” Shame says, “You’re disgusting. You’ll never change.”

That’s why boys stay stuck. They confuse guilt with shame. They think, If I admit what I did, I’ll prove that I am broken beyond repair. So they bury it. They deflect. They cover. They run to anything that distracts them — work, hobbies, pornography, substances — instead of facing the truth.

Men know the difference. Men understand that guilt can actually be a gift because it points you to God’s grace. Shame is a prison. Guilt says, Run to God. Shame says, Run away from Him. Guilt says, You failed, but you can get up. Shame says, You are a failure, so stay down.

Confession is how you break shame’s grip. Because the moment you bring it into the light, you remember who you really are. You are not defined by your worst decision. You are defined by Christ.

The Scapegoat

In the Old Testament, God gave Israel a powerful picture of this truth. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would bring two goats before the Lord. The first goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people. Its blood was shed as payment for their guilt. That goat represented forgiveness.

But then came the second goat. This was the scapegoat. The high priest would place his hands on the goat’s head and confess over it all the sins of the people — every lie, every failure, every hidden thought. Then the goat was led out into the wilderness, far from the camp, carrying their shame with it. The goat was never brought back. It vanished into the desert, gone for good.

Picture that scene. Thousands of Israelites standing together, watching as their shame is literally walked out of the camp. First, the priest slaughters the sacrifice to cover their guilt. Then, as the scapegoat disappears into the horizon, every man, woman, and child sees a

visible sign: “My shame is gone. It has been carried away.”

Both goats were necessary. One dealt with the penalty of sin. The other dealt with the pollution of sin. One paid the debt. The other removed the stain.

Fast forward to the cross, and you see the complete picture in Jesus. He is both goats. He is the sacrifice whose blood pays for guilt. And He is the scapegoat who carries away shame. Hebrews 12:2 says Jesus endured the cross, “scorning its shame.” That means He not only paid for our sin, He also destroyed the power of shame to define us.

This is why confession is not something to fear. It is an invitation to freedom. When you confess, you are not informing God of something He doesn’t know. You are stepping into what Jesus already purchased. You are receiving both goats, forgiveness for guilt and cleansing from shame.

Confession as a Lifestyle

Most men treat confession like a fire alarm. You only pull it when everything is already burning. The problem is that by the time you finally yank the alarm, the kitchen is full of smoke and half the house is gone.

The Bible paints a very different picture. First John 1:7 says, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin.” Notice the word walk. John does not say, “If you step into the light every once in a while.” He says walk. That means ongoing. Step after step. Day after day. Confession is not an emergency response. It is a way of life.

Boys see confession as damage control. They confess only when they are cornered. They wait until someone points and asks, “Who did this?” and only then do they mumble the truth. Men live differently. Boys hide and hope nobody notices. Men tell on themselves and sleep better. Boys wait to get caught. Men speak up before the question is asked.

The enemy cannot blackmail a man who already told the truth. So stop hiding. Stop waiting to get caught. Stop calling your excuses “privacy.” Boys tell their mom. Men tell on themselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think hiding feels safer in the moment but heavier over time?
2. Before Adam was caught, he used fig leaves to cover himself up. What is your "fig leaf" excuse or habit you use to cover your mistakes?
3. Who in your life is safe enough for you to confess to, and if you do not have anyone, how can you start building that circle?
4. How have you experienced the relief of confession in your own life?
5. What is one specific area this week where you need to tell on yourself before you are caught?



T E N E T

7

Boys Avoid Work; Men Lay Foundations

My dad was an electrical contractor. As soon as I was small enough to crawl under houses or squeeze through attics, I was on the job. Saturdays. Summers. Riding in the work van before the sun was up.

That van was my childhood classroom. I learned how to read the Thomas Guide, which was basically Google Maps in a spiral notebook. No GPS. Just endless pages, highlighters, wrong turns, and a mild sense of panic.

One summer I started a big job with my dad. The plan was to work the entire summer and save up for my first desktop computer. I was getting paid five dollars an hour under the table. In my head, I was stacking cash like Tony Montana. In real life, I was mostly buying Taco Bell.

Then came the day I learned a lesson I never forgot. We were on a big construction site. Hot. Loud. Packed with grown men actually working. I was exhausted and decided I deserved a break. So I found a hallway where my dad could not see me, sat down, and played Snake on my Nokia. That phone was an ancient gaming system with one game and zero excuses.

I made it about ten minutes before something shifted. Nobody yelled. Nobody pointed. But every man on that site saw me sitting while they were working. I felt it instantly. They knew. I knew. And deep down, I knew I had embarrassed my dad.

Later that day, he pulled me aside and gave me a serious talk. Not loud. Not dramatic. Just firm. That day I made a decision. I would never

be lazy. Not because I loved work, but because I loved my father. God works the same way. And you are his son.

God Gives Work Before He Gives More

When God made Adam, He did not start with comfort. He started with responsibility. Before a wife. Before authority. Before expansion. God gave Adam a job. Work was never punishment. It was preparation. That matters, because laziness does not just delay blessing. It disqualifies men from it. God does not stack promises on top of unfinished foundations.

Scripture does not tiptoe around this. “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Timothy 5:8

That is not rude. That is clear. If a man claims faith but refuses responsibility, his life contradicts his confession. Providing is not optional. It is evidence of maturity, integrity, and obedience. A man’s work is spiritual. His sacrifice is worship.

When a man gets up and goes to work each day, lays down his life for his family, his church, and his community, that is a holy act. God uses that faithfulness as the foundation for everything He wants to build. Boys avoid work. Men lay foundations.

Jesus Shows Men How to Work

This is why Jesus’ life before ministry matters so much. Before He preached sermons. Before He healed the sick. Before He walked on water. Jesus went to work.

The Gospels call Him “the carpenter’s son,” but the word used is *tekton*. That word does not mean a guy making birdhouses on the weekend. It means builder. Craftsman. Contractor. In Galilee, that likely meant stone as much as wood. Jesus would have been on job sites. Fixing walls. Lifting beams. Shaping stone. Sweating in the sun. Clocking in long before anyone knew His name.

For thirty years, the Son of God showed up to ordinary work. Thirty

years. No crowds. No miracles. No platform. Just responsibility. That was not wasted time. That was God's training ground.

We love the three years of miracles. God required thirty years of faithfulness first. Because leadership in the Kingdom does not start on a stage. It starts on a job site. Jesus did not skip responsibility. He embraced it. And when the Father saw He could be trusted with the weight of a hammer, He trusted Him with the weight of a cross.



God still works the same way. He gives responsibility before influence. Faithfulness before favor. Weight before authority. Boys avoid work. Men lay foundations. And God builds futures on men who are willing to sweat first and shine later.

My Proudest Season of Life

Maria and I met in Bible college, fell in love, and got married before we had real jobs or real money. It was one of the smartest decisions I ever made. It was also one of the fastest ways God exposed how selfish I still was. Marriage has that effect.

Suddenly life was not just about me. I had a wife. A real human being trusting me to lead, protect, and provide. Not just pay bills, but carry responsibility. Then Maria got pregnant. She assumed she would go back to work after the baby was born. That plan lasted about as long as a New Year's resolution.

One day she came home in tears. She said she felt guilty leaving the baby. Then she said something that hit harder. She felt resentful that I did not make enough for her to stay home.

That one hurt. Not because she was wrong, but because she was right. The problem was not my income. It was my leadership. I was careless with money. Buying dumb stuff. Living above our means. Swiping the card instead of saying no. My irresponsibility was now stealing peace from my home.

So I grew up. We downsized. Cut debt. I picked up a second job so Maria could stay home during those early years. It was not glamorous. It was not fun. But it was manly.

That season did more than fix our finances. It laid a foundation. When I chose responsibility over comfort, God finally had something solid to build on. Trust grew. Peace settled in. Our family took root. Everything good that came later was built on that season. Not talent. Not luck. Obedience. That is how God builds lives. Boys avoid work. Men lay foundations. And God builds strong families on men willing to carry the weight first.

Going to Work for God

From the beginning, God has used men to build things. Gardens. Arks. Nations. Temples. Not because God needed help, but because building forms men.

Providing was never just about a paycheck. It was always about worship. That is where tithing stops being about money and starts being about manhood. Too many men treat giving like a bill. Something the church asks for when it is short. That mindset is backwards. Giving is not loss. It is alignment. It is showing up to work for what God is building. When a man gives, he is not funding an organization. He is taking responsibility for the house of God. That is an honor.

The Tithe Is a Trust Test

God does not start by asking for everything. He starts with ten percent. Not because He needs it, but because He wants to know if He can trust you.

Money is rarely about money. It is about priority. Tithing says, “God, You come first.” Not after bills. Not after hobbies. Not after vacations. First. That posture turns a man from a consumer into a contributor. From a spectator into a builder. A man who cannot trust God with ten percent will struggle to trust Him with a family, a calling, or influence.

Men Build the Church

Strong churches do not happen by accident. They are built by men who carry weight. Men who show up. Men who stay late. Men who give quietly. Men who see the church as their responsibility, not a service they

attend. When men give, they stop asking, “What am I getting?” They start asking, “What am I carrying?” And that changes everything. The church is not a building. It is the hope of the world. And God builds His church on men who are willing to work for it.

This is bigger than money. God is inviting men into the sacred work of building something that outlives them. That is not pressure. That is purpose. Real men do not ask how little they can give. They ask how faithful they can be. And when men step up, the church grows strong, families stabilize, and cities feel the impact. God builds his church on men, not boys. Boys avoid work. Men lay foundations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think avoiding work and responsibility feels easier in the moment but creates instability over time?
2. Where in your life are you most tempted to look for comfort instead of carrying weight?
3. God gave responsibility before reward. What “unfinished foundation” might be limiting what God wants to build next in your life?
4. How does seeing Jesus work quietly for thirty years challenge the way you view ordinary, unseen faithfulness?
5. What is one specific responsibility God is calling you to pick up this week so you can start laying a stronger foundation?



T E N E T

8

Boys Play House. Men Build a Home.

A guy came to me recently, frustrated about his relationship. “Pastor, I don’t get it. I’m trying to lead my girlfriend, but she won’t submit.”

I almost laughed. “Good,” I said. “She shouldn’t. She’s not your wife. She’s your girlfriend.”

He fired back, “But doesn’t the Bible say women should submit to men?”

“No,” I said. “It says wives submit to husbands. Covenant changes everything. You’re trying to be a husband without paying the cost of becoming one. No wonder it’s not working.”

That’s the problem with a lot of men today. They want to play house without building one. They want the authority of leadership without the weight of responsibility. They want to be treated like husbands while living like bachelors.

It’s the same thing we did as kids playing house. Somebody held a baby doll. Somebody pretended to go to work. It felt real, but it wasn’t. No midnight feedings. No bills. No pressure. It was fun because it was pretend. Too many men never outgrow that.

Playing House Is Dangerous

Playing house feels close enough to the real thing that it tricks you. You can live together. Share a bed. Split rent. Share passwords. But without covenant, it is still pretend.

Ephesians 5 is clear. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” That is not boyfriend language. That is sacrificial, covenant language.

Paul is talking to husbands. Not boyfriends. Not fiancés. Not “we’re basically married.” When a man skips covenant but expects submission, he is not leading. He is pretending. That’s immaturity. So I told him the truth.

“Your girlfriend’s leader is not you. It’s Jesus. Your job right now is to point here to Christ, not you.” Boys play house. Men build a home.

The Tenet

Boys want authority without responsibility. Boys want romance without covenant. Boys want leadership without sacrifice.

Men know a home costs something. Men know leadership means laying down your life. Men do not play house. Men build one.

Boys Play House. Men Build a Home.

Playing house is not new. Kids used to do it with toy kitchens and plastic baby dolls. Grown men still do it today. The toys just cost more. Playing house looks like moving in together because “rent is cheaper,” while avoiding marriage. Playing house looks like buying a couch from IKEA and calling it a future. Playing house looks like getting a dog and calling it a “starter child.” Playing house looks like sleeping together while still using the words boyfriend and girlfriend like it is eighth grade. Playing house looks like “test driving” marriage instead of committing to one.

Here is the truth. You are not building a home. You are staging one. It is like a model home in a new neighborhood. Everything looks perfect until you open the fridge and realize it is fake.

I have counseled plenty of couples who wanted the security of marriage without the covenant of marriage. It almost always ends the same way. Somebody cries. Somebody moves out. Somebody fights over who keeps the Netflix account. Because boys want the benefits of commitment without paying the cost of responsibility.

Building Beyond Yourself

By the time Maria and I had three kids, I realized providing was not enough. Food, shelter, and tuition do not give a child direction. Kids need a foundation. So we started forming principles as a family. We would say things like, “This is how the Colemans do it,” or “That is the Coleman way.” It was our attempt to create values and culture in our home.

Then I got convicted. I realized I did not want my kids living life “my way.” My way is not eternal. My opinions can be challenged. My principles can be debated. And one day, when my kids grow up and disagree with how I raised them, what happens then? They throw out the Coleman code and replace it with their own.

That is when God shifted my thinking. I do not want to build my family on my name. I want to build it on His. God’s way outlasts mine. God’s Word does not expire. God’s truth does not change with culture.

From My Code to God’s Code

So we stopped saying, “This is the Coleman family code,” and started saying, “This is God’s way.” That shift changed everything for me as a father. I stopped trying to make my family an extension of myself and started pointing them toward Christ. I stopped teaching my opinions and started teaching God’s principles. Because His Word is what will carry them when I am no longer around.

But here is what I did not expect. Teaching my kids God’s Word forced me to live it. If I told them to put God first, I had to put God first. If I told them to honor God with money, I had to stop spending foolishly. If I told them obedience mattered, I had to obey.

God used my kids to disciple me. The more I taught His Word, the more it shaped me. It made me a stronger man, a better husband, and a better father.

A Home That Lasts

This is how real homes are built. Not on your last name. Not on your personality. Not on your wisdom. Those things fade.

Psalm 127 says unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor

in vain. You can build it your way and it might stand for a season. Build it God's way and it will stand for generations.

That is the difference. Boys play house for today. Men build homes that outlive them. Boys chase comfort. Men pursue legacy. Boys think about their name. Men care about God's name. So stop playing house. Build on God's foundation. Teach His Word. Live His Word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What values are you currently building your home on — your own opinions, or God's word?
2. Have you been more focused on creating comfort for today, or legacy for tomorrow?
3. What is one practical way you can begin teaching and modeling God's family code in your home?

T E N E T

9

Boys Play With Themselves; Men Work on Themselves

Let's be honest. When you saw this title, nobody thought it was about LEGO sets or model trains. You knew. That's why we're talking about it. Boys waste energy chasing five seconds of relief in secret. Men invest energy building strength that actually lasts. Boys lock the door and hope no one finds out. Men open the door, face their weakness, and get to work.

Here's the truth. The more you play with yourself, the less you feel like a man. The more you work on yourself, the more respect you gain from God, others, and yourself.

Let's Call It What It Is

I have this conversation all the time. Guys say, "I pray. I go to church. I read the Bible. Why am I stuck?" Dig a little deeper and it's the same pattern. Late nights scrolling porn. Instagram "fitness tips" that turn into soft-core two swipes later. Phone in hand until 1 a.m., then wondering why they have no energy or discipline.

And it's not just sex. Playing with yourself is a lifestyle. Food. Money. Time. It's the inability to say no to yourself. Boys indulge. Men invest.

The Bible Does Not Play Nice

Proverbs says, "A man without self-control is like a city with broken walls." Translation: wide open, exposed, and one bad hit away from

collapse. Paul says it even clearer. “I discipline my body and make it my slave.” In other words, my cravings don’t lead me. I lead them. Because if you cannot lead yourself, God will not trust you to lead anyone else.

Appetite Is Training

This is why food matters. A boy eats for comfort. A man eats for fuel. If you cannot say no at the table, you will not say no in the bedroom. If you cannot push back from seconds, you will not push back from sin.

Appetite is practice. Boys get taken out by cravings. Men build strength by mastering them. Boys play with themselves. Men work on themselves.



Men take their bodies seriously. Not out of vanity, but discipline. Paul says, “Train yourself to be godly.” The word train is where we get gym. Translation: strength, spiritual or physical, does not magically appear. It is built. Men understand the body is not meant to be indulged. It is meant to be trained. Water instead of soda. Sleep instead of one more episode. The gym instead of the couch. Not for abs. For mastery. Because the goal is simple. I am in charge of me. My cravings do not vote. My appetites do not lead. My body works for me, not the other way around.

That is the difference. Boys play with themselves. Men work on themselves. Here is the surprise. Discipline is not prison. It is freedom. A man who controls himself walks differently. He looks people in the eye. He shakes hands with confidence. He does not leak shame because he is not hiding from himself.

Train your body and your mind sharpens too. You sleep better. Think clearer. Show up stronger. Your wife notices. Your kids notice. Even strangers notice. And it shows up everywhere. A boy eats until regret. A man eats for fuel. A boy finds excuses. A man finds reps. A boy drains himself in secret. A man brings his best home. A boy prays when he feels like it. A man trains his soul. A boy coasts at work. A man brings excellence.

Self-mastery is not about being impressive. It is about being free. Free from cravings. Free from shame. Free to lead. That is what it means to work on yourself.

When Maria Tried to Break Up With Me

Maria and I had only been dating a few months when she pulled one of the boldest moves in relationship history. She asked me to meet her in her car.

I thought we were going for food. Instead, I sat down and she handed me an envelope. Thick. Heavy. Three pages. Immediately I thought, I'm about to get dumped in a Honda. I looked at her and said, "I'm not reading this. If you're breaking up with me, you're going to have to say it out loud."

She started crying. Which is never a good sign. She read the letter, and it was basically a full audit of my life. She loved me, but she was honest. I was immature. I abused my freedom. I did not live by the values she expected from a man. And if I kept living like that, she could not stay with me.

Translation: "You're fun, but you're not husband material." And she was right. I was twenty-one, living on my own, and my idea of adulthood was staying up too late, eating whatever I wanted, and spending money like I had a side hustle called "infinite credit." I wasn't mastering freedom. I was wasting it. Sitting in that car, listening to her cry through three pages of truth, was one of the most humbling moments of my life.

The Change That Stuck

If the story ended there, I'd just be a guy who got dumped in a parking lot. But I loved Maria. And I loved God. So I changed. Not just to keep my girlfriend. Changes made for people rarely last. Changes made for God do.

I got serious about my faith. I showed up to church. I served. I surrounded myself with men who challenged me. And slowly, Jesus rebuilt me from the inside out. I became more disciplined. More focused. More confident. And here's the wild part. The more I worked on myself, the more attractive I became. Self-control is magnetic. Discipline earns respect. She didn't dump me. She married me. And that moment in her car turned out to be one of the greatest gifts God ever gave me.

Overcoming Porn Addiction

Here's what Maria did not know at the time. The real problem was not my schedule. Not my spending. Not my discipline. It was porn.

I knew it because I could not even say no to myself yet. I wanted to change. I wanted to grow up. I wanted to be the kind of man Maria deserved. But every time I quit and failed again, the shame stacked higher. I would stop for a while. Then go back. Then feel like a fraud.

Eventually I thought, What's the point? Why try to become a better man if I keep losing the same fight? That cycle almost made me give up on everything. I remembered something my dad said when I was a teenager and he caught me with porn. I expected yelling. A lecture. Shame. Instead, he said one sentence. "Son, when a man can conquer this, he can conquer anything." That was not advice. That was a vision for manhood.

Years later, when I finally decided I was done losing, that sentence became my mantra. *I will conquer this*. Scripture says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Romans 8:37. The phrase *more than conquerors* comes from the Greek word *hypernikōmen*. *Nikē* means *victory*. It is where we get the word Nike. *Hyper* means *more than, beyond*.

Paul is saying we do not just barely survive. We overwhelmingly win through Christ. You were not designed to live stuck. You were designed to live in victory. God did not create you to manage addiction. He created you to overcome it.

If you are a man reading this, there is about a ninety-nine percent chance you struggle with porn on some level. That does not make you broken. It makes you human. But it does mean you need a strategy. Here is the part most men hate. You do not beat porn alone.

The only way I know to become a conqueror is to stop hiding and start talking. Secrets are oxygen for addiction. Brotherhood suffocates it. The day I decided to get free, I confessed my addiction to a Christian brother. Turns out he had the same struggle. So we did something radical. We met every week. No skipping. No excuses. No pretending. We told the truth. We called each other out. We prayed for each other. Every week. For a year. And slowly, the grip broke.

Brotherhood changed my life. I have not looked at porn since. That

was nearly twenty years ago, and I am still free. Not because I am strong. But because I stopped fighting alone. Victory is possible. Freedom is real. If God can do it for me, He can do it for you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where in your life are you most tempted to indulge instead of invest, whether with sex, food, money, time, or comfort?
2. The chapter says “if you cannot lead yourself, God will not trust you to lead others.” Where do you see a gap between your desire to lead and your current self-discipline?
3. How has secrecy, especially around porn or private habits, affected your confidence, energy, or sense of manhood?
4. What difference do you notice between seasons when you were hiding versus seasons when you were honest and accountable with other men?
5. What is one concrete step you need to take this week to stop playing with yourself and start working on yourself, and who will help hold you to it?



T E N E T

10

Boys Run to Their Father.
So Do Real Men.
You Will Always Be a Son.

Dad, Help!

When I was nineteen years old, I was incredibly dumb. Olympic-level dumb. I had been living on my own for about a year. Paying my own bills. Had my own apartment. Naturally, I thought this meant I was a fully formed adult male.

My mom was in town, and I was driving her through the Valley when I cut someone off. Totally my fault. The guy lost it, rolled down his window, and yelled, “Hey, is that your mom in the car? F your mother.”

Now, instead of doing literally anything wise, calm, or legal, I decided this was my moment. I jumped out of the car, heart pounding, walked up to his window, and said, “You better apologize to my mom.”

He laughed and yelled even louder, “F your mother!”

And because I was nineteen and had the decision-making skills of a golden retriever, I punched him through the window as hard as I could.

I jumped back into my Honda Civic, my mom screaming, and took off like I was auditioning for *Fast & Furious: The Valley Drift*. About thirty seconds later, reality set in. He was following me. He followed me all the way to my apartment. Got my address. Then peeled off.

That’s when the panic really hit. So naturally, I made the next dumbest possible decision. I got back in my car and started following him.

Yes. I know. The entire story is just one bad decision sprinting into

the next. My hand is bleeding all over the steering wheel, and I finally do something smart. I call my dad and say, “I’m following this guy, and he’s heading to the police station.”

My dad says, “I’m on my way.”

He pulls up in his work van, and I will never forget this image for the rest of my life. My dad steps out... carrying a sledgehammer. Not metaphorically. Literally. A full sledgehammer. Like he was prepared to resolve this situation in the most Old Testament way possible.

In that moment, two things became very clear. First, I was an idiot. Second, I knew without question that I had a dad who would show up.

By the grace of God, the cops let me go. I was not arrested for assault. And that guy never came near my house again. I’m pretty sure the man with the sledgehammer made that an easy decision.

Looking back, the whole thing is embarrassing. I was reckless, immature, and about five seconds from ruining my life. But it taught me something important. At nineteen, I thought being a man meant reacting fast, being tough, and never backing down. That’s not manhood. That’s pride mixed with fear.

Never Stop Being a Son

Scripture says:

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Romans 8:15–16

Because of Jesus, we are not just forgiven. We are adopted. Which means we get a Father. Abba is not formal. It means Dad.

And here’s the part we forget: nowhere in the Bible does God stop calling us children. We never graduate from sonship. We never outgrow running to our Father.

When you are in over your head, your instinct should not be fixing it yourself. That’s pride pretending to be strength. Real strength runs to

God. Boys run to their father. So do men. You will always be a son. Boys become older. Men become sons.

Security vs. Insecurity

Here's the difference between boys and men. Boys hide when they mess up. Men run to their Father. When a boy breaks something, his first instinct is, *Don't tell Dad*. He spills gum on the carpet and throws a rug over it. He dents the car and parks it farther down the street like the damage might get lonely and fix itself. He gets a bad grade and buries the report card at the bottom of his backpack under three months of crumbs and forgotten homework.

Why? Because boys think Dad equals punishment. So they hide. That's insecurity. Men think differently. Men know their Father is not a threat. He is their security. So when a man messes up, falls short, or breaks something in his life, his instinct is not, *I hope God doesn't find out*. It's, *I need to run to God*. That's not weakness. That's maturity.

David said it best in Psalm 18:2:

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

Notice the language. Rock. Fortress. Deliverer. Refuge. Shield. Stronghold. Those aren't words of fear. They're words of confidence. David knew where his security came from. He knew exactly where to run when life fell apart. A boy hides in shame. A man hides in God. And that is the difference between insecurity and strength.

The Prodigal Son

Jesus told a story about this in Luke 15. A son decided he was ready to be independent. So he went to his father and asked for his inheritance early, which is basically a respectful way of saying, “I'd rather have your money than you.” He wanted the benefits of his father without the boundaries of his father.

Shockingly, the dad gives him the money. And the son takes off. New

city. New friends. New lifestyle. And he does what most young men do when you mix cash with freedom. He blows it. Late nights. Parties. Wild living. Friends everywhere. For a while, it feels like freedom. Until the money runs out. And when the money disappears, so do the friends.

Jesus says the son ends up broke, starving, and working in a pig pen. That detail matters. For a Jewish boy, pigs were unclean. He's not just poor. He's humiliated. He's feeding pigs and wishing he could eat what they're eating.

That's what independence without the Father always leads to. It feels like freedom at first, but it always ends in slavery. Then Jesus says something powerful. The son "came to his senses." Reality finally catches up. He thinks, Even my father's servants eat better than this. I need to go home. So he rehearses his apology speech. He's not trying to be a son anymore. He'll settle for servant status if that's all he can get.

But here's the moment that changes everything. While the son is still a long way off, the father sees him. And instead of waiting with crossed arms and an "I told you so," the father runs. Middle Eastern patriarchs didn't run. It was undignified. But this dad doesn't care.

He runs to his son. He hugs him. He kisses him. And before the boy can finish his speech, the father restores him. Robe on his back. Ring on his finger. Sandals on his feet. Then he throws a party. Why? Because the son didn't come home as a servant. He came home as a son.

That's the story Jesus tells to show us what God is like. We think independence makes us strong. God calls it lost. We think hiding protects us. God calls it slavery. We think coming back means punishment. God calls it restoration.

Why We Believe God Is Mad at Us

Here's the lie most of us live under. We believe God is mad at us. We mess up, we fail, we relapse, we blow it again, and our instinct is to pull away. We assume disappointment. Anger. Distance. So we hide. We avoid prayer. We stop running to God and start running from Him.

But that is not the gospel. Jesus already took the punishment we deserved. That is the whole point of the cross. God is not waiting to punish you. Jesus was punished for you. God is not counting your failures.

He placed them on His Son. You are not God's enemy anymore. You are His child.

That is why the prodigal story matters so much. The son expected consequences. The father gave him restoration. The son prepared a speech. The father prepared a party. The enemy hates that truth. Because the greatest threat to the enemy is not your discipline, your effort, or your willpower. It is your identity. If the enemy can convince you that God is mad, you will keep your distance. You will hide. You will isolate. And isolation is where defeat lives. But when a man knows who he is in Christ, everything changes. There is nothing more dangerous to the enemy than a man who knows he is a son.

A son does not beg for permission. A son does not live in fear. A son runs to his Father with confidence. That is what Romans 8 says. We did not receive a spirit of fear, but the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father." Not Judge. Not Boss. Dad.

You do not fight from shame. You fight from sonship. You do not obey to earn love. You obey because you already have it. And when you live from that place, the enemy loses leverage. Because shame loses its grip. Fear loses its power. And identity becomes your strength. There is nothing more powerful than a man who knows exactly who he is. A son of God.

The Most Dangerous Man on Earth

Here's the truth the enemy does not want you to know. There is nothing more dangerous than a man who knows who he is. Not arrogant. Not loud. Not trying to prove anything. A man who knows he is a son.

When a man knows God is not mad at him, he stops running. When he knows Jesus already took the punishment, he stops hiding. When he knows he belongs, he stops living scared.

The enemy's best strategy has always been the same. Convince you that God is angry, disappointed, distant. Because if you believe that, you will stay away from the very place you were meant to run. But when a man understands sonship, shame loses its leverage. A son does not beg. A son does not cower. A son does not fight alone. A son runs to his Father. A son gets back up. A son stands firm. And a son who knows his

identity becomes unstoppable. Not because he never falls, but because he always gets back up. Not because he is perfect, but because he is secure. Not because he is fearless, but because he knows exactly where to run when fear hits.

That is the man the enemy cannot stop. That is the man hell cannot intimidate. That is the man God trusts with weight. You are not fighting for identity. You are fighting from it. You are not earning sonship. You are living out of it. Stand up. Lift your head. Stop hiding. You are a son of God.

Becoming Like the Greatest Man Who Ever Lived

This book was never about behavior modification. It was never about trying harder. And it was never about pretending to be something you are not.

ManCode is about formation. It is about becoming like Jesus, the greatest man who ever lived.

- ♦ Jesus did not make excuses.
He took responsibility for a world that was not His fault.
- ♦ Jesus did not make empty promises.
He kept His word, even when it cost Him His life.
- ♦ Jesus did not reject correction.
He lived in submission to the Father.
- ♦ Jesus did not surround Himself with playmates.
He chose allies and built men.
- ♦ Jesus did not follow His heart.
He guarded it and gave it away in love.
- ♦ Jesus did not hide His failures.
He lived in truth and integrity.
- ♦ Jesus did not avoid work.
He laid foundations that still stand today.
- ♦ Jesus did not play house.
He built a home called the Church.
- ♦ Jesus did not indulge Himself.
He mastered Himself.
- ♦ Jesus did not outgrow sonship.
He lived every day as a Son of the Father.

That is the ManCode. Jesus did not stumble into a world-changing calling. God trusted Him with it. He was faithful when no one was watching. Obedient when it was costly. Strong under weight. Secure in who He was. Because of that, God trusted Him with a mission that altered history.

God is still looking for men He can trust. Men who choose calling over comfort. Responsibility over excuses. Truth over hiding. Sonship over shame.

The ManCode is not about self-improvement. It is about becoming the kind of man God can trust with weight, influence, and impact. God trusted Jesus with the world. He wants to trust you too.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you mess up or feel overwhelmed, is your instinct to hide, fix it yourself, or run to God? What does that reveal about how you see Him?
2. Which lie do you most struggle with: that God is mad at you, disappointed in you, or distant from you? How has that belief shaped your prayer life?
3. In the prodigal son story, where do you see yourself most often: asking for independence, feeding the pigs, rehearsing an apology, or being restored as a son?
4. What does "living from sonship instead of shame" look like practically in your life right now?
5. What is one area where God is inviting you to stop fighting alone and start running to Him as Father this week?



CONCLUSION

The Campfire That Changed My Life

Not long after I got married, my wife and I took a group from church to an orphanage in Mexico. I had never led a missions trip before. I did not speak Spanish. I had no idea what I was doing. But I was newly following Jesus, wildly sincere, and convinced that saying yes to Him was always an adventure.

For several days, we worked. We painted. We built bunk beds. We did construction in brutal heat. We walked through the hardest parts of the city, passed out flyers, hosted an outreach, loved on kids who had nothing, and partnered with a local ministry doing real work in a real place. It was meaningful. It was exhausting. It felt impactful. But the moment that changed my life did not happen during the work. It happened around a campfire.

That night, we sat with a man named Eric. Maria had known him since college. He had been a close friend for years. But after graduation, he packed up, left everything behind, and moved to this orphanage.

Eric lived on the property. His room was basically a shack. Concrete floors. No insulation. Oppressive heat. Almost nothing that would register as comfortable. On his wall were framed pictures from years earlier, from college days, standing next to friends who had gone on to careers, families, and normal lives.

Maria noticed those photos immediately. They were old. Faded. Clearly treasured. Later that night, as the fire burned low, we asked the question everyone was thinking. Why? Why would you leave everything behind to live here? Why would you give your life to these kids? Why this place?

His answer stopped me cold. He said he had stopped believing a lie. A lie that many Christians believe. A lie that keeps people from ever stepping into their purpose. The lie is this: *that God has a plan for my life*.

At first, that sounded wrong. That was the message I was preaching. God loves you. God has a plan for you. You matter. If you were the only person on earth, Jesus would have died for you. All of that is true. But it is incomplete. Eric explained that when our faith becomes centered on me, we quietly make ourselves the point of the story. We pray as if the universe revolves around our comfort, our fulfillment, and our destiny.

But the Bible does not say, “For God so loved you.” It says, “For God so loved the world.” Jesus did not come to give you a private plan. He came to redeem a broken world. And when we pray, “God, show me Your plan for my life,” we are often praying a backward prayer.

The better prayer is this:

“God, show me what You are already doing in the world You love so much and show me where I fit.”

That night, something shifted in me. My prayers changed. My faith matured. My understanding of calling was rewired. I realized God is not waiting around to reveal a secret plan for my comfort. God is already moving. His Kingdom is already advancing.

Scripture says,

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been advancing forcefully, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

Matthew 11:12 (NIV)

The word forceful comes from the Greek *biastēs*, which means *determined, resolute, unwilling to remain passive*. Jesus is not talking about physical violence. He is describing men who move with urgency when God moves. The Kingdom of God does not advance through comfort or convenience. It breaks into a resistant world, and only those who respond

with decisive faith step into it. Forceful men are not reckless men. They are men who refuse to sit back, delay obedience, or live as spectators. They see what God is doing and move toward it.

The Kingdom belongs to men who lay hold of it. God does not need spectators. He needs sons. Men He can trust. And that brings us here. This book was never about self improvement. It was never about becoming impressive. It was about becoming available.

My final charge to you is simple, but it will cost you everything:

Stop asking God to bless your plans.
Start asking Him to show you His.

Ask Him where He is working.
Ask Him where there is brokenness.
Ask Him where there is weight to be carried.

And then step forward as a man God can trust.

Because real manhood is not about finding your life. It is about giving it. Live the ManCode.

A Dangerous Prayer for When You Are Ready to Be Trusted With God's Plan

Father,

I come to You not asking for my own plan, but for Yours.
Not asking You to bless my agenda, but to align my life with what You
are already doing.

Open my eyes to see You clearly.
Open my heart to want what You want.
Show me where Your Kingdom is advancing in this world and where
You are inviting me to step in.
I confess that I have often made my faith about me.
My comfort.

My success.

My future.

Forgive me for small prayers and safe obedience.

Today, I lay down my need to be the center of the story.

I surrender my plans, my timeline, and my control.

I choose to be available.

Make me a man You can trust.

Trust me with responsibility.

Trust me with weight.

Trust me with people, purpose, and impact.

Give me the courage to move when You move.

The strength to obey when it costs me something.

And the humility to serve without recognition.

My life is Yours.

My strength is Yours.

My future is Yours.

Send me where You want me.

Use me how You choose.

I am not here for my glory, but for Yours.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.