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Church

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Trending Now: Masculinity

1 Kings 2:1–9

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series: Trending Now

The video we just saw demonstrates that one of the most important things a father can say to his son is “you got this.” As important as it is for a boy to hear that from his mother, it is even more important to hear it from a dad.

It's been said boys can only become men by the instruction and leadership and example of other men. Author Richard Rohr tells a story about two young African bull elephants in a national park that lose control. The young males were adolescents who didn't stick with the herd; they'd push over trees, SUV's, trample other animals, even baby elephants if they were in their way. The young males were causing chaos in the park and some wildlife experts came in to find out why. They realized for some reason the area had lost all the mature male elephants through old age or poachers and these two young bulls were the oldest males left in their territory. But they never learned how bull elephants were supposed to act. So they brought in a couple of older bulls and within weeks the chaos ceased! The older males would flap their ears, stomp their feet and growl when the young males started to act up, and the young bulls quickly learned how a mature bull was meant to behave. Only older males could teach them how to do that.

Guys may be born male, but we have to learn to be a man. For young men to understand their masculinity they need older men who flap their ears, stomp their feet and growl at them before they can say to them, “You Got This.”

Before we can talk about how a boy becomes a man, we need to ask this question: What is true masculinity? There is a lot of confusion about this today and that's why we have made this one of our Trending Now topics. An excerpt from a *GQ* magazine article asks the question, “When is it appropriate for men to cry?” One thing the author made clear, it is never appropriate for men to cry if they are watching their favorite team. If you are a player it's okay to cry in celebration or sorrow, but never appropriate to cry if you are watching the Warriors tonight! Got that guys?

Skye Jethani, an insightful Christian writer and speaker asks, “What is Biblical Masculinity? Because it seems like men in the Bible, like men today represent a wide spectrum of gifts, personalities, interests, and callings. Some are warriors, some are artists, some are both. Some lead, others follow. Some are the pinnacle of virility with thousands of wives and concubines, and others are castrated eunuchs affirmed for their faith and courage. Some get naked and dance (David) and others get naked and drunk (Noah). Some defend themselves with swords (Peter) and others remain silent before their accusers (Jesus). Some cry (Jesus), others sing (David), and some even sew dresses for other guys (Bezalei). (Let me clarify this, Jethani is referring to Bezalei sewing the priestly

garments for the priests for temple worship). Some are hunters (Esau), others chill out in tents (Jacob), one made his brothers jealous with his fashion sense, (Joseph). So what is Biblical masculinity? We need to probe deeper and find out.”

One thing most everyone seems to agree on is there's a manhood crisis today. This is seen in a variety of ways. We see it in the delayed adolescence in young men. There is an increasing amount of young men in their 20's and 30's stuck in a confused no-man's land between boyhood and manhood. I am speaking now in generalities, but these young men have become experts at video games but struggle with finding a defining purpose. They are bombarded with porn and wonder why it's so difficult to find a meaningful relationship with a young woman. A hooking-up fantasy is preferred over the efforts to find true intimacy and connection that comes through a commitment to one woman.

We also see this crisis of manhood today in the growing numbers of fatherless homes. In 1950, 7% of all dads were absent dads. By 2005 in one generation the figure went from 7% to 47% of dads in America absent. Half of the households in America are very confused about what to do on Father's Day. The poverty rate in these homes is almost 50%—over 4 times the rate for children living in married couple families.

Finally we see it in the blurring lines between male and female. Christians have always believed that God created two distinct genders—male and female; both genders equal in dignity and worth, but distinct and complementary. God points to the differentiation of humans into male and female as a total reflection of his image. When we diminish the differences between maleness and femaleness in humans, we distort the image of God and the picture of his relationship with us.

So in the midst of this crisis we need to ask, “What does it mean to be a man?” To answer this question we want to look at one of the great “You Got This” episodes in the Bible. It's found in 1 Kings 2:1-9. It's the story of King David passing the baton of leadership over the nation Israel to his son Solomon. David is old and infirmed. One of his sons, Adonijah, asserted himself as King. But David had already promised the throne to his son Solomon, and David finally musters the energy and strength of will to publicly name and appoint Solomon his successor. And it was just in the nick of time, because David was soon to die, so he called Solomon to his bedside to give him some last words.

When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. “I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, act like a man,” (verses 1-2).

Of all the charges King David had given in his life, these were the most dear to his fatherly heart. Be strong! Do the things men are supposed to do! This was an expression used by soldiers to encourage each other before going out to battle. We remember back to a man named Joshua who took over the leadership of the nation of Israel from Moses, and was handed the task to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land. The problem was that some pretty scary and large people lived in that land. Over and over, God said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous..." So you can see these are fighting words from a father to a son: "Be strong! Be men, and fight."

Biblical Masculinity Involves Being Strong

To be a man means you accept the responsibility you have to fight for what's right and good and just. You may need to fight for your marriage. You may need to fight for the soul of your children. You may need to fight to provide for your family. You may need to fight for the poor and the weak.

The other night I spoke with some men from CPC who are being very courageous and creatively fighting against the sex trafficking industry here in the bay area. This is an expression of true masculinity. Men helping women. Men flapping their ears, stomping their feet and growling at men behaving badly.

Reject passivity/Accept responsibility. This is where the first man Adam failed. You know the story. God created Adam and placed him in a beautiful garden to work it and care for it. God told him he could eat from any tree in the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then God said, *"It's not good for a man to be alone, I will find a helper for him."* So he put Adam to sleep and took one of his ribs and fashioned it into a woman. He brought her to Adam and he was absolutely thrilled. But one day the serpent came to Eve and tempted her to eat from the forbidden tree. Genesis says, *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it."* Did you notice something about this? Adam was with her the whole time, but he said nothing and did nothing. That defines passivity—say nothing and do nothing. God had given him the command about that tree, he should have spoken up, "Hey Eve, don't eat that fruit. God warned us about that!" He should have fought. Instead he went passive. He should have stood in front of his wife and grabbed that snake at the neck and thrown it out of the garden. So when God came to see him later, instead of Adam and Eve running to the one who loved them, they hid from God in their shame. The story continues and one of the first things we notice is that Adam tried to blame his wife, but God wouldn't let him pass on his responsibility. God said, *"What is this YOU have done?"* Adam wasn't strong. He didn't fight. He went passive. He didn't accept responsibility. Paul says, *"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong"* (1 Cor. 16:13).

....and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses.

Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel' (verses 3-4).

Biblical Masculinity Involves a Resolve to Obey God's Word

David is telling Solomon there's no mystery about what God wants you to do—it's written right there in the law given to Moses. Today we not only have the law of Moses, we have the rest of the Old Testament and we also have the New Testament. Not just the law but the gospel as well.

David tells Solomon that he will prosper and that the Lord will keep his promise to always have a descendant of David on the throne of Israel if he obeys God's Word. I think we men think our family will prosper if we just work harder, get that promotion, if our kid gets in the right college, if we can just buy that house. God may reward us with these nice things sometimes as he sees fit, but we lose our masculinity if we compromise or forsake God's word to achieve anything on earth. But when we are resolved to obey God's word we are investing in eternal things. And masculine men invest in eternal things.

Invest eternally. We know from Genesis 3 that God also held Eve accountable for her sin. But Adam bore a unique and primary responsibility for his family. There is a leadership responsibility men have in this regard that's not a popular thing to talk about these days, but it's straight from God's word.

A masculine man reads God's Word. He feeds on it, letting it judge, correct, guide his life. He doesn't take his cues for masculinity from culture. He takes his cues from God's word. If he is married, he bears the primary responsibility to get equipped to lead his wife by loving her as Christ loved the church. If he is a father, he has the primary responsibility to lead his family with his words and deeds grounded in scripture, to speak truth to his kids and prepare them to receive the "you got this" moments from you.

Masculine men are committed to a church community. We did a little research here at CPC and to the best of our knowledge the average family at CPC shows up to church on a typical Sunday about a third of the time. I'm not trying to spread guilt today; what I'm trying to do is think about this in light of your family's need for the word of God and the encouragement that comes from other believers.

For many years I kept this painting framed on a wall in my office (*Saturday Evening Post* picture). It's a Norman Rockwell painting from May 16, 1959. I love to show this to couples I am doing premarital counseling with. Look at it. Look at the mom's face—cold as ice. Look at his daughters. They are following their mom, imitating their mom. Now look at the son. Who is he looking at? Is it his mom? No. He is intrigued by his father's brand of masculinity. And everything in this little guy wants to imitate his dad.

I looked at a study put out by *The Christian Post*. The study reveals, "It is the religious practice of the father of the family that, above all, determines the future attendance at or absence from church of the children." The evidence was overwhelming and serious. The study reports: If both father and mother attend church and participate regularly, 3 out of 4 children will end up involved in church as adults. If the father is not attending church and the mother is a regular attendee, only 1 out of 50 children will become regular participating worshippers as adults. Only 1 out of 3 will become nominal semi-regular attendees of church if the father is engaged in church and the mother is. This means that almost 2 out of 3 children will be lost completely to the church if the father does not engage in the church.

It gets more interesting. What happens if the father is a regular participant in church, but the mother is irregular or a non-attendee of church? Fathers who are regular participants and fully engaged in church will see the percentage of children becoming regular attendees of church rise to at least 2 out of 3 and in some studies up to 3 out of 4 children becoming engaged in the church as adults. That is even when the wife is a non-participant.

One of the reasons for this suggests that children tend to take their cues about domestic life from mom while their cues of the world outside come from dad. If dad takes faith in God seriously then the message to his children is that God should be taken seriously. This confirms the essential role of the father as a spiritual leader, which I would argue is true masculinity.

This is a good time for a commercial break. I want to encourage all you dads out there to mark time this fall on Tuesday nights at North Campus for Men's Fraternity. Our topic for the fall is on being a masculine father. It's called "A Man and his Fatherhood." Men's Fraternity is right here on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 pm to 8:15 pm. If you can't make the evening, then at our Foster City campus we do the same teaching from 6:00 am to 7:30 am on Thursday mornings.

"Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood he stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace. But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom. And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" (verses 5-9).

This is an interesting change of theme for David. He is now in his final words trying to prepare his son Solomon for some of

the challenges he will have to face right away as the new king. Talk about unfinished business. That is what David is pointing to. "Solomon, pay attention to these things, if you ignore these things you'll pay for it."

Biblical Masculinity Involves Leading, Providing and Protecting

Lead courageously. First there is Joab. He was David's military general, but he broke the law by killing two of David's commanders. He was a loose cannon and Solomon would need to deal with him. But then there were the sons of Barzillai. They took care of David while he was running from Absalom. So David tells Solomon to show them kindness for their loyal service. Finally David reminds Solomon that Shimei is still around. When David fled Jerusalem, Shimei came out and threw rocks at him and cursed him. You don't curse any Israelite ruler according to Exodus 22:28.

In essence David is telling Solomon, you are wise, you got this. I'm sure Solomon was scared but men press through fears and lead courageously. When we are in bed at night and we hear a noise, we don't say to our wives, "hey it's your turn, you go check on that noise." Masculinity is not fools rushing in, it's a leader who cares and is willing to show courage and risk. All this talk of masculinity makes me think of Jesus. If anyone can show us clarity on manhood it's Jesus.

Biblical Masculinity is Perfectly Seen in the Man, Jesus

The Bible says that Jesus grew into manhood. He would have gone through all the normal stages of growth and maturity. Remember reading in Luke that when Jesus was 12 he was amazing the teachers of the law with his insight that came from his unique relationship to God? Jesus spent 20 years or so living in Nazareth, working in his father's carpenter's shop. Years later when he came back to Nazareth to teach, the people he'd grown up with were amazed, "Wasn't he the carpenter's son?" How often do we think of Jesus as a carpenter, with sweat and dust and hardened muscles and an aching back after a long day of work—a man!

As you study his life and ministry, we see he didn't fit the worldly stereotypes of masculinity. He felt things deeply. He wept at his friend's grave. Unlike most men of his day he honored and protected women—the women at the well, the one who poured perfume over his head, the woman caught in adultery, and of course his own mother. He loved children in a day when children were totally powerless and without rights. Yet he was moved to action, rebuking the devil in the wilderness. He took on the religious leaders, calling them snakes and wolves in sheep's clothing. He cleared out the money changers from the temple with a whip. And then with infinite courage and faith he took on sin and death by offering himself to be crucified. That's a man. A real man!

Do you remember in our study in Romans we just finished how Paul compared Jesus to Adam—Adam from Genesis and Jesus from the New Testament? *"Consequently, just as one trespass*

resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:18-19).

To a lost and hurting world, this is one of the greatest statements of scripture. Through one man sin entered the world; through one man righteousness entered the world. Through one man true masculinity was lost. Through one man true masculinity was found. We have two men with two different destinies. For Adam, manhood was about what a man does. Earth is all there is. He set his course on instincts, human reason, and human reaction; his manhood was about competition, satisfying self and personal rewards. Adam looked like a man, but he acted like a boy. For Jesus manhood wasn't about self, it was about others. It wasn't about successes on earth, it was about a significant legacy. It wasn't about earthly rewards, but eternal rewards. Jesus' manhood was about character and integrity.

Think for a moment what was going on in heaven as God watched Adam and then through him the whole human race disconnect from God. Imagine the questions throughout the heavenly host, "Who will be strong? Who will reject passivity? Who will accept responsibility? Who will lead courageously? Who will invest in eternal rewards? Who will stand up for the human race, for family, for marriage, for children?" Not Adam, he couldn't even stand up for his wife. But at that moment, Jesus, equal with God his Father, with the same rights and privileges as his Father said, "I will do something about it."

Biblical masculinity paints a picture of a man with an ear turned to heaven. A picture of a man whose energies are directed toward protecting, inspiring and motivating others. A picture of a man who is a giver, not a taker. A picture of a man who knows how to run toward action, how to stand in the heat, and how to kneel and pray in a moment of quietness. And you know what? Our kids can smell fake masculinity.

Our kids can smell an absent dad. They can smell a distant dad. They can smell a dad who is home but the kids don't feel it. He has the uncanny ability to be around but invisible at the same time. Your kids can touch you, but they can't feel you. There is no connection. They can smell a demanding dad. They can smell a dad who makes contact but he makes contact by giving orders, through control and power, instead of servanthood. They can even smell an involved but visionless dad. It's great to see dads involved in their kid's activities, spending time, doing good things, but a Biblical masculine dad knows his responsibility to deliver a vision for life as well as being involved in activities.

What kind of vision? Answering questions kids need answers to: How do I deal with the opposite sex? What is marriage all about?

What does it mean to be masculine and feminine? Why do I keep sexually pure? How do I know God? What is living life well all about? What are the things I can really count on in life? How do you prepare for college? How do I prepare for work? What does it mean to give away your life to gain it?

Several years ago I went through an ordination process with the church denomination I was in prior to coming to CPC. It was a pretty grueling process of paper writing and defending in front of a board of my peers. I was glad when it was completed. After I finished, we had an Ordination service and my church and friends and family came. It was going to be great. We would sing, hear a message from our superintendent, and pray, and then have cake and punch at the end. I don't remember the songs we sang, I don't remember the message from our denominational guy. I don't remember what kind of cake we served. But I did remember one thing. I remember the prayer my dad prayed for me. It empowered this young man like nothing else could. In this prayer my father expressed that he loved me. He expressed that he was proud of me, and he expressed that he believed I was good in something. He said to me.... I Love You....I'm Proud of You....You're Good at.... Dads, these are three things that will speak to your kids like nothing else will.

As I processed the wonderful feeling, believe me, it was a powerful masculine moment for me. I felt there was something familiar about his prayer and another father and son. I remembered preaching from Matthew 17 where Jesus took Peter, James and John up to the mountain, what we call the Mount of Transfiguration. On that mountain the disciples catch a glimpse of Jesus in his glory. For a few seconds the humanity of Jesus is peeled back and these guys caught a glimpse of the glory of God in Jesus. And not only did they see the glory of God, they heard the glory of God as well. When this happened a bright cloud covered them and a voice came from the cloud said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" It was the Father saying to the son, "I Love You, I am proud of you, You are good at something." It was the Heavenly Father saying to his only begotten son, "You Got This." I wondered why I felt so empowered, why it felt so good as a younger man at my ordination. My dad was telling me, "You Got This."

I enjoy being around other men who are pursuing Biblical Masculinity. I thank God for his grace to show us patience when we fall short. I thank God for his grace to give us a community of men at CPC to help and encourage each another to define and live out our masculinity by Biblical values. So we can look each other in the eye and say to each other, "You Got This."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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