

Biblical Manhood

Jim Essian : February 22, 2015

THE PARADOX CHURCH

A couple of years after we moved into our house in Fort Worth, I discovered a dead possum in our garage.

I'm not from Texas; I'm from up north. There are possums up north, but I'd never seen anything like that before. I'd never done the whole hunting thing. I'd never even shot a gun until I moved to here. (You have to shoot a gun when you move to Texas. That's the rule, right?) I'd never really handled dead animals or anything like that, but my wife had. She grew up in the country. They didn't even deliver pizza to her house, that's how country she was. She grew up shooting guns in the backyard, shooting cans off the fence. They had a horse. She had a Mustang with a really loud exhaust system. She was country.

I'd never experienced something like having a dead possum in my garage. So I called a friend and asked, "Do I call the animal shelter? What do I do here?" He just laughed at me. "Do I call the city of Fort Worth and ask them to come pick it up?" I just didn't know. By that time my wife had come out to the garage, so I had to figure out what to do with the dead possum.

I got a shovel.

People laugh at that because you're not supposed to use a shovel; you're just supposed to pick it up. I used a shovel. The whole time I imagined that the possum was literally playing possum with me, and it would wake up and bite my face off. I tried to use the shovel to pick it up but couldn't. It just wouldn't get under there. So my wife told me, "You just need to grab it and put it in the trash."

"Woman, I'm not gonna grab that thing! *You* grab it!"

So she did.

She grabbed some gloves, picked up the possum, and put it in a garbage bag. She'd brought her camera out because she saw me messing around with the possum. So afterwards, she struck a cute pose, and I took a picture of her with the bagged possum.

That was our experience with a dead possum in our garage. Of course, my manhood was just ashamed. I couldn't show my face for a couple of weeks. I had to go lift weights and pound beer cans on my head to get my man card back.

When we talk about biblical manhood, we're not talking about those things. We're not talking about women being kind and gentle while men are strong and assertive. We're not talking about the differences between masculine traits and feminine traits. Women sometimes display masculine traits and that is okay; men sometimes display feminine traits like gentleness, because that's right and good also. Men are to be gentle and loving. That's just being a Christian; that's not being a woman. So when we talk about biblical manhood or womanhood, we're not talking about that as a distinction. We're not saying you have to like sports or go hunting or like those kinds of things. That's not what we mean. The question we have is: If God has uniquely and distinctively designed men and women, then what are men for? Why did God design us uniquely and distinctly?

If you look at the raw statistics, we're not doing very well. Men cause a lot of messes and a lot of problems in the world. So what are we doing then? What are men uniquely and distinctly here for?

First, a quick word to our gals... There are two things I want from you for this week:

1. I want your expectations for men to rise. Some of you have set the bar far too low for men. If they just give you a little bit of attention and they have a job, they have a chance. That's too low of a bar, too easy to get over. We're in the Bible belt. Some women think, "If you just believe in God and give me some attention I'll give you a hearing." That's not good enough. The book of James says demons believe in God and they shudder. If your qualification is just that he believes in God, the only thing you know about him is that he's either a human or he's a demon. That's all you know. You don't know if he's a biblical man. You don't know if he's on a trajectory towards biblical manhood. Your bar has to be raised. You are unbelievably valuable. You have been loved by the God of the universe. You are delighted in by Him. You were bought at a great price, the death of His Son. So do not cheapen yourselves by lowering the bar on men, but instead, raise that bar up.

2. Encouragement. Wives, when you leave this place you are not to give your husband a mini-sermon after my sermon. My sermon will be sufficient and the Holy Spirit can do the rest. Do not give him a mini-sermon this week or later on today. That's not going to help. Encourage him. Help him. He needs help. Single gals, same thing. Encourage the men of this church. Hope in the men of this church. Pray for the men in this church. There are men in your City Group gatherings. Be praying for them, encouraging them, hoping in them. Raise the bar. Tell him if he's not making it. If some guy is pursuing you, tell him he's just not over the bar yet. Be honest and forthright with him, but then hope in him and pray for him. Tell him to meet with one of the leaders. Get him involved. Invite him to church if he's not involved already. Do something to that degree so you're actually encouraging men and you're not the hard, distant gal who exudes an "I don't need a man" attitude. That's not what we're talking about. We're just asking you to encourage us as we try to step over the higher bar.

So, what are men for? Turn to Genesis chapter 1, verse 27.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Facebook has 56 different options for selecting gender. There's gender questioning, bi-gender, pan gender, gender queer... There are school proms now called Gender Bending Proms where the women wear tuxes and the men wear dresses. There are parenting books across the board that talk about how we raise our children generally, but it doesn't talk about how to raise our boys to be men and our girls to be women. There seems to be no need in our culture for gender distinctions. Yet the Bible just said, "God created them male and female." It says there are gender distinctions.

There is a difference between male and female, between men and women. In every realm of society where the men don't act like men, there are dead bodies, torn limbs, and broken hearts strewn across the battlefield. When we lose gender distinctiveness, then we have what's happening in our society. We don't need the Bible to tell us this. Statisticians and sociologists will tell you that when men aren't men, there is poverty, incarceration, school dropouts, depression, confusion, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, and lots and lots of tears. All those things increase when men are absent or men aren't being men. You don't need the Bible to have an understanding of this. In Genesis 1:27 it's saying we are going to fall short in properly bearing the image of God, reflecting the goodness and grace of God, displaying the

glory God uniquely and distinctively as men if we don't live out the designed purpose of biblical manhood. Innately, we know these things are true. Men and women are different.

We also innately know that boys are different than men. You can be a male but just be a boy and not be a man. If male meant men, then 8-year old boys would be men, and 8-year old boys aren't men at all. There's something about growing into our manhood. We're designed as males with the ability to develop into a man. But what does that look like? When do you go from a boy to a man? What does it mean to raise boys to be men? Many of us know the adult male who's not a man. He's still a boy in a man's body. What does it mean, then, to actually be a biblical man?

First Corinthians 16 gives us a nice, succinct definition starting in verse 13.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

Act like men. In the Greek language, it's distinguishing men from boys in terms of maturity and from women in terms of gender. It says that men are to be watchful. Be aware, be sober and alert, be on guard, always be on a wartime footing, be looking for opportunities to step in and protect, and be looking for opportunities to defend. Biblical men are like a middle linebacker with his head on a swivel, always aware of what is happening. They're watchful. Be watchful.

And it says, "Stand firm in the faith." So a man's a Christian. He loves Jesus. He reads his Bible, prays, and makes disciples. He's not so easily discouraged, dismayed, despairing, or depressed. He's immovable. He's steadfast. There's a steadfastness in the faith for him. His strength is found in the Lord, not his ability. His strength is found in Jesus, not in his knowledge. He's not tossed to and fro by every wave of popular doctrine or worldly values. He's not pursuing trinkets, stuff, or success as if that is his only goal. He knows that's going to fail him at some point and he's going to fall, but he stands firm in the faith. It says, "Be strong and let all you do be done in love." Of course, love is not exclusive to men. This is saying that when a male is a biblical man, he expresses his love in a uniquely masculine way.

Boys take, men give .

Boys criticize, men create.

Boys complain, men solve.

Boys consume, men serve.

Boys pout, men endure.

Boys harm, men protect.

Boys tear down, men build up.

Boys lust, men love.

Boys lay someone else down on the altar of their selfish desires, men sacrifice and lay down their life for others.

Biblical manhood is the expression of biblical love in a uniquely masculine way.

So there's a difference between male and female. There's a difference between boys and men. This is the point when the world tells you to be really successful, strive harder, sleep with a lot of women, make a lot of money, and watch sports or join a fantasy football team to be a man. In the church, it's not much better. They give you a couple of Bible verses, tell you to stop looking at porn, and hope for the best.

I don't want to do that. I don't think it's helpful to just throw down five biblical principles that make you grow from a boy to a man. What I want to do is show you what you've been designed for, show you a big vision of the task you have been given so you can see what you've been equipped to do, what you have been called to do by the God of the universe and by the perfect man, Jesus.

Turn to Genesis 2:15. What are men for?

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

God places Adam in the garden and gives him work to do. There is no sin yet. Men, work is not part of the fall. Work was before the fall. It's part of the original design. We will work in the new heaven and the new earth; otherwise we would get unbelievably bored. He put man in the garden to work it and keep it. Eve wasn't around yet, so it was uniquely Adam's responsibility. Essentially God says, "Here's a garden. I want you to make the rest of the world look like this." Going back to Genesis 1, He basically says, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. Have dominion over it. Subdue it. I want my glory to fill the earth. You're going to need some help so have lots of babies and fill the earth so you can go to work and organize it and order it."

Adam is invited in as a co-ruler with God, a sort of vice-regent, a king. And He gives him these words: work it and keep it. These are actually priestly functions. The same words are used to describe the job of the Levites, the priests in the Old Testament, who would care for, work, and keep the temple. The temple in the Old Testament was where people would worship God, meet

with God, and be in God's presence. Adam was put in a type of temple. It's where God dwelled. God would walk with Adam and communicate with him. They had a perfect relationship. The garden was a temple, and Adam was a priest over the temple to work it and to keep it just like the Levite priests would do.

I don't know your understanding of priests. When you think of a priest you may not think of a man. The priest and the pastor across history have not usually been looked at very fondly. I read one book where the guy basically described pastors as a third gender. He used an illustration to describe what he meant, saying the men are playing football on the football field while the pastor is in the stands explaining the game to the women. That's how he described pastors. Not man enough to play but not woman enough to be a woman.

That's not what the Levite priests were like. They slaughtered tens of thousands of people when they were told to. So I don't know what your understanding of priests is. For Adam it's not less of a man thing; it's quite a manly thing if you look at the priests in the Old Testament. He's to work it and keep it. This means it's his job to provide and to protect. Ephesians 5 says a husband is to nourish and cherish. It's all the same thing. Man is given responsibility for the work of the creation, the ordering of creation unto God's glory. So wherever men are, and wherever they're being biblical men (nourishing and cherishing, providing and protecting, working and keeping) all those around them should flourish. When men behave like men the city flourishes, the neighborhood flourishes, the campus flourishes, the home flourishes, and people flourish. They have a greater joy. God receives greater glory when men are being men and doing the job they have been tasked to do. Wherever they don't do that, society feels it and there are dead bodies, torn limbs, and broken hearts all across the battlefield.

One of my favorite definitions of manhood is: the glad assumption of sacrificial responsibility. Man rejoices in assuming the responsibility to lay down his life for others. That's what it means to work it and keep it. Man will work. And he's going to be responsible for that work.

Then things start to go bad. Look at Genesis chapter 3, starting in verse one.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

These verses are war. You have the enemy challenging God's word. God's very word spoke creation into existence. His word is how He commands us so we may walk in rhythm with how He spoke creation into existence. For our joy and for His glory, we must be obedient to His word that we might stay on beat. His word is unbelievably important, and now the enemy introduces a war on words. Where the enemy is speaking and questioning God's word, there is conflict. A lot is at stake here. Whose words will they believe? Will they believe God's words or the enemy's words?

And what does Adam do? Verse 6 says he does nothing.

The whole time Eve was engaging with the enemy, Adam was with her and he did nothing. He did not speak, protect, or defend. Where men do not enter into the conflict, chaos and brokenness ensue. In Genesis 1 you have God speaking into the chaos and bringing about light and order, speaking into the darkness and bringing about flourishing. Where men will not enter the fight, there is chaos, brokenness, torn limbs, dead bodies, and broken hearts across the battlefield. Men have to get in the fight, and Adam doesn't.

This is when our masculinity actually comes out. It's in the conflict, in the fight, in the brokenness, and in the darkness. It's not in peace time that we're uniquely man; it's in the fight. It's when things are broken, when there's a threat, when there's conflict, when there's a war that men are seen to be men. We step into the mess, we protect what's broken, and we bring about order. So what are men for? We're to protect and provide, nourish and cherish, to guard, to defend, and to take responsibility for human flourishing. When there's conflict, man enters the conflict and does what he needs to do. He doesn't shy away from the fight. But instead of fighting, Adam did nothing. This is abandonment. Adam abandoned his wife and, as sons of Adam, we tend to lean to abandonment, avoidance, or abuse.

Men will abandon those around us. We'll avoid the fight at all costs. Or in the midst of the fight, we'll use it to our advantage and abuse those who are weaker. Adam was abandoning his wife in the fight. He wouldn't fight. Some of you know this man. The marriage gets hard so they get

out. There's conflict in the church so they just leave. Somebody is being oppressed or being made fun of and peer pressure gets the best of the man. He no longer enters that conflict or fight but just goes along with whatever the majority is doing. Abandonment is a man who won't fight.

As an example, husbands, when your wife is displeased with you, do you check out? You just emotionally can't take it, don't have an understanding, don't want to deal with it, don't want her to be upset or mad so you just check out. Maybe you literally get out or emotionally check out. Maybe you just shut her off. Is that the way it works?

If you're a dad, do you discipline your children, or do you leave them in their sin? Their sin is rotting out their soul. Do you just abandon them in their sin, or are you willing to discipline them? A man doesn't abandon others. He actually gets into the fight. Abandonment is when a man won't fight.

Others refuse to even see the battle. They avoid the fight at all costs. They don't even enter the battle at all. Laziness is one of the darkest sins for a man. It's being unwilling to even see that a conflict exists. It's an unwillingness to enter into a situation where they might be rejected or turned down or fail. Laziness is basically the retreating of a man to becoming a boy.

For most guys there's still a semblance of being a man there. They're going to do something, but what they're doing isn't good or wise. They're not actually engaging in something worthwhile. They're lazy in all areas of their life, but when they clock in on watching TV they don't clock out for a few hours. They're just putting their time in there. When they clock in on a video game, they don't clock out for hours. They know everything about their favorite sports team but nothing about their wife or their Bible. That's laziness. These guys aren't doing their work, not doing their schoolwork, not working on the marriage/friendship, not making disciples, not taking responsibility for the church, city, neighborhood, or campus. It's just laziness. There's dysfunction all around you, and you do nothing. How long will you function in the midst of your dysfunction? That's avoiding the fight.

Avoidance is why so many Christian single gals are incredibly frustrated. Because it's Christian men who follow the sins of their fathers and avoid really entering any real relationship where they're afraid of rejection or they're afraid of having to make changes to their life in order to keep a godly woman, marry that woman, and make a family or whatever they want to do. That's

avoidance. It's laziness. It's frustrating to Christian gals who want to be pursued, to have a godly marriage, and to raise a godly family. You're avoiding the fight.

Some will fight the wrong fight and create more chaos in the midst of the darkness and brokenness. This is abuse. Where abandonment and avoidance are the passive retreating of men, those that would abuse in the midst of the fight or take advantage of the conflict are being aggressive, not passive. And it's abusive. Aggression is when you don't know how to fight in a godly way. You will fight, but you don't know how to do it in a godly way. The other men won't fight. This man will fight but just doesn't do it well and it's ugly. It's devastating. It's intimidating. It's fearful. Your wife is afraid of you. Other people are not served by anything about you because they're intimidated. It's abusive.

This doesn't have to be violent. It can be non-violent or non-threatening where you abuse with your knowledge. Husbands, have you ever tried to out-logic your wife in an argument? Did that work at all? Did that serve her at all? "Actually, honey, if you had done A and B we wouldn't be at C. That's all that's going on here."

"You're right. You're right. I'm not mad at you anymore. I'm not crying anymore."

That's never worked. If you're pulling out Ephesians 5 and talking about her submitting to you, you've already lost. The worst is spiritual abuse, where you know a lot of Bible verses and you're Bible know-it-all guy. Be very careful that you're not the guy Paul talks about in which knowledge puffs up. It's not helpful. It's spiritual abuse. If you're the guy who is always correcting people in your City Group gatherings or Christian community, you're not actually entering into people's sin and suffering. You're just lobbing truth bombs over the wall. That's abuse. That's not love being expressed in a masculine way at all. If you're the theological Twitter and Facebook police, you're not being helpful at all. Bible know-it-all guy is another form a spiritual abuse because he doesn't help or educate. The truth is meant to set us free, not crush us. So abuse is not the way either. That's not fighting the right fight; it's creating another fight.

So there's abandonment, avoidance, and abuse. We don't want to do that. We want to actually enter the fight. Biblical manhood is entering into the fight. When we enter into the conflict, we're made aware of the areas in which we need to grow. We're made more aware of some of the weapons we don't have. We won't actually grow and develop as men if we don't begin to enter into some of these broken places, in the home or in the workplace or in the church or wherever

there is a conflict going on. How do you know if your axe needs to be sharpened if you don't actually swing your axe? The man that steps into conflict will begin to develop and grow. He's on a trajectory towards manhood. We're not talking about perfection. We're talking about a guy who is willing to fight and, in the midst of the fight he begins to grow as a man.

There's a guy in our church whose girl broke up with him. He didn't have a pity party. He's not feeling sorry for himself. Instead, he quit his job because it was a dead-end job that wasn't going to lend itself toward marriage and a family. He set himself on a different career path. He's making whatever changes he needs to make, because he was part of the fight, lost, and now he's getting back in. That's a manly dude, a godly dude. If we never step into the fight, we're not going to grow. We won't know if we need to read our Bible more. We won't know if we need to grow as a disciple, if our finances need some help, or if we're bearing the load and taking responsibility so that a woman would feel safe or a family would feel safe or a church would feel safe with us. We have to enter into the fight. We're not expecting perfection but a trajectory towards manhood.

Single guys and college students, find something worth fighting for. I promise there are few things more attractive to a gal than a dude fighting for something worthwhile. Where there is sin, kill it or confront it. That's a good fight. Where there's brokenness, step in, get your hands dirty, and bring about restoration with the power of the gospel. If there's a gal in your City Group gathering or Christian community who is burdened or struggling, then be the first to pray for her. Pray over her, and do so in front of everybody else. Enter into different fights that are the right fight.

Ty Bowden is a college guy who helps lead a Bible study with other college dudes. He works at The Net with the Demand Ministry, where they minister to men in the church with sexual sin and teach them how that sexual sin is actually fueling the sex industry. The men learn how porn, sex trafficking, and prostitution is fueled by the demand they've created. Ty talks to them about their sexual sin. Then he gets them involved in counteracting the demand in Fort Worth so those things won't be in such high demand, so that the supply might go down. That's a man! He's in college! He's got like a samurai man bun, too! (His hair. I could never pull that off.) He's found a fight worth fighting and he gets in there and gets his hands dirty. He's willing to lie down, sacrifice, and bleed out. Find a fight worth fighting for. The church is worth fighting for. The gospel is worth fighting for.

So what *should* Adam have done? Instead of avoidance, what should he have done? Instead of staying silent, what should he have done? He should've spoken! He should've said something. "EVE! NO! THAT'S A LIE!" God, in Genesis 1, speaks into the darkness and chaos. Men, your words need to be heard. That means you need to know your Bible so you actually have something to say. That means you need to listen so when you do speak you're actually being helpful and not just talking at people. Adam should have said something. We need your voice to be heard. On Sundays, we need your voice to be sung. We need to hear the voices of men speaking the truth of the gospel, speaking and singing the glories of God. We need them to talk, have something to say, and say it without any fear.

I was having a conversation with a guy this past week. We were talking about this thing we heard a guy say, and he said, "I heard that, too. I'm glad you said something, but I didn't really know him very well." If you have something to say that's going to serve someone, say it whether you know them or not! We need you to speak. We need more men to speak because far too often we have this mindless banter or ridiculous chatter going on in our lives or, like Adam, we don't say anything.

Adam should have spoken. What else should he have done? He should have protected her! To provide and protect, to work and to keep, to nourish and cherish... He should have grabbed Eve's hand, pulled her away from the serpent, and he should have stood next to the serpent. He should have protected her. This is one way we can actually parent differently as we teach boys and girls. We teach our little boys to protect little girls. I don't feel like we need the Bible to know these things. We teach our little boys to protect girls. "You're going to protect your sister, and you're going to protect other little girls." I only have two little girls. I don't have a boy. So I have to teach other parents' kids. Because they hit my girls, and they push my girls! I'm not going to let them hit my little girl. I know he's 4 or 6 or whatever, but I'm not going to just let him hit my little girl. Somebody's going to go down, or I'm going to teach your boy if you don't. "Hey! You don't hit little girls. You protect little girls. You're a boy; you're going to become a man. You need to protect little girls, otherwise I'm going to have to hit your daddy, and I can't do that because it's frowned upon as a pastor. So you protect little girls." I don't think you need the Bible for these things. Innately there's this sense of responsibility to protect. Even if your wife has Jason Bourne skills, if something goes down, you have this sense that you need to get in there. So we protect physically, emotionally, spiritually... we protect. We *have* to protect. Adam should've protected. He should've spoken. He should've said something!

Look at God's response. Look at their response and then God's response. Verse 7.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

Who does God hold responsible? Who sinned? Eve did. Eve engaged with the enemy. Eve was the first to take of the fruit. But God holds Adam responsible. This is the idea of headship. Headship is defined by Jesus because He's the head of the church. Any understanding of headship has to match up with what Jesus is like and what Jesus does. Headship is defined by Jesus in Ephesians 5 as the head of the church who lays down His life for the church. Headship is sacrificial love. It's biblical authority that lays down its life for those whom they're responsible. That's what headship is.

Headship is in the home and in the church. Men don't have headship or authority over women in general. Women, men don't have authority over you. But a husband is responsible for the home. He is head over the home. He is meant to have authority over the home, to lay down his life for the flourishing of the home. Men, you set the spiritual temperature of the home. You're the one that's got to open the Bible, to pray, and to engage the hearts of your wife and children. That's your responsibility, not your wife's. You are head and responsible for the discipline of your children. Single dudes, all you're doing now is beginning to grow in those areas so when you are the head of a home, you have been equipped. You know your Bible. You've loved other people. You laid down your life. You've sacrificed. Your whole life hasn't been for yourself. That's one of the worst parts about being single is that you're selfish, selfish, selfish and then you're called to lay down your life for somebody else. Start now laying down things. Lay down your preferences. Start now bleeding out for others.

There's also headship in the church. The church is modeled after the home. It's a large family made up of little families. The government and order of the home is the government and order of the church. So pastors are only men. It's very clear in the Bible. I know that's countercultural. I know that's controversial. But that's what the Bible teaches. Men are the pastors. And men, as heads in the church, are meant to bleed out for the church, to sacrifice, and to give of their lives for the church. We need more of them. We need more men who are

willing to commit to the church, be elders, grow in their faith, and do whatever they need to do to become a pastor, that they might have responsibility for the spiritual nourishment of the body. Hebrews 13 says that I will stand and give an account for The Paradox Church, along with Pastor Ryan. One day I will stand before God and give an account for you. That's taking responsibility for those you are over, and it's scary. We need more men who are willing to do that. This is the idea of headship.

Adam is held responsible. Let's see what he does. Verse 10.

And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

The first thing Adam does in response to God holding him responsible in verse 10 is to hide. A man's greatest fear is being found out. Listen to me. The One Being in the universe who matters the most already knows. He already knows, and He still loves you. Do not hide. In verse 12, Adam blames his wife, "the woman", and then he blames his God, "the woman you gave me". The first step to biblical manhood is to just own it. Own your failure. Own your weakness. Perfection is not what we're after. Instead of blame shifting or hiding, just own it. Blaming others is what boys do; men don't blame others. We own our failures and we own our shortcomings, because we are going to fail miserably at this.

Taking responsibility, speaking into the darkness, not retreating, not abandoning, not abusing, not avoiding,.. This week will not go by without you failing miserably at this. Perfection is demanding. You know why? Because every time we do avoid, abandon, or abuse, somebody else pays. Somebody else gets hurt. A woman or a child gets abused. Society's ills are contributed to. Many times I've seen the life get sucked out of my wife because of my sin. I've seen my children... I'm learning a lot about girls right now... and I'll see their faces drop. I have done things to contribute to the brokenness of society, and I've NOT done things that then contribute to the brokenness of society. Every time we fail at this somebody gets slaughtered. When a man won't fight on the battlefield, somebody dies. Perfection is demanded, but you're not going to be perfect. That's why the gospel is so beautiful. This is why we rejoice in the hope of the gospel, why we love Jesus, because He was the perfect man. He came and did all these things. He did them on our behalf, in our place. That frees us up to grow and be biblical men. We're not paralyzed because we've fallen short. We're not even paralyzed that we've crushed somebody.

We know that God, in His goodness and in the power of the gospel, can restore. So we're not ashamed and we don't hide and we don't retreat. We're not paralyzed by the fear of being found out. We're freed up now to actually do this because of Jesus. Because...

When we took, Jesus gave.

When we criticized, Jesus created.

When we complained, Jesus solved.

When we consumed, Jesus served.

When we were pouting, Jesus endured.

When we harmed, Jesus protected.

When we tore down, Jesus built up.

When we lusted, Jesus loved .

When we laid someone else down on the altar of our selfish desires, Jesus sacrificed and laid down His life for us.

We will fail, but the gospel frees us up to keep going. It empowers us to keep going. Brothers, you are the image and glory of God. You have been given and empowered and designed to take a heavy load on your shoulders; to take responsibility for your home, your church, your city, your neighborhood, your campus... You have been tasked to fill the earth with God's glory and to cultivate human flourishing for the joy of all the people. It's an unbelievable calling. And in the gospel, by the power of the Spirit, you are equipped to do it. So we get to leave here with power, freed up, with this great calling to bring glory to God, to serve, and to love others.