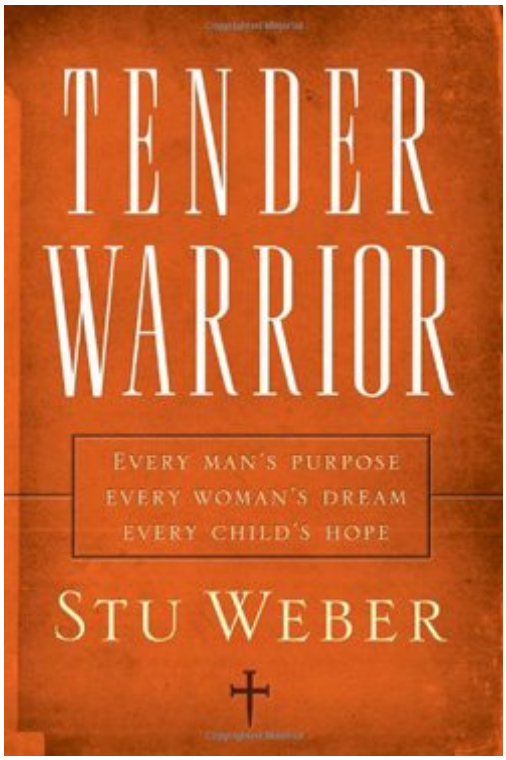
Is the Tender Warrior Wild at Heart? – Characteristics of Christian Manhood

Dr. Bohlin looks at two attempts to define the characteristics of a godly man according to a Scriptural, biblical worldview perspective. These characteristics give a Christian man a way to evaluate his walk with God and how it communicates Christ to others.

The Four Pillars of a Man's Heart

Manhood continues to be in crisis. For many men today, their physical strength is rarely necessary. Technology and urban isolation have ripped up the landscape that men inhabit to such a degree that many men are wandering around wondering who they are and what they're here for. The extreme women's movement proclaims that a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.



Over the last fifteen years numerous books have been written from both secular and Christian authors to help men find their way. In this article we're going to spend some time with two of them. Stu Weber, a pastor in Oregon wrote the hugely influential *Tender Warrior* in 1993. *Tender Warrior* is full of stories and illustrations that irresistibly pull you along to Stu's appointed end: a vision of manhood mined from God's original intention for a man wrapped up in the New Testament vision of the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus

Christ.

At the core of Weber's vision is what he calls the four pillars of a man's heart: the Heart of a King, the Heart of a Warrior, the Heart of a Mentor, and the Heart of a Friend. I first read *Tender Warrior* in the mid 90s, and I was immediately caught up in his four-part description. I knew I didn't exemplify all of these characteristics as Weber describes them, but I knew I wanted to.

The Heart of the King reflects a man's provisionary heart. The part of a man that wants to offer order, mercy and justice to the world he inhabits. Think of some of the Old Testament patriarchs, people like Abraham, Moses, and David. All of these men had a sense about them that drew others to them. They were leaders; they looked ahead and prepared those around them for what was coming.

The Heart of a Warrior portrays that part of a man that wants to shield, guard, defend and protect those around him. We intuitively understand this about men, but so many are inhibited from expressing this today. Movies and the entertainment industry often portray this aspect of manhood in its harsher tones. Consequently, this true aspect of manhood is more a target for suppression than for understanding.

The Heart of a Mentor reflects that part of a man that desires to model, train, and explain. Little boys particularly expect their dads to know everything. And a dad puffs up every time he can answer his son's questions. This aspect particularly is missing today in the church as young men from broken and dysfunctional families flounder, looking for an older man to help point the way.

The Heart of a Friend describes the part of a man that is truly compassionate, loving, and committed. The apostle Paul was a tough character as expressed in the list of hardships in 2 Cor. 11:23-28, yet he talked to the Thessalonians with

gentle and tender words in 1 Thess. 2:7-8.

“Sourced in Scripture, observed in history, and experienced personally, these four pillars bear the weight of authentic masculinity. They coexist. They overlap. And when they come together in a man, you will know it. You will feel it. You will be touched by it. Like four strands of a steel cable, they will hold you.”{1}

A Man and His Family

These four pillars encapsulate four essential qualities in a man of God: leadership, protectiveness, teaching, and compassion. A man with just three of the four is out of balance. A man who just emphasizes one of the four is a caricature of a real man. Nowhere is this more evident than in the biblical picture of headship and a man’s role in his family.

Our culture is horribly confused on this point. Weber sums it up neatly when he says, “Men, as husbands you have been given a trust, a stewardship, a responsibility, a duty, to husband, or manage, or care for the gifts of your wife.”{2} Part of my job as a husband is to create an environment in our home that allows my wife to be all God created her to be. She needs to be able to trust my leadership. She needs to know I will stand up for her and provide a secure environment. She needs to be comfortable in seeking my guidance and instruction. Finally, she needs to know that she is loved with a Christ-like self - sacrificing love. Weber adds, “A woman was made to be provided for, protected, and cared for. A man was made to be a provider, protector, and caregiver. Nothing is more pitiful than a man forfeiting his masculinity or a woman her femininity by transgressing the created order.”{3}

Weber’s discussion of a man and his lady provides numerous helpful insights, exercises, and illustrations on how a man is to love a woman. One commentator suggested that the chapter

titled, “Does Anyone Here Speak Woman?” is worth the price of the book alone. Weber encourages men to realize that since men and women are inherently different, a man needs to learn a woman’s language, to live with her in an understanding way as Peter commands (1 Pet. 3:7). We need to put our analytical minds to work to understand how she is put together. We won’t ever get all the way there, but after all, a little mystery is what keeps marriage exciting, fresh, and interesting anyway.

Weber devotes three chapters to the incredible power of fathering. Our culture today is in dire need of real men willing to father their children. So many dads are absent either physically or emotionally. This alone accounts for so many wayward kids, both male and female alike. A father has a powerful multigenerational impact on his sons and daughters whether intentional or not. It’s the nature of God’s design.

Like arrows in a quiver, each child needs to be constructed, aimed, and released according to the bent God has given them. Skillful parenting does not come naturally, especially in our culture today that is so confused and off course. It will require biblical and rational thinking in advance.

A Man and His Friends

In his book, *Tender Warrior*, Stu Weber titles the first chapter about a man and his friends, “Real Men Stand Together.” In our increasingly mobile and fragmented society, it’s harder than ever for men to know each other well enough to be willing to stand together. Upon hearing that Jonathan was dead, the future King David commented that Jonathan’s love was wonderful, more wonderful than that of a woman (2 Sam. 1:26).

Men who have weathered tough times together, even fought together, develop a bond that can be stronger than that between a man and a woman. But how many men have such a friendship? There are numerous forces in our culture that

leave most men isolated and cut-off. We see the lonely male model in the movies all the time. Characters played by John Wayne, Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger tend to be the isolated lonely male types: able, or perhaps, forced to handle life's pressures on their own.

Neighborhoods rarely have block parties today. We live in our closed up homes (no open windows in summer or people out on the porch on summer evenings) with tall fences keeping things private. We drive our own cars to work, work long hours, and relax in front of the TV or a book isolated from those around us. A sense of community has been lost in our cities and even small towns. Men, therefore, have no one to connect with outside of office mates or sports teammates. We think we do just fine on our own, thank you.

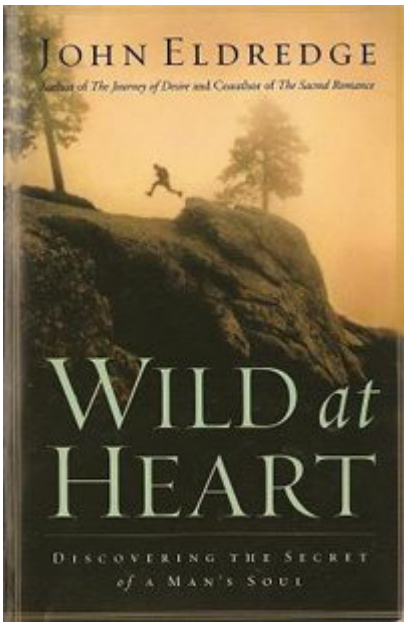
However, as we grow older, we hunger for someone of the male species to truly share what we are experiencing. But there is no Jonathan or David, someone I fought with in the trenches, someone who really knows me and my successes and struggles.

Men long for someone to lock arms with in a struggle greater than themselves. Looking again at David and Jonathan, we learn in 1 Samuel 14 that Jonathan was a warrior just like David, and when David slew Goliath (1 Samuel 18), Jonathan immediately made a connection. They had shared values. They became one in spirit. Jonathan made a covenant with David that basically said what's mine is yours. They developed an unselfish love for each other. Jonathan exhibited a deep loyalty to David when he intervened on his behalf when his father, King Saul, sought David's life.

In 1 Samuel 20, David and Jonathan expect that they may never see each other again and weep in each other's embrace. They were transparent. They weren't afraid to be emotional in the other's presence. Do you have a friend like that? I encourage you to seek a friend who shares your values, and work to

develop an unselfish, loyal, and transparent relationship that the Lord will use to guide you through today's muddy waters.

Battle to Fight, an Adventure to Live, and a Beauty to Rescue



In the continuing parade of books from Christian authors for men comes a book that has taken the evangelical community by storm. Counselor and writer John Eldredge claims that men are wild at heart and desperately need to recapture this essential part of maleness. In his book, *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge claims that every man needs a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

Eldredge's triumvirate lines up quite well with Weber's four pillars, the Heart of the King, Warrior, Mentor, and Friend. Both Weber and Eldredge assert that a man needs a cause outside himself to fully live out the image of God in him. They just use different terminology.

However, *Wild at Heart* sometimes leaves you a little too wild. Yes, men need to be free to explore that wild side, but responsibility is not just a duty that shackles a man's God-given wildness. Eldredge can sometimes run roughshod over the state of men in the church and seems to encourage men to be little boys rather than grown men with both needs *and* responsibilities.

For instance, Eldredge uses many illustrations from physically demanding backcountry experiences to highlight his call to be wild at heart. Early in the book he retells how he and his sons faced the flooded, muddy, and debris-filled Snake River with nothing but a canoe. He says, "I have never floated the

Snake in a canoe, nor any other river for that matter, but what the heck. We jumped in and headed off into the unknown, like Livingstone plunging into the interior of dark Africa."{4} Wild? Sure, but reckless and irresponsible, too!

But despite the occasional excess, Eldredge uncovers that same need for a cause outside himself, and identifies it as a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

Eldredge proclaims that there is something fierce inside every man, whether it is slaying the dragons of business or whacking a little white ball on a golf course. Men naturally compete. If there is no winner, we quickly get bored.

The adventurous spirit is not just about having fun. Adventure requires something of a man. Deep down inside we wonder if we have what it takes, whatever the task that presents itself. Most men watch war movies wondering how they would have responded if presented with the same situation.

But there's more. Men need someone to fight for and with. A companion. A beauty. A helpmate. Adam had a great and wonderful world to explore at his creation. But God recognized that he needed something else, a helpmate suitable for him.

In summary then, at the heart of every man there is something fierce, wild, and passionate. But all this can only be properly harnessed as we seek a relationship with the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus Christ. But in a fallen world, we are all walking wounded. If that is the case, does Eldredge have a recipe for healing?

Healing the Wound

John Eldredge likens many men to a huge male lion in his local zoo. The lion, as powerful and ferocious as he is, is caged in a small cell where he lies around, bored except at feeding time, and is but a shadow of what he was created to be. In a fallen world, where our enemy prowls around looking for

someone to devour, most if not all men have been wounded at the heart of their masculinity. It has sapped their strength and put them on the sidelines.

Most often this wound comes from someone close to us, either a parent (usually the father), sibling, relative or peer. Most of us can remember someone telling us, either by words or actions, that we don't have what it takes to be a man. This can often be due to a series of events over an extensive period of time rather than to a single event. As a result, we go through life wondering if we have what it takes.

In today's culture, this wound can come from a school system that is telling our boys that there is something wrong with them. Boys are far more likely to be medicated than girls, and often it is only for just being boys. And with so many fatherless homes due to either physical absence or an extremely passive father who never gets involved, nobody is showing boys and young men what it means to be a man.

So men will often try to answer their question, to heal their wound, by going to some very unwise places. Some rebel, others try to earn their father's respect by becoming driven overachievers. Others retreat into passivity or are haunted by pornography or even drugs. Some search for their masculinity from women or maybe just one woman. But femininity can never bestow masculinity.

There ends up being a false self we create to distance ourselves from the question we fear, that gives others the impression we have it all figured out, when deep inside everything is mush. The answer lies in going to the One who created us for a very specific purpose and indeed knows who we are (Psalm 139). Jesus never shied away from acknowledging that He was totally dependent on the Father. Many times He said things like, "I and the Father are one." Or "I do nothing apart from the Father."

We have been created to be dependent on God, yet we as men continually try to convince ourselves we can do it on our own. In order to bring us to a point of recognizing our daily need to walk with Him, the Lord will bring us through trials that force us to depend on Him. The false self is stripped away until there is nothing left for us to do. Here and only here can the wound be healed. The Lord will walk us through an intensely personal awakening to reveal whom He created us to be if we will only trust Him.

So when troubles arise, instead of whining or complaining, we should ask, What is it the Lord wants me to see? What is He trying to teach me? What do I need to learn? Then we will be on the road to true masculinity.{5}

Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1993), p. 43.
2. Ibid., p. 92.
3. Ibid., p. 92.
4. John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 5.
5. This last section summarizes chapters 3-7, which are the heart of Eldredge's book, *Wild at Heart.* When reading *Wild at Heart,* one needs to be aware that Eldredge's language is sometimes imprecise and can leave the wrong impression. I'm convinced that Eldredge sees that the real battle we all must face is with spiritual forces, and that our physical tests of strength are only rehearsals for the real thing. But his book can be misinterpreted as an excuse for men to overindulge in risky behavior and some men to take dangerous risks they are not prepared for. For some, *Wild at Heart* can only serve as an appeal to the flesh.

So, is the tender warrior wild at heart? Yes, but not to the degree some choose to believe.
Eldredge uses a great illustration on page 83. “Yes, a man is a dangerous thing. So is a
scalpel. It can wound or it can save your life. You don’t make it safe by making it dull; you
put it in the hands of someone who knows what he’s doing.” Only the Ultimate Tender Warrior, Jesus
Christ qualifies.

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Four Pillars of a Man’s Heart – A Biblical View of True Manhood

Lou Whitworth summarizes the key points of Stu Weber’s book on this subject. He explains that biblical masculinity is lived out in four aspects of a man’s life, king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Understanding these aspects can aid us in living a Christian life that fully emulates the life of Christ sharing Him with the world around us.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Stu Weber, in his book, *Four Pillars of a Man’s Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance,*(1) states that biblical masculinity rests on four pillars. The four pillars represent the four major facets of a man’s life; these aspects of masculinity are: king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Weber believes that when all four “pillars” are balanced, peace and tranquility will prevail in our marriages, our families, our

churches, and in the community and the nation. These institutions rest on the balanced pillars of biblical manhood, and they all collapse when the pillars lean out of balance. The major problems our society faces, for example, are the result of many men having one or more of their personal pillars out of balance—leaning one way or the other. For some men, the pillars have fallen down.

As we look at our society, it is clear that we are in trouble. Some of the pillars are leaning, and others have fallen down. It takes four sturdy, balanced pillars to hold up a building. "It takes four pillars to make a man. . . . who will bear the weight, stand against the elements, and hold one small civilization [a home] intact in a world that would like nothing better than to tear it down."(2)

Why is our civilization falling down around us? Because there is a war going on. The war of political correctness is part of it; sexual politics is part of it too, but it is larger than these. It is a war against the image of God. Listen as Weber draws a bead on the issue:

> Gender is primarily an issue of theology. And theology is the most foundational of all the sciences. Gender is at the heart of creation. Gender is tied to the image of God. Gender is central to the glory of God. And that is precisely why the armies of hell are throwing themselves into this particular battle with such concentrated frenzy.(3)

Remember that God created mankind as male and female to be His image in the world. Thus, there is no better way to attack God and His creation or to destroy His relationship with mankind than to deface the image of God.(4) "Satan's effectiveness in destroying God's image through male-female alienation, by whatever means, has been incalculably costly to the human race."(5) This is where the current battle rages.

The first pillars started to wobble a long time ago. In the

Garden of Eden, Adam began as a four-pillared man. But he disobeyed God and blamed Eve. Then the first pillar fell, and the remaining ones were weakened or compromised. For the first time enmity and tension came into his relationship with Eve. Since then there has always been the potential of strife between the sexes. In recent years there has been a concerted effort to blur gender distinctives. But blurring gender differences results in disintegration, disorientation, destruction, and death. No society that persists at it will survive. The answer is to return to the instruction book, the Bible.

The purpose of Weber's book is to point the way for men to become all they should be biblically so that they and their wives and children can flourish in an often hostile world. Weber writes:

> What kind of man builds a civilization, a small civilization that outlives him? What kind of man has shoulders broad enough to build upon? A four-pillared man:
>
> A man of vision and character . . . a King.
> A man of strength and power . . . a Warrior.
> A man of faith and wisdom . . . a Mentor.
> A man of heart and love . . . a Friend.(6)

Man as Shepherd-King

In Stu Weber's new book, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, the "first pillar" represents the kingly aspect of man's nature.

The king, as pictured by Weber, is a Shepherd-king. This figure is modeled after Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings, who sometimes spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. The first pillar in Weber's book, therefore, is the pillar of the Shepherd-King who combines the position of a king with the heart of a shepherd.

Weber's key thought about the king or shepherd-king is that he

is a provider, though it is a very broad conception of provision. If we say, “He is a good provider,” we mean, “He makes a good living,” or meets the *physical* needs of the family. The meaning here, however, is that the shepherd-king looks out for *all* the needs of his flock—emotional, physical, social, spiritual. The kingly man is looking ahead and planning for ways to meet tomorrow’s needs as well as today’s. His has a *vision to provide* the resources for the needs of his family.

Among the minimum requirements of the Shepherd-king is work to do that provides for the family. He works hard at whatever it is and stays with it. The work may not be exciting or glamorous, but he shoulders the load and provides for the little flock God has entrusted to him. His wife may work for paycheck; she may even make more than he does, but no matter what she does, the *obligation and the burden of provision* is his, to see that it is done.

Another major duty of the shepherd-king is to provide direction for the family. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”(7) A shepherd-king points the way for his flock, followers, and his family. To lead or set the pace, one doesn’t need to be a master of every skill or field of knowledge. For example, Lee Iacocca doesn’t need to be a great mechanic; he can hire the best. What he does best is set the policies, give the company direction, and make sure the infrastructure is in place to make the automobiles. In the same way, the man with a king’s heart doesn’t have to know everything, but he is expected to set the tone, the boundaries, and point the way for the flock.

The king in a man cares deeply about every aspect of his family. He models by actions and words biblical standards of behavior. He is gracious and just. He shows justice, mercy, and honor to everyone he meets.

A shepherd-king never abandons his flock. To do so is to

violate the most basic ingredient of his calling to—protect. To abandon one's flock is cowardice, the equivalent of desertion in time of war.

The shepherd-king figure could also be called the servant-king. This is based on Christ's service to his disciples.

If the king pillar is not in balance, it leans to one extreme or another. He becomes either a tyrant who uses his strength to force people to do his bidding, or an abdicator who is weak, passive, or absent (whether in fact or in effect). Such a man's kingdom is filled with disorder, chaos, family dysfunction, or oppression. When the king pillar is in balance in a man's life, harmony and tranquility are possible in the home and the community.

Next, we will discuss the second pillar which represents the warrior aspect of man's makeup.

Man as Warrior

The primary duty of the warrior is to defend and guard his flock. Though he is primarily a protector of his family, he is also the protector of his church, the wider community or nation, and the weak and powerless.

The author's models for the warrior are Christ and David. Weber reminds us of the passage in Revelation 19 in which Christ, as a knight riding a white horse, leads the armies of heaven into battle. David was a bold and courageous fighter, but was also a man after God's own heart.

The warrior in a godly man doesn't love war. But, because he is a man of high moral standards and principles, he is willing to *live by* those principles and moral standards, spend himself for them, and, if necessary, *die for* them.

The warrior is not a popular figure in today's society. This attitude is understandable, particularly from those who have

experienced life around men whose warrior pillar has leaned toward the brute. Women and children need to be protected from such men by faithful warriors whose lives are in balance.

Though the concern many have about the strong side of man's nature (king, warrior) is understandable to a degree, it can't be wished away. Someone once remarked that when most men are soft, a few hard men will rule. The reality is that the warrior is here to stay. So, the answer is not to deny the fact, but to channel the warrior energy to constructive ends.

The warrior in a man can be a great asset, but if the pillar of the warrior is out of balance, the situation can become disastrous. Consequently, the warrior must be under the authority of God because his energy needs to be focused, and the Holy Spirit must be allowed full control over his mind, soul, and body.

There is no such thing as a soldier or warrior without a line of authority. Even if no specific orders are in effect, every soldier is under the authority of what is called "general orders," such as: "walk your post," "be alert," "remain on station until relieved," etc. In a similar manner all Christian men are under general orders from the Lord of Hosts. We are "to spend time with the Lord," "to love our wives at all costs," "to bring up our children to know and honor God," and "to be involved in the local church." God's warrior is not a mercenary; he is under God's authority. God's warrior remains on call. Oh, sure, he takes some needed rest and recreation, but at the first sign of need or danger, he reports for duty. He never becomes passive or careless during on his watch. On or off duty, he is alert for any threat to his flock.

A warrior's life is full of sacrifice; he is called to sacrifice himself for his wife, his children, his church, the spiritually lost, and the weak and helpless. He sometimes finds it necessary to sacrifice his popularity by saying and

doing the hard things that others won't say. On the other hand, the godly warrior has a heart of mercy for the weak and the helpless. The price of being a warrior is high, but the rewards are great.

The third pillar represents the mentoring role inherent in a balanced man's nature.

Man as Mentor

The primary function of the mentor is to teach. Weber's key concept is that the mentor has something valuable (i.e., life wisdom) that is important to pass on to others. That process can be as formal and conscious as a Bible scholar instructing a seminary class of eager young men. Or, it can be as informal and unconscious as the ongoing presence of an older, more experienced man working beside a boy or a younger man. Said another way, mentoring can take the form of modeling over time (even a lifetime), instinctive coaching (at appropriate times), or systematic teaching (at scheduled times). Jesus, for example, used all three methods of mentoring.

The mentor's core characteristic is the fact that he communicates transparently with the person he is mentoring. He imparts himself and his knowledge without undue self-consciousness. In other words, he is transparent enough to share his successes, and even his failures, if these experiences will edify his students. If a mentor fails to pass on the baton of knowledge or wisdom, then he has not succeeded in his role.

Weber emphatically believes that there is a mentor in every man's heart; that is, the potential for mentoring is inherent within us. Many men, however, are nervous about this and feel unqualified. But, in reality, we are all involved in mentoring already in one way or another, whether we realize it or not.

Mentoring is basically passing on the secrets of life: lessons

from our life experiences. The purpose of mentoring is straightforward: mentoring builds men who understand life and pass their knowledge on to others. The attitude and posture of a good mentor is quite transferable to others because mentoring has its own built in process of duplication. In other words, when it is done well it is very duplicatable because it has already been modeled by the mentor. The expression, “It’s easier caught than taught,” can apply here. The goal of mentoring is to advance an ever increasing network of mentored mentors who will keep passing on their life wisdom to others. It helps us understand why Jesus spent so much time with 12 men, doesn’t it? He apparently thought that mentoring a group of men was the most productive way of leaving a lasting and ongoing legacy. The fact that His message has spread to most areas of the globe and has persisted for 2000 years illustrates that He was correct.

It should be an encouragement to comprehend that God can use both the good and the bad experiences from our lives to help others. And, we all have a measure of wisdom and experience to share. However, just because we are capable of mentoring at some level just as we are, we should not conclude that we can’t or shouldn’t try to improve as mentors. One of the primary ways for us to improve as mentors is to grow in our knowledge of the Bible. When our life experiences are filtered through a deep knowledge of the Bible and a life lived for Christ, then our mentoring potential is greatly enhanced. The consequence of vast networks of men mentoring others who will in turn mentor others can change the world.

Finally, we will look at man’s role as friend to other men. This is the fourth pillar.

Man as Friend

The primary function of a friend is “to connect,” that is, to link hearts. Someone is a true friend if that person loves to connect, or to link one heart, with another. A true friend is

one who, in spite of his own needs at the time, connects deliberately with another who has a need or a burden. He doesn't just connect when it's convenient and he feels like it. If a man is unable or unwilling to connect, he has failed in his primary duty as a friend.

To truly connect in deep friendship or to minister to hurting people, we must be not be afraid of a rich variety of emotions—whether they be the emotions of others or our own. It is just here that many men have difficulty. We can usually express anger, but other emotions are tougher. Weber believes that *allowing* (notice the word) himself to weep (in appropriate situations) was a milestone in his life. He suggests that many men need to be able to weep and to express other emotions as well. In fact, it appears that for many men, allowing themselves to weep breaks up the emotional logjam in their lives and gives them a new sense of freedom. Follow the author's thoughts as he explains how he felt after witnessing the birth of his youngest son:

> For the first time in my memory, I wept uncontrollably. . . . Me? Crying in front of people? Stu Weber, the football captain. The Airborne Ranger. The Green Beret trooper. The man. Bawling like a kid? Oh, I had cried before somewhere along the line. . . . But this was different. New. There was no shame, and there was lots of connection.(8)

He goes on to add:

> *And I have to admit something else. . . . Emotions are such a great gift from God. And after a lifetime of stuffing them for athletic, military, and "manly" purposes, I love them.(9)*

He sides against what he calls emotional*ism*, but calls for men to learn to express and enjoy real emotions. As an older soldier, with nothing left to prove, he could finally face his humanity and embrace the honest, clean emotions that earlier he had always stifled. If we do so, our ability to connect as

a true friend will be greatly enhanced.

Man’s Best Friend

Men need friends, but many American men have only acquaintances and no close friends. Thankfully, there is already a Friend out there looking for us, the Ultimate Friend, Jesus Christ. No discussion of friendship, then, would be complete without referring to Him. Our Ultimate Friend has been trying to connect with us, because He wants a relationship with us. Even the best human friend will disappoint us and let us down, but once connected with us, the Lord will never leave us or forsake us.

If our relationship with the Lord were dependent on our own steadfastness, then we’d have a reason to fear. Fortunately, the Lord who sought us can keep us safe because nothing can steal us from the Lord’s hand (John 10:29).

> There is, my friend, somewhere down inside you, the power to connect. There is in every man’s chest a friend, and emotionally connecting friend. Find yours. Unchain him. And find life on a richer level than you’d ever dreamed possible.(10)

Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of A Man’s Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance* (Sisters, Ore.:Multnomah, 1997), 13.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 39.
4. Ibid., (Halverson, cited in *Four Pillars*, p. 39)
5. Ibid, Halverson, 40.
6. Weber, 13.
7. Joshua 24:15
8. Weber, 229.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 237.

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Knighthood and Biblical Manhood – A Christian Perspective on True Manliness

Lou Whitworth summarizes an inspiring book which lays out the characteristics of a godly man. The ceremonies and the code of conduct of knights are compared to a biblical perspective on Christian manhood. This model encourages us to live in Christ as examples of godly men.

A Vision for Manhood

In this essay we will be looking at an inspiring book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* in an effort to learn how we can motivate our sons to live lives of honor and nobility. This book, written by Robert Lewis, grew out his own experiences as he and some close friends struggled to lead their sons into balanced, biblical masculinity.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the disparate strands of manhood—fierceness and gentleness—can find healthy synthesis in the person of the knight and in the code of chivalry. Here these competing impulses—normally found in different individuals—find their union.(1)

Were one of these two bents given full rein, the balance required for authentic Christian manhood would be lost. Strength and power, without tenderness, for example, give us the brute. Tenderness and compassion without masculine firmness and aggressiveness produce a male without the fire to

lead or inspire others.

Biblical examples of these two elements resident in one man are numerous. Jesus Christ, our Lord, revealed both tough and tender aspects in His humanity. Once Jesus expressed a desire to gather the citizens of Jerusalem together as a hen gathers her young under her wings.(2) We know that Christ wept at least twice: once at the tomb of Lazarus(3) and again as He looked out over the city of Jerusalem and reflected on the fate of those who rejected His witness.(4) However, Jesus could also be very stern. Once He made a whip, ran off the money changers in the temple area, and turned over their tables.(5) And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, His mere glance knocked grown men to the ground.(6)

In Paul, we see the same blend of firmness and gentleness. He poured himself out tenderly nurturing his spiritual children,(7) but he endured more hardship than most soldiers(8) and didn't hesitate to castigate false teachers.(9)

In the Old Testament, we see David, who was a poet and singer, but also a warrior and king. He had the fierceness to kill Goliath, the giant, and the tenderness to provide for the needs of Jonathan's descendants after Jonathan was killed.

Keeping the right balance between our impulses toward power and aggression and the need to be gentle and tender is a challenge most men face. In his book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis says that Christian fathers can use knighthood as a symbol, an ideal, and a metaphor for guiding their sons into authentic manhood. In this way opposing drives can be harnessed and balanced.

Now, of course, everyone experiences difficulty balancing competing impulses, but it is specifically the violence by young males that is bringing our society to the verge of breakdown. Our young men need a vision for masculinity that

challenges and inspires if our society is to be stable and healthy. In an age of great social, spiritual, and gender confusion, such as ours, there is a desperate need for clear guidelines and models that can inspire young men and harness their aggression for constructive ends.

This is where the image of the knight comes in. Since the Middle Ages these men in iron have fired the imaginations of young men. Knighthood is attractive because of its code and its call to courage and honor. Young men are intrigued by testing themselves against various standards, and the code is inspiring because of its rigor and strictness.

The Need for Modern-Day Knights

In his enthusiastic foreword to Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* Stu Weber writes:

> *Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. If it's difficult for you and me as adult males to maintain our masculine balance in this gender-neutral' culture, imagine what it must be like for our sons, who are growing up in an increasingly feminized world.(10)*

We must supply our young men with healthy, noble visions of manhood, and the figure of the knight, in this regard, is without equal. In the knight we find a conception of manhood that can lift, inspire, and challenge our young men to new heights of achievement and nobility. One authority asserted: "Not all knights were great men, but all great men were knights."(11) According to Will Durant, chivalry and knighthood gave to the world one of the "major achievements of the human spirit."(12)

C. S. Lewis, in his essay, "The Necessity of Chivalry," agreed.(13) He wrote that the genius of the medieval ideal of the chivalrous knight was that it was a paradox. That is, it

brought together two things which have no natural tendency to gravitate towards one another. It brought them together for that very reason. It taught humility and forbearance to the great warrior because everyone knew by experience how much he usually needed that lesson. It demanded valour of the urbane and modest man because everyone knew that he was likely as not to be a milksop.(14)

In Malory's *Morte Darthur* a fellow knight salutes the deceased Lancelot saying: "Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest." This expresses the double requirement made on knights: sternness and meekness, not a compromise or blend of the two. Part of the attraction of the knight is this combination of valor and humility.

Someone once said history teaches us that, "When most men are soft, a few hard men will rule." For that reason we must do everything we can to build into our boys the virtues of strength and tenderness so they can be strong, solid family men and so society will be stable.

The lack of connection between fathers and sons in our culture, made worse by broken homes and the busyness of our lives, has left many young men with a masculine identity crisis. That's why the ideas in this book are so timely and important. Our sons are looking to their fathers for direction. Fathers are searching for real answers in their attempts to guide their sons into godly manhood. This book provides answers and guidelines for this search.

First, from the example of the knight, fathers have a way to point their sons to manhood with clear ideals: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause. Second, the pattern of advancement from page to knight provides fathers with a coherent process for guiding their sons to manhood. Third, numerous suggestions for ceremonies equip dads

with a variety of means to celebrate and validate their sons' achievements.

The Knight and His Ideals

Now we will turn our attention to the knight and his ideals. In *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis suggests three major ideals for modern-day knights: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause.

A Vision for Manhood – The author states four manhood principles: Real men (1) reject passivity, (2) accept responsibility, (3) lead courageously, and (4) expect the greater reward. He suggests that though men have a natural inborn aggressiveness, they tend to become passive at home and avoid social responsibility. These principles, if followed, prevent passivity from becoming a significant problem.

A Code of Conduct – The code for modern-day knights comes from the pages of the Bible. Lewis lists 10 ideal characteristics appropriate for modern-day knights taken from the Scriptures: loyalty, kindness, humility, purity, servant- leadership, honesty, self-discipline, excellence, integrity, and perseverance. Modern-day knights must be trained in three important areas. First, the modern-day knight needs to understand that there must be a will to obey (God's will) if there is to be spiritual maturity. The young man must come to know that life is inherently moral and that there is a God who knows everything and who rewards good and punishes evil. He must know that absolute values exist and that the commandments of God are liberating, not confining. Lewis states "True satisfaction in life is directly proportionate to one's obedience to God. In this context, moral boundaries take on a whole new perspective: they become benefits, not burdens."

Second, the modern-day knight needs to understand that he has a work to do that is in keeping with his inner design. This work is not just his profession or trade, but refers to work

in his home, church, and community. Life is certainly more than a job, and your son should hear this from you lest he get the mistaken perception that manhood is just one duty and obligation after another.

A third realm of responsibility for the modern-day knight is a woman to love. The code of chivalry requires that all women be treated with respect and honor. Sons need to see and hear from their fathers the importance of caring for women in general and loving, leading, and honoring their wives in particular.

The knight in training should be taught the value of work, have summer jobs, do chores around the house, and study hard on his school work. The goal here is to establish patterns of industry and avoid sloth so that a solid work ethic is in place as he gets older.

A Transcendent Cause – Life is ultimately unsatisfying if it is lived solely for self. Jesus said if you give up your life you will find it, so if you live for a cause greater than yourself, you'll be happy and fulfilled. A transcendent cause is a cause that a person believes is truly heroic (a noble endeavor calling for bravery and sacrifice), timeless (has significance beyond the moment), and is supremely meaningful (not futile).

The only antidote to the futility of life is a transcendent cause and a vision for life that "integrates the end of life with the beginning," and connects time and eternity. Obviously becoming a Christian, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and living for Him are basic, irreplaceable elements for having a meaningful life.

A Knight and His Ceremonies

At this point, we turn to focus on the importance of ceremonies in the life of a young man. It is said that a knight remembers the occasion of his dubbing (i.e., his

installment as a knight) as the finest day of his life. Such is the power of ceremony that it makes celebrated events unforgettable. Ceremonies are also invaluable markers that state emphatically: “Something important has happened here!”

In much of the world, older men have instinctively seen the wisdom of providing for their sons markers of their journey to manhood. These markers have been in the form of periodic ceremonies or a significant, final ceremony. Following such events there is no doubt in the young man’s mind that he has reached the stage in his development celebrated in the ceremony. Later he can always look back on the ceremony and remember what it meant.

After the elaborate physical, mental, and religious disciplines endured and passed in relation to his dubbing ceremony, no medieval knight ever wondered, “Am I a knight?” Such matters had been settled forever by the power of ceremony in the presence of other men. This is what our sons need.

Our sons do not normally have such experiences. As Lewis writes, “One of the great tragedies of Western culture today is the absence of this type of ceremony. . . . I cannot even begin to describe the impact on a son’s soul when a key manhood moment in his life is forever enshrined and memorialized by a ceremony with other men.”(15)

The author suggests that there are natural stages in a young man’s life that lend themselves to celebration. Each stage has a parallel in the orderly steps toward knighthood.

Puberty: The Page Ceremony – The first step for a young boy on the path to knighthood was to become a page. He was like an apprentice, and he learned about horses, weapons, and falconry and performed menial tasks for his guardians. Since puberty occurs in a young boy’s life around 13 and is an important point in a young man’s journey toward adulthood, it is an excellent time for a simple ceremony involving the boy and his

father celebrating this stage of the young man's life.

High School Graduation: The Squire Ceremony – The next stage on the path to knighthood was the squire; he was attached to a knight, served him in many ways, and continued to perfect his fighting skills. This stage is roughly parallel to the time of high school graduation. It should be marked by a more involved ceremony led by the boy's father but involving other men.

Adulthood: The Knight Ceremony – This is the stage in which the squire, after a period of testing and preparation, is dubbed a knight in an elaborate ceremony. This marks the end of youth and the arrival of adulthood for the knight. For the modern- day knight this stage of life is characterized by the completion of college or entering the world of work or military service. The author suggests this stage as a perfect time to have a celebration marking a son's arrival at manhood and full adulthood. This ceremony should be very special; it should involve the young man, his father, his family, and other men.

Some Final Thoughts on Knighthood

In this discussion we have been looking at Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* and discussing knights and chivalry in an attempt to promote the knight as a worthy ideal, symbol, and metaphor for young men to emulate. A question left unasked is why young men might need a stirring, vivid image or concept like the knight as a model. After a lifetime of studying cultures and civilizations, both ancient and modern, the eminent anthropologist Margaret Mead made the following observation:

> *The central problem of every society is to define appropriate roles for the men.(16)*

Though Margaret Mead was a controversial figure, and I have sometimes disagreed with her myself, in this statement, I

believe she is right on target. Author George Gilder adds a similar insight when he states: “Wise societies provide ample means for young men to affirm themselves without afflicting others.”(17)

Men need appropriate roles, and they need the desire to live and perform those roles. They need to be inspired to do so. Men need roles that are considered valuable and held to be worthwhile. This is true because men are psychologically more fragile than women and suffer with their identity more than women do, though feminists would have us think otherwise. Why is this so? It is true because “Men, more than women, are culture-made.”(18) This is why it is so important to have a culture-wide vision of manhood.

In modern Western society boys make the journey to manhood without a clear vision for what healthy manhood is. If they get out of control, the whole society suffers. Proverbs 29:18 states: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” [or, “are unrestrained”]. Knights and chivalry can supply a stirring vision of manhood that has been lacking. Yet some may think that the figure of the knight is an inappropriate image to use to inspire Christian young men. Such people need to take a close look at Scripture. The teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul use the image of the hard working farmer, the athlete, and the soldier to illustrate the points they are trying to make.

Furthermore, there are numerous biblical passages that picture knight-like images, some of whom are angelic beings and others are Christ Himself. Specifically, Revelation is replete with images of courtly life familiar to medieval knights: kings, thrones, crowns, swords, censers, bows, armies, eagles, dragons, chariots, precious stones, incense, etc.

Actually, we are more indebted to the knightly virtue of chivalry than we realize. Many of the concepts and words have become part of our familiar vocabulary. It is from chivalry,

for example, that we acquired the concept of the gentleman (notice the dual stress here—gentle-man) and our concepts of sportsmanship and fair play. It is perhaps no accident that the decline in chivalry parallels the rise of taunting and the "win at any price" attitude among our sports figures.

There is one more aspect to all of this that needs to be emphasized. If we are successful in inspiring our young men to seek to become modern-day knights, we need to remind them and ourselves that one can't become a knight on his own. Our young knights need the company of godly men to be all that they can be; they need the Roundtable. As Robert Lewis states so well: "Boys become men in the community of men. There is no substitute for this vital component. . . . if your boy is to become a man, you must enlist the community."(19) Why? "First, if a father's presence is weighty, the presence of other men is weightier still. . . . Second, enlisting the community of men results in a depth of friendship that the lonely never experience. . . . And third, the community of men expands a son's spiritual and moral resources."(20)

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," *Present Concerns* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 11-16.

2. Matthew 23:37.

3. John 11.

4. Luke 19:41.

5. John 2:13-16.

6. John 18:6.

7. Thessalonians 2: 5-9.

8. 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

9. Galatians 5:12.

10. Stu Weber cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising A Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to authentic Manhood* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Focus on the Family, 1997), vii.

11. Matthew Bennett, "The Knight Unmasked," *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 4(Summer 1995): 10, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

12. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization—The Age of Faith 4* (New York: Simon & Schuster,1950), 578, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

13. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," 13-26.

14. Ibid.

15. Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 99.

16. Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1968),168, cited in Lewis, 46.

17. George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1992), 34, cited in Lewis, 46.

18. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic, 1995), 17, cited in Lewis, 46.

19. Lewis, 150.

20. Ibid., 150-51.

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