



Jake Hamilton

The Journey to
Biblical Masculinity
12 Paths Every Man
Must Take

“Jake Hamilton has been used by God in many levels in the body of Christ and in my personal life to teach what a godly man looks like. This book will be a sword in the hands of every man wanting to be all that God has called him to be.”

Brian Barcelona, speaker and author, *The Jesus Club*
and *Don't Scroll*

“Jake Hamilton creatively blends the wisdom of Jesus’ teachings, ancient wisdom traditions, and Parzival’s quest for the Holy Grail to address the modern crisis in masculinity. This book offers a vital, holistic journey, redefining manhood away from toxic stereotypes and guiding men through their God-intended, heroic paths in family and society.”

Bishop Mark J. Chironna, PhD, founding and lead pastor,
Church On The Living Edge; founder, Mark Chironna
Ministries; presiding bishop, Legacy Edge Alliance

“If you build it, He (the Father) will come. Jake Hamilton’s powerful and practical, sensitive and compassionate book on building men and fathers is a major impetus to the fulfillment of the ultimate ‘field of dreams,’ bringing many sons to glory.”

Lou Engle, founder of TheCall and Bound4LIFE

“A book filled with wit, wisdom, and invitation. Hamilton offers a robust path to a deeper life, and he does so with great gusto. As readers, we have a lively guide at our arm, even as the darkness gathers.”

Dr. Martin Shaw, author and teacher

“In *The Journey to Biblical Masculinity*, Jake Hamilton reacquaints us with Jesus as the paragon of manliness and re-acclimatizes our imaginations toward a model of manhood men were both designed and destined for.”

Jason Upton, songwriter, speaker, and worship leader

“Now more than ever in our history, the power and importance of biblical masculinity cannot be overstated. In this book, you will experience the transformational power of storytelling to unlock the hearts of men and thus transform the heart of our culture. You will be infused with the courage to pursue your own journey and reap the benefits for years to come!”

Kris Vallotton, cofounder, Bethel School of Supernatural
Ministry; author, *Spiritual Intelligence* and *Uprising*

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Biblical Masculinity



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To my wife, Nicci,

whose patient endurance with my growth has allowed me to become the man I am today and our marriage to flourish into the love story we have today. You are intuitive and brave, always ready for a fun adventure, and willing to dive into other people's pain to help them discover what's hindering them from being their truest self. I am undone by your beauty every single day, and I am forever in your debt for the love you have so graciously offered me, as well as your unrelenting devotion to our family regardless of how hard the season is. It is a privilege to be your husband.

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To my son Ezra,

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To my son Judah,

you are all my passion and all my devotion, without any of my failures. You are a beautiful and courageous picture of masculinity, creative and fearless, kind and merciful. It is my honor to be your father.

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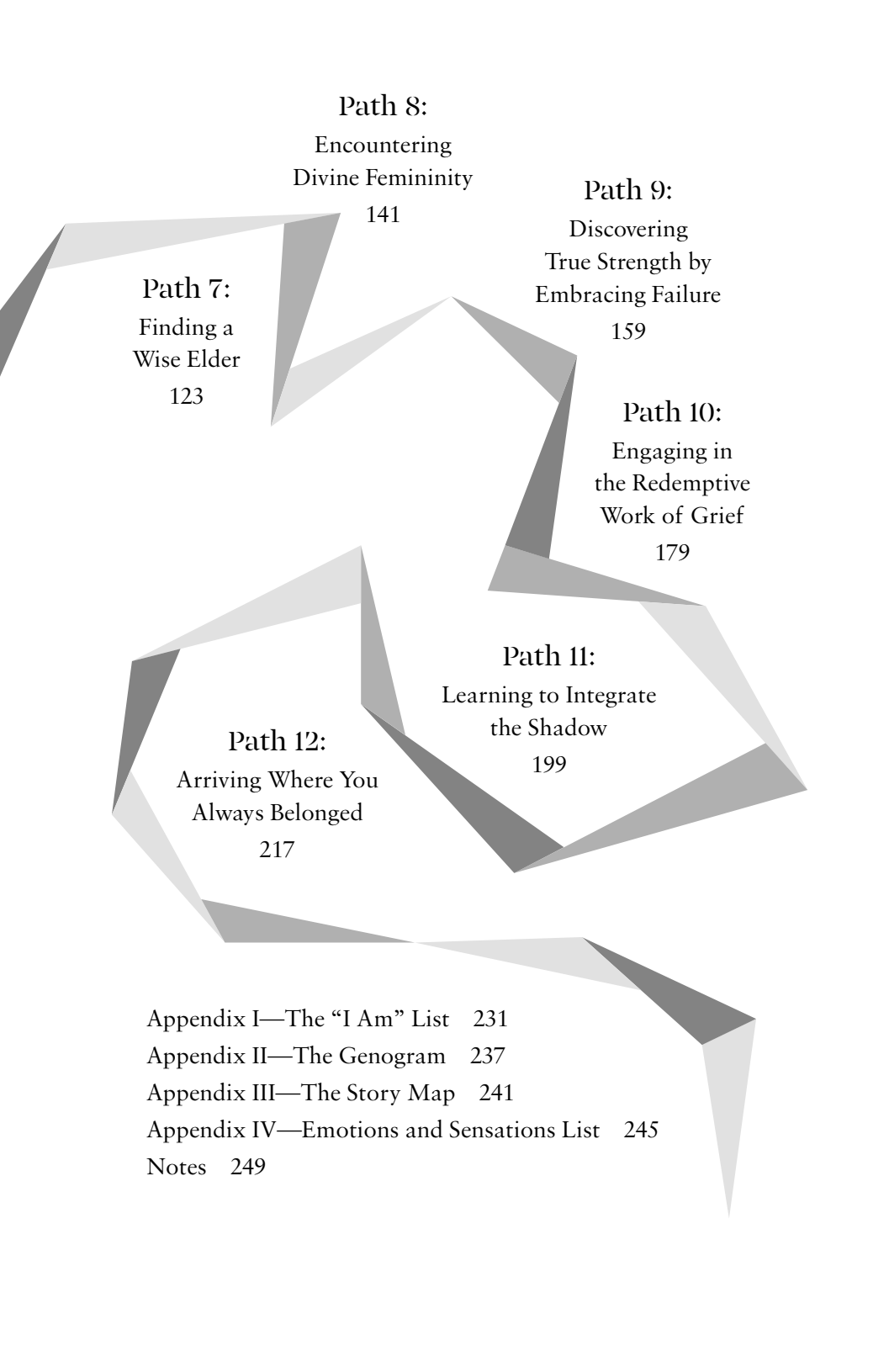
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Introduction

The Heroic Image of True Masculinity

Every little boy wants to be the hero of his story, from the moment he picks up his first stick and pretends it's a sword.

For me, a child in the late 1980s, I wanted to be a Thunder-Cat. “*Thunder. Thunder. ThunderCats Hoooooooooooo!*” roared Lion-O every Saturday morning. I waited eagerly for the next story, the next moment of courage, the next moment of adventure to take me beyond my experience and deep into the recesses of my imagination. I was hooked. I eventually got into comic books, probably more than most. I didn't collect comics for saving and investment. I was an artist. I copied the characters, tore out the pages, and savored all the stories. I had all the toys and tried to save up for anything I could get—every vehicle, character, and lair, until I had the craziest thought: *What if I drew my own comics?*

I could draw and design my own adventures and make my own stories come to life.

So, I did.

I drew my first comic, or at least my first attempt at one, when I was about ten years old. I called it *The Masked Avenger*.

It was full of characters and action, dynamic conflict and romance. Even though I was only ten, it allowed me to make myself into the main character and play out the fantasy of the hero who saves the world. I designed a comic book where I was the hero—every boy’s dream and every man’s desire.

But it’s more than just a dream or a desire.

It’s the invitation of heaven.

The Creator called me by name and initiated our joint story, giving me the opportunity to partner with Him and co-create while I am still alive amidst my own broken, dysfunctional, no-hope story. In fact, such characters seem to be the ones He uses the most. I didn’t grow up in a perfect family, in a perfect neighborhood, with perfect parents, because that doesn’t exist for anyone. Are some stories harder than others? Of course they are, but that’s the beauty of a good story. Can you imagine watching a movie where nothing ever goes wrong, and the heroes never have a moment where they can’t seem to win because all the odds are stacked against them? *Boring.*

In fact, let me give it to you in another way: we all learn the most through the trying and difficult seasons of our lives.

Nobody learns anything in seasons of comfort and tranquility.

When our weakness is exposed, our vulnerability is revealed, we learn more about ourselves and others than at any other point in our story. There are lots of reasons why we avoid these seasons, even though they’re when we learn the most. In fact, this is why heroes are still needed. We need pioneers and adventurers who aren’t afraid of the hard stuff to show us that we can make it through, and to call us from the other side into greater levels of courage.

The prophet Daniel says in essence that those who know their God will have great adventures: “But the people who know their God shall be strong and do great things” (Daniel 11:32 TLB). This shows us that the courage we desire isn’t found in a

personality trait; it's found through relational encounters with our Creator. These encounters don't have to be profound or monumental experiences; they can be quiet, understated moments where you grow in your connection to the Divine and draw deeper into the depths of relationship. From that place, your adventures begin to unfold right in front of you.

These adventures are grounded in everyday, ordinary life choices, standing our ground against all odds for marriage, family, and the Kingdom of God. As men, we have something inside us that wants to be king of the mountain, captain of the football team, rock star, leader, dragon slayer. When that's missing, we know it's a sign that something has been broken, something has been lost inside the boy.

That doesn't mean every man needs to be aggressive, loud, extroverted, or obnoxious. It means that within each young boy there is the spark of courage and the ability to defend that which he claims to love. That was what I discovered in my comic book-fueled imagination. I believed that if given an opportunity, I would have been able to seize it, rise to the occasion, and become the man I daydreamed about, bold and fearless. But in life, if that moment doesn't come quickly enough or in the way we thought it would, we begin trying to force it on an unsuspecting population ourselves. Our desires and design don't change, but our opportunities to express them do.

The brutality of this is revealed in young boys who grow up to be men who were never given the opportunity to use their powers for good, so they often use them for evil. Men who were kind become cold and hard. Men who were generous become selfish. Men who were compassionate leaders turn into controlling rebels. Men who were humble become egomaniacs. Men who had a heart for justice begin to oppress and enslave. Men who had a prophetic leading become manipulating.

Men who were encouragers begin to use their words to damage and abuse.

This happens to the best of us. Look at the life of the ancient King David, who ruled Israel between 1010 and 970 BC. He was considered a good man who led better than had his predecessor, and he would go on to be known as a man after the Creator's own heart. His life was lived in such proximity to the One who created him that he actually took on His likeness in the way he led as a king and lived as a man. But we all have weaknesses, and this is why, although we may love our Creator, believe in His Son, and be filled with the Spirit, we still fall. We are dependent beings.

As for King David, after leading many years and fighting many wars, he was found in a compromising situation. God's Word, the Bible, says that in a day when kings were supposed to be at war, David was at home. One night, he found himself on his balcony, staring at someone else's wife while she was bathing. I tend to think that if he had had a computer, David would have had massive struggles with pornography. Once he saw her, he then used his ability to mobilize armies and conquer kingdoms to manipulate one woman and overthrow one family. He took another man's wife as his own, abducted her, raped her, lied about it, and then had her husband killed (see 2 Samuel 11). This can become the path of all good, well-intentioned men who don't understand the nature of their masculinity and the very real war they are currently fighting.

Have you ever noticed that *evil* spelled backward is *live*? To truly be alive, to *live*, is the exact opposite of *evil*. I believe that if we lose our vision to live in the fullness we were created for, we will default to evil behaviors. It is time to break those chains and find the hero inside us, placed there by our Creator. It is time to live with purpose, with clarity. To *live* is to come home, to be intentional with our time and talents and

treasures, to waste nothing we have for selfish gain. Like David, we were made for war, but we keep finding ourselves scrolling for attention and definition. Even the gentlest and most artistic men were made to go to battle for that which we claim to love.

The difference is expression, not design or desire. Some men may lead campaigns or missions to foreign lands, while others may write the songs that fuel these movements and paint paintings that show the depth and color of all the Creator is doing. They may also expose the world's evils through every frame of the camera or stroke of the brush. It is time for heroes to rise again and display who they are with conviction. You can't have heroes without conflict, but our battle is not against flesh and blood. Real heroes in this hour don't need swords and shields or mechanical armor and magic hammers; they need character and integrity that display the power of manhood to transform the planet in a world of sexual chaos and inconsistent values.

That's who I am writing to—men who need to know there is hope and that they can make it and become the men they were created to be. Men who have already messed it up, and men who are just a few steps away from blowing their lives up. Men who are just starting to feel something is off, and men burned out from all these conversations.

I am also writing this for the heroes who already exist out there. Men who have endured hardship and loss, or who have experienced addiction and adultery, and have chosen the better path. They have chosen not to walk away from it all, not to buy into the lies of the culture and the pressures of the age, and not to throw their lives, families, and futures in the trash for a lesser thing.

But most importantly and selfishly, I am writing this book as a letter to my sons, for my future heroes, and for their journey. I can't tell them, or you, all the pitfalls and blind spots that exist. All I can offer is what I've found and what the Creator mentions

in His Word. Once my boys hit their preteen years, I realized I had no idea how to walk them from boyhood to manhood—despite years of Bible training and full-time Christian ministry. I bought bestselling books people recommended, I knew Bible verses I should sow into their lives, and I had some personal experience that could translate into teachable moments. But our time together started to sound as if we were at a Christian conference, not like a dad connecting with his sons' hearts in a way that would impact their view of masculinity and their role as men in the world.

So I began to explore ancient rites of passage for young men, and the stories that were shared to guide them through the experience. These stories became a key to unlocking my sons' hearts, and mine as well. I could see why men throughout history sat in circles around a fire and told heroic tales of epic journeys. Such tales became a way to view my life, my experience, and my faults, without shame, without consequence. I could see each character and his journey as a picture of my own, and in that place, I understood why it says in two of the four Gospels that Jesus never taught without telling what could be called a "fake story." Some people prefer the word *parable*, but in ancient tradition, both in the Church and in culture, it's called *myth*—a story rooted in the culture it came from, so deep and profound that it leads us to the truth we have been looking for the whole time.

In recent years, we've allowed masculinity to be defined by those who have been hurt the most by its destructive and oppressive nature. But that's not everyone's experience, it's not historically and sociologically accurate, and it's definitely not biblically and mythologically the whole truth. We must come up with working definitions for masculinity, male spirituality, and male rites of passage that allow boys to have a vision for their personal and spiritual journey, while giving adult males

the opportunity to see when they are falling short of their God-given potential.

Without these definitions and psychological and spiritual structures, working out what it means to be a man and how men ought to behave becomes a free-for-all. At that point, culture defines the masculine through media and leaves us with sociopathic or paralyzed versions where men don't know whether or not they're allowed to pay for dinner on a date, open the car door for a woman, work hard at their job to provide for a family, or simply stay home with the kids. In this type of culture, any act of aggression is proof of toxic masculinity, and any form of male-dominated leadership is patriarchal. There must be a better way, a pathway that leads us through the wilderness of social constructs and theological ideas and offers us something firm to stand on and a clear vision for the future.

The answer is *story*.

In our modern society, with tweets and blogs, podcasts and Substack, we forget that most of our psychological and theological DNA has primarily been passed on through oral tradition. And it wasn't informational; it was mythological. Storytelling wasn't about passing on the rules of a culture, but the heart of a culture. Then through the doorway of the heart, those who heard these stories were able to see what was expected of them and the potential blessings and consequences of their actions played out in fantastic narrative, engaging their divine imagination and the simplest and truest parts of their nature.

A story is a way we can view the world and our experience in it. Rarely, if ever, do we see things as they truly are. We see things through the lens of our experience, our pain, our victory, our passions, our personality. That's why we need the cooperative power of mythological and personal stories in our life. Myths speak to the larger tribal narrative of human experience, and personal stories apply to our everyday experiences in life.

Before you question the validity of using mythology to discover eternal truths, look at the life of Jesus. I mentioned earlier that the Gospels say twice that Jesus never taught without using a “fake story.” What is a fake story but a myth? We just like the word *parable* because we so appreciate religious language. But our historic, tribal, and oral tradition would have called Jesus’ parables *myths*, shared them around campfires, and embraced that they were more than they appeared on the surface. We might even use the word *prophetic* here. They were prophetic stories giving us insight into eternal realities grounded in the everyday world we inhabit.

Look at how the prophet Nathan confronted King David when David was in the most vulnerable and rebellious moments of his life. He had sinned by committing adultery and then having the husband of the woman he slept with killed on the front lines of battle, while he rested at home. David knew what he did was wrong, but the prophet Nathan didn’t confront him with the direct truth of his actions. By telling David a story, Nathan gave him the dignity of discovering the truth for himself:

“There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

2 Samuel 12:1–4 NIV

The Bible says that David “burned with anger” against the rich man in the story (verse 5). He demanded justice for the poor man whose sheep had been stolen, because David had not yet put together that *he* was that rich man. But once he connected the dots through Nathan’s declaration “You are the man!” (verse 7), he was able to repent and begin the process of transformation.

I have written this book to help men in such a process of transformation, on their journey toward wholeness in body, mind, soul, and spirit. *The Journey to Biblical Masculinity* is a book that offers you, the reader, the opportunity to explore what it means to be a man, as well as exploring the long-lost traditions of male initiation.

Along our paths ahead, we will answer questions like “When does a boy become a man?” and “How do I help my sons become men if I never had a father to help me?” Men seem more confused than ever about how to express their masculinity in ways that offer support and courage to those in both their homes and communities.

In *The Journey to Biblical Masculinity*, I use the ancient story of “Parzival and the Quest for the Holy Grail,” written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, to uncover powerful biblical truths and serve as a framework to mark “pathways” on the journey from boyhood to manhood. These pathways include exploring *family, wilderness, adventure, aggression, mentorship, failure, grief, and redemption* to discover what it means to be a man, a husband, and a father. Each path we will travel is not a means to an end, but is a simple signpost on the walk of life, urging us forward to deeper places of growth, while reminding us that we aren’t lost even when we fall or when the road gets rough.

My goal is to help you feel empowered and seen as you read through this story, and then to help you engage with your own

story, facing every hardship and disappointment with a deep sense of hope and purpose. To facilitate the process, each chapter or path is followed by a section called “The Work,” in which I invite you to explore how you are processing the concepts we talk about and how you can apply them practically to your everyday life.

This road is not easy. It is a journey into spaces of deep longing, fear, pain, loss, and regret—muddled with relentless hope, unceasing joy, and great courage. I believe in you. You are not alone as you travel it.

Path 1



Departing Business as Usual

Here begin the terrors. Here begin the marvels.

—Chrétien de Troyes,
“Perceval: The Story of the Grail”

You are not alone.

Although your life may make you feel differently, *you are not alone*.

There are thousands of men all over the planet longing to answer foundational questions about their lives and their existence in the world. They want to know who they are and what significant role they are supposed to play. They are frustrated with their failed attempts to learn why they react and respond the way they do. They want to serve Jesus and connect in Christian community, but they feel like the outsider, the fraud, or the only one in the room who doesn’t “get it.” And ultimately, they want to understand what it actually means to be a husband, a father, and a son. But deeper inside them, there is a desire to know what it means to be a man. They know somehow,

subconsciously, in an eternal part of them, that if they can answer that question, it is a key to unlocking the answers to all the other questions they are asking.

Ancient cultures would have prepared a man for this from the time he was born. He would have grown up in the midst of a tribe of men reminding its young boys that they were unready for the call of manhood until they had reached certain markers and completed certain tasks. Manhood required a sacred wounding that they had yet to obtain and could only attempt if they lived within the clear boundaries set around them and if they were willing to be tempered by the process. This was an invitation to a young boy, not a rejection of him. Every day that he witnessed the tribe's celebration of its men who so selflessly provided for and protected the family and friends he loved so dearly, the model of success was formed in him. The boy admired these men and hungered to be like them. They were fierce and focused, devoted and determined, merciful and sacrificial all at the same time.

But young men of this modern age are left to wander aimlessly, frustrated and confused, angry and bitter because this passage into manhood was never offered to them. They have grown up in an environment with no model of manhood from a father who loved them, chose them, and called them into masculinity's deep waters, staying by their side as they floundered repeatedly and almost drowned, as they learned to balance their own weight within the murky waters of the world around them.

Fatherhood has been abandoned for comfort and convenience, for unsustainable models of success, in the name of meeting our needs, while abandoning the needs of the children we leave behind. Young boys are therefore left to find their own rites of passage. With no older men sacrificing to guide them, they settle for violence, for sexual exploits or sexual confusion,

for lazy, depressed lifestyles without any vision, because they have nothing and no one to look up to except their peers.

Maybe this is why so many of us feel alone.

We were never given the model of manhood, let alone the method of how to walk it out for a lifetime and then give our children something to look up to and live up to.

But there is an opportunity to change that.

No story is so far gone that redemption is not available.

Not one life in all of creation is so lost that it cannot be found again.

There is hope.

You are not alone.

A Working Definition of a Man

We can make powerful decisions today that will require sacrifice and suffering, but that will also develop the courage, confidence, and character in us that we know we are capable of. This will not happen overnight. If you are looking for a quick fix or a shortcut, you won't find it on the pathway to manhood. Men know how to embrace the work necessary to develop the skills and strengths required for the task ahead of them. Therefore, a working definition of what it means to be a man is required so we can find common ground and define attainable goals.

So let's begin with these few things in mind: that a man is a biologically male human who confidently chooses to go first in any circumstance and joyfully commits to honoring God, respecting women, and protecting children at all costs.

Men do this by engaging in the story they were given, not the story they wish they had. They do this by embracing tension and mystery in the face of uncertainty, and by honoring ceremony and tradition while others throw those away without concern for the sacrifices of the men who went before them.

Men do this by developing a healthy understanding of their sexuality and their sexual desires.

Men also understand the value of their emotions and know where to place them and when to express them. They do not shy away from danger. They do not abandon their families. They know the meaning of love and the value of communication. They do not start fights, but are strong enough to take a punch if one comes their way. They provide for the family and community they came from without question, and without the need for appreciation. They know what they are afraid of, but they move forward regardless so that fear doesn't define them.

A man has no use for the approval of others, as long as he can see it in the eyes of the woman he loves. His greatest joy is not what he can buy for his children, but the legacy of the life he models for them every day. A man who has woken up to his masculinity longs for more than just Bible studies and accountability groups, Sunday services and stadium gatherings. All these valuable things have a place in our expression of faith, but they will never be enough to fulfill the true desire of a man's soul because any man who has encountered Jesus Christ wants to live like Him and look like Him. A man who has had an encounter with the living God lives his devotion every day by sacrificing for his bride and calling his children to something bigger than their ego pursuits. He sees in Jesus' life more than just oversimplified theologies and religious jargon; he sees something worth living for, fighting for, and dying for.

This is a man.

Yet he feels lonely because he sees so few running into the battle with him. He wants to be called to this standard of mature masculinity, yet he shies away when he feels misunderstood.

He doesn't need to fly three thousand miles around the world to preach to strangers in order to fulfill what God has called him to. A man doesn't need religious validation from Christian

institutions that would tell him his ministry is anywhere outside his own home. He walks out biblical masculinity every day when he walks thirty feet across his own living room to put his arms around his wife or to sit on the floor and play with his children.

Choosing Jesus as Our Model

This is the model of Jesus: He left His heavenly position to partner in the suffering of His Bride for the sake of her redemption. We call this *incarnation*. An embodied Christianity lived out even when it is inconvenient or uncomfortable, not just talked about with oversimplified language and theological rhetoric. Jesus would do it for the one, without the possibility for wealth or fame or even acknowledgement.

So you have to decide: *What model will you choose?*

Your birth father?

Your stepfather?

Your uncle?

Your grandfather?

Your pastor?

Your leader?

Your mentor?

I don't care how beautiful or brilliant any of these men are (or were); they are not and can never be Jesus. Their model can point you or me there, but if we are to become who we were meant to become, if we are to attain the call and the standard we were created for, then we need the model of Jesus as a man—not just as God, but as a flesh-and-blood male human.

When we choose to make Jesus our model for life, for manhood, letting His life define what it means to be a father and a husband, there is so much we must learn and so much more we must let go of. It's not as simple as a checklist or a mantra,

although I wish it were. It becomes a constant turning over and over of what I thought my life was about, what I thought I stood for, and what I am currently doing, comparing these to the light of His presence and His standard for living.

This has several implications for us as men. First, *men must go first*. When we initially hear this statement, we agree, and then we immediately make it about systems and structures, platforms and positions that have nothing to do with the model of Jesus. He left His position and came to serve His Bride, the Church (see Isaiah 49:1–7; Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 19:6–10). He sacrificed for her to come into her fullness, even when the ones He came to save rejected and crucified Him. In the midst of His pain, He cried out that His people be forgiven. He desired to see those He loved given opportunity for redemption, regardless of His experience.

This brings us to the second implication of Jesus as our model: *Suffering is not optional; it's necessary*. You can say that you would choose your wife, love your kids, and stand up for Christ. Yet when you don't get what you want, when things don't go your way, when pain enters the story, and when sacrifice is the only way forward, will you choose to sacrifice, or will you run?

This is where the proverbial “rubber meets the road.” I can have great theology, perfect habits, a thriving church community, the kids, the wife, the dog, the cars, the house, all of it . . . and then sickness, then pain, then sin, then heartbreak . . . and the question is, *Then what?*

Reaching this point is not a sign of God's frustration toward you or His abandonment of your story. It's an invitation into the depths of His heart, an initiatory moment in a man's life where he has to back up what he says he believes, regardless of whether or not he can see any value in it today. Nobody gets frustrated with a fruit tree for not blooming in winter, which

is an expected cycle of life. It's a death we can see and still know that the dormant tree without any signs of life is waiting for the warmth of spring to come again. Then it will bear the fruit it was made to bear in due season. Just as no one who has read the entirety of the Gospel account gets angry when Jesus is nailed to the cross. We know what's happening next. We know what's coming.

Death is not the end of the story.

And this will land us in the third and final takeaway from the life of Jesus as a model of masculinity. This third implication may be the most difficult to live out. When Jesus becomes our model, *as men we are no longer allowed to say that our current situation, our circumstance, our sacrifice, and our suffering isn't "fair."* The most unfair act in all of human history was God wrapped in flesh hanging from a tree, put there by those He created and came to love. But that one sacrifice was redemption for all stories, for all humanity, for all time. In our homes, with our families, in the midst of our communities, we have the opportunity and the privilege to put this on display every day—but most especially when we are feeling as if we are dying, and that death is at the hands of those we love and those who claimed to love us.

Once Jesus conquered death, it went from being an enemy to being an ally. We no longer have to fear or run from death anywhere in our lives; it is an invitation to resurrection. We're not just speaking in the realm of physical death, but the death of things we loved, positions we cherished, health we thought would never fail, relationships that didn't go the way we planned, loved ones who rejected us, mentors who failed us. These are all deaths, opportunities to stop looking at life one-dimensionally and see the depth of what's available to us through Christ's example. We don't simply give up or run away when things get hard and death knocks on our door. We

engage with it and explore it for divine paths of growth and resurrection.

You are not a victim of your own life.

We live in a culture where if anything doesn't go my way, or if I'm not treated the way I feel I should be treated, then I'm allowed and encouraged to throw it under the label of victimization. You and I are not the victims of someone else's bad behavior. That person might be toxic, or might be a narcissist, or might just be an ego-driven, selfish jerk, but we can choose to leave. We can find a new job, get new friends, go to a different church. Whatever it is, whomever it is, you and I have control.

You are not a victim. You probably made some destructive or poor choices yourself, and men must learn to own their junk and take responsibility for their choices and actions. This is a massive marker of maturity in a man's life—when he can see the choices he has made, recognize how they have affected his life and the lives of those around him, and then engage in the work of repair and care, regardless of what it costs relationally, emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Then he is on the path to becoming a man with character and integrity.

Choosing to Pick Up Our Cross

Right now, the world desperately needs men who are able to own and engage with the pain of their lives, the disappointments, and the brokenness, without blame and shame or pulling out the “victim card” to get sympathy when they really need to take responsibility. But men rarely get to this place in our culture because we're so busy making sure everyone is comfortable and feeling okay, never having to feel pain or feel inconvenienced at any time.

This is a massive issue. Too many times in the name of “compassion,” we pull people (or ourselves) off the “cross” before

they die. Yet we are told that we're supposed to be picking up our cross daily. That's the central reality of making Jesus our model for living and for manhood. He boldly told us, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23–24).

The cross is a picture of the rejection, pain, sacrifice, and suffering we must endure, even when we've done nothing wrong. You are "taking up your cross" to reveal who you were always meant to be, while engaging in the redemption of those you hurt and those who hurt you, even if they are the ones you love or the ones who claim to love you. We've been falsely taught that someone should come and save and rescue us from our painful circumstances, so we are hoping to *escape* rather than *engage* in our lives, in the story we have been given, as well as with the choices we have made. We want a way out without ever having to fully die.

The issue with doing this is twofold: first, we miss the redemptive power of sacrificial living, and second, we never have to engage with the ego-killing submission required to find our true identity. We cannot avoid sacrifice in our lives. Either we choose it, or life chooses it for us. Choosing to eat healthy instead of living off fast food is a sacrifice, but if you don't choose to make that sacrifice today, the health issues that potentially will arise in the future will demand sacrifices tomorrow, next week, or next year. We must learn to pay the price today for the future we hope for tomorrow, as well as learn to trust that God knows what He's doing.

So regardless of my understanding or the cost, I fully surrender to the story and life I've been given to fulfill God's purposes in me and through me. By doing so, I submit to His will, His purpose, and His plan, recognizing that nothing is wasted by

our God, who still makes beauty from ashes. Submission to Him points me in the direction of who He knows I can become instead of just settling for what others expect of me.

Jesus answers both issues when He stands before Pilate in John 19. Pilate tells Jesus, “Don’t you know I have the authority to have you killed?” And Jesus responds with, “You have no authority except that which was given to you by my Father in heaven” (my paraphrase of verses 10–11). Jesus’ life was not taken from Him; it was a willing sacrifice from a man whose life was fully submitted to God. Because He knew who He was and why He had been sent, Jesus could consciously make that choice. No one murdered Him. He wasn’t a doormat others were allowed to walk all over. He was participating wholeheartedly in His life and His part of the story as a willing servant sacrificing whatever was necessary—even His own life—for the sake of redemption, resurrection, and reconciliation.

As men (or women), we must stop helping people escape their circumstances, avoid their pain, and reject the story they are *actually* living. Helping someone avoid or detach from his (or her) experience is the strategy of the *enemy*, not the strategy of *heaven*. The enemy wants to offer you opportunities to fulfill your God-given potential without you ever having to die, without you ever having to suffer, and most assuredly without you making any sacrifice. This is what he offered Eve in the garden, what he offered Jesus in the desert, and what he offers us on a regular basis to limit our growth while keeping us in cycles of guilt and shame, in order to maintain control over our story. We have a very real enemy, and taking him up on his offers never helps us fulfill our potential. In fact, it does just the opposite.

When Jesus was at the end of His forty-day fast in the desert—when He was at His weakest point, but was also only moments away from His greatest breakthrough of returning to the city endued with power from on high—the enemy offered

Him three ways that He could fulfill His God-given potential without ever having to die (see Luke 4:1–13). The devil tempted Jesus to provide for Himself by turning stones into bread (provision), to bow before him to get back the authority Satan had gained in the garden of Eden (promotion), and to throw Himself off the temple to test God and have the angels rescue Him (protection). These same three offerings come to us regularly: temptations to gain for ourselves provision, promotion, and protection. They come in a thousand different ways, a thousand different times over the course of our lives, but they will always fall into the same categories Jesus faced in the desert:

1. Will you settle for provision—the money, the stuff, the temporary and fleeting things of the world that will go in and out of fashion and will fade, rust, and deteriorate? Or will you be satisfied and grateful with where you are and what you have?
2. Will you compromise just a little when no one is looking to receive the promotion that you believe you deserve, or that it was prophesied you would obtain, or that you know you were made for, in order to avoid the sacrifices and pain it would require to do it right over the next five or ten years? Or will you pursue promotion in a way that sustains your integrity and develops your character?
3. Will you give up or give in when someone or something offers to save you from the pain and offers protection and covering and reprieve from your experience? Or will you willingly engage in the moment you were given as a gift, regardless of the cost, and not attempt to avoid it or to simply “get over it”?

Your job is not to rescue, to fix, to figure out, or to make someone feel better. Your goal as a man is to make sure the

person in front of you, starting with your own family, feels seen as you are able, with kindness and care, to bear witness to his or her experience. Remind the people around you daily, and in some seasons hour by hour, that their struggle does not go unnoticed. When your wife is hurting, sure, bring her flowers. But then engage with her pain. Sit with her in it. I don't care if it makes you uncomfortable.

If you have a friend who is losing everything, sit with that person in it, grab a coffee, and don't use phrases like "it's going to be okay." You don't know it will be okay. The only reason we say things like that is because we're uncomfortable and feel awkward about someone's circumstances, and in many ways we're probably avoiding our own. So to continue avoiding our struggles, we help others avoid theirs. This cycle will continue until one man decides he isn't going to run anymore, and he isn't going to let someone else run either. Jesus began this over two thousand years ago, and we can join Him in it today if we are willing to make Him our model of masculinity.

Now, let me make this clear before we move forward: There is a difference between the circumstantial, situational experiences I was just referring to and the violating, unjust acts that require men to step in and do something without concern for their personal well-being. While there are times when men need to know how to sit with others and provide care without attempting to rescue or fix things, there are also situations where a man needs to know how to take a punch or give one, utilizing discernment to know how and when to protect and defend those who are being mistreated or are in danger. Men need to know how to sit with the suffering, but they also need to be able to stand aggressively against a violent man attempting to attack their family. A man needs to be able to weep with those whose hearts are broken, but then turn around and use that same strength to run inside a burning building to save a small child.

An Invitation to Come, Die, and Live

We must develop a masculinity that can humble itself before the throne of Jesus, while opposing wicked systems and structures that oppose the basic human rights of others. This requires wisdom, training, mentorship, physical and emotional strength, confidence, identity—all the things we will continue to explore with each pathway we journey down in this book.

But this journey toward masculinity is not a demand.

Everything I have just described to you is an invitation.

An invitation away from the false gospel of this age that bids us to “come and live, so that you will never have to die.” An invitation into the true Gospel of Jesus Christ that calls us to “come and die, so that you might live.”

Yet sadly, based on studies about the absence of male role models and data on the struggles today’s young men face, most men will never venture down these pathways. They will avoid, deflect, justify, and remain stagnant where they are. Their stories will remain untold, their marriages unchanged, and their children uninspired, and we will all be lesser for it.

We need one another, if this is going to change.

THE WORK

The end of each chapter will include what we will call “The Work.” You will find steps to take along each specific path to help you move forward on your journey. Our first tools are a notebook or journal and a pen—something to record your journey and your progress as you process all that you experience along the way.

These are the first among the many tools I will offer you in this book for the journey ahead. But let me make it clear that these first two are not optional tools if you decide to move

forward. Truly, they have more value than I can express in a few simple pages.

We have books and studies over the past fifty-plus years that show the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual implications of simply writing. Such an exercise is what author and artist Julia Cameron calls “Morning Pages,” and what professor and psychologist James W. Pennebaker, PhD, calls “Expressive Writing.” For our use here, we’ll call it “Morning + Evening Notes.” You miss a day, a week, whatever, no big deal. Just start again, and keep writing. This isn’t about whether you like it or get it or hate your handwriting or don’t want people to read it. This is about health, strength, and connecting with yourself and your story in ways you may never have done before. I recommend getting a nice notebook and a good pen, something of value that carries with it the seriousness of your intention.

But what do I write down?

It’s easier than you think, but more difficult than you might assume.

The goal as we begin is to write two times a day, morning notes and evening notes. Let’s look at each.

Morning notes. Morning notes are for writing *what you’re currently feeling and why*. Whatever is bothering you, stressing you, frustrating you—write it all down, even if all you write is “I hate Jake Hamilton and the fact that I have to do this. It’s stupid and has no value.”

That’s a great first step toward engaging what’s happening inside you with honesty and vulnerability. What happened the day before? Process it on the page, with raw emotion. You say you don’t know what emotion you’re feeling because that’s completely new to you? We’ve got you covered there too. Just turn to the “Emotions and Sensations List” provided in appendix IV, choose three words from three different categories, and

start there. You've probably never been asked to do this before, so don't beat yourself up while you are learning and referencing the list. You don't need to add shame and guilt to the equation.

Then here's the rough part: *Write down one "secret" about your life and your story.* It can be recent, it can be from your childhood, or it can be anywhere in between; it just has to be true. No need at this point to write out the full story in detail; just a simple few lines will do. I'm not looking for you to write only the secrets that are traumatic or marking, although that's part of it. I'm also asking you to *write down the secrets about who you are and what you long for. What is it that you dream about or imagine?* If you've lost that ability, today you can rekindle it by asking yourself, *What did I imagine or daydream about when I was a child?*

Don't try to make your morning notes longer than they need to be or more perfect than I'm asking for. Just a few lines, maybe five to ten minutes to start, can change your life.

Evening notes. And now the evening notes, which are for writing down *what you are grateful for* each night before your head hits the pillow. Again, this may sound simple, but if you've had a frustrating or stress-filled day, it may be a real challenge to find three to five things you're grateful for. But that's the work. Gratefulness is a key ingredient of resiliency in your own identity and in relationships. There is never a time when it's "all bad." There is always something you can find to say thank you for when you're looking.

But why are we doing this?

We are doing this exercise to get what's inside us—in our hearts, in our heads, circling around in irrational thought patterns—outside us, onto a piece of paper where we can look at these things and better evaluate them so they don't express themselves in explosive or reclusive behaviors. Once a thought has passed through your heart, into your mind, out of your

hands, and before your eyes, these filters will allow you to see it and explore it in ways you may never have done before. This may lead you to new conclusions you have never found before.

The goal is exploration. Through your “Morning + Evening Notes,” you are building a backward map from where you have been, to bear witness at an undetermined date in the future to how far you have come.

So before you continue with this book, buy yourself something to write in or staple some paper together, get a nice pen or a felt-tip marker, and start writing. You’re not just plotting a course back home; you’re building a road map for your great-grandchildren.

See you in the next chapter, on the next path, as we step into a bigger story.