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*This book contains stories of many hurting couples
we've counseled in more than three decades of ministry.
We've changed the names in most cases as well as some details,
because many of these accounts could carry several names.*

*The sad, but true, fact is that marriages within the church
are broken and needy. And many husbands have lost all hope.
Although we may not know you personally, you probably
can find your story here, bearing another name, but one
you can identify with in an uncomfortably personal way.*

*We are grateful to those courageous friends who
gave us permission to share their stories and we hope
that one day your story can be shared as well.*

*We pray that God will transform your life
and your marriage for His glory!*

Why Should You Read This Book?



We were three days into the honeymoon when I knew we were in big trouble. Some marriage problems take years to form, but we were struggling from the beginning. You take one fierce woman, combine that with a non-confrontational “nice guy,” and you have a recipe for disaster. At least that’s what was happening in our marriage.

Five years in, and I was pretty much done. We weren’t planning to divorce, but just settled into a routine of living like unfriendly roommates and existing in a holding pattern of “ceasefire” between enemies. We entered a long period of misery and hopelessness.

Can you relate?

We were searching for answers, but kept coming back empty-handed. I tried to be a good husband, to please my wife, to do what was right, but it never seemed good enough. She was miserable. I was miserable. And we were stuck.

We were stuck in a destructive relationship pattern that we call

the “Fierce Woman/Fearful Man” cycle. It was sheer torment. But what we thought would destroy us actually became what brought us to a deeper understanding of God’s love.

This book tells our story. We’ve been amazed by what God has done and frankly, it is embarrassing to share with you all the raw and shameful journey of our marriage, but we have to. If our story can help, we’re willing to tell it. We don’t want you to keep groping for answers and coming up empty. And we want you to understand just how amazing God is and what He can do.

Through this book, and my wife’s book, *Fierce Women: The Power of a Soft Warrior*, we’re reaching out to couples who are in that painful place, where we were stuck for almost two decades, and sharing what God has taught us. He has completely transformed our relationship. We actually enjoy each other—and would never have imagined how good loving one another could be.

We’re holding out a rope of rescue and letting you know—there is a reason for hope. There is an answer. God sees what you are facing, He knows what you are dealing with, and He cares. You are not alone, and He hasn’t abandoned you.

Your journey to a new beginning starts here.

C H A P T E R

1

The Courageous Leader Within



The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision
of what is before them, glory and danger alike,
and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it.

THUCYDIDES

When we were at the lowest point in our marriage, my wife would (not so subtly) pass on to me “helpful books.” I wasn’t a fan of those types of books. I enjoy reading, but I’d rather read just about anything than a book on “relationships.” Maybe I shouldn’t admit that in the first paragraph, but if I’m going to be honest with you throughout this process (and I am, I’ll be painfully honest), then I might as well start by getting that confession out in the open.

So, knowing how I feel about “relationship books,” why am I partnering with my wife to write a book on marriage?

If you’re experiencing anything like we were for the first half of

our marriage, then you're at a very dark place. You're struggling with feelings of failure, with a sense of worthlessness—feeling like no matter how hard you try, you can never do anything right. You've probably lost hope that things could ever improve in your relationship with your wife and you've resigned yourself to accepting the idea that this is how it's going to be for the rest of your life.

I want you to know that I'm here for you—that's why I'm writing this book. Because I've been to that place of hopelessness, stuck in a marital nightmare for several years, but I want you to know that there is reason for hope. There is a way out. The last half of our marriage bears proof of that. You can check out the video where we share some of our story here: <http://www.kimberlywagner.org/?p=180>.

But before we get too far into this, let's start by examining what it means to be a man. Any relationship we're involved in is affected by how we view manhood and how we relate to others as men. No matter what you hear the culture telling you today—manhood is not something to be ashamed of. Courageous manhood is what you and I were designed for.

What does it mean to be a man?

Answers abound on this one. Everybody seems to have an opinion.

Esquire has a few things to say on what makes a man:

A man carries cash. A man looks out for those around him—woman, friend, stranger. A man can cook eggs. A man can always find something good to watch on television. A man makes things—a rock wall, a table, the tuition money. Or he rebuilds—engines, watches, fortunes.

He passes along expertise, one man to the next. Know-how survives him . . . A man fantasizes that kung fu lives deep inside him somewhere . . . A man is good at his job. Not his work, not his avocation, not his hobby. Not his career. His job. It doesn't matter what his job is,

because if a man doesn't like his job, he gets a new one.

A man can look you up and down and figure some things out. Before you say a word, he makes you. From your suitcase, from your watch, from your posture. A man infers.

A man owns up. That's why Mark McGwire is not a man. A man grasps his mistakes. He lays claim to who he is, and what he was, whether he likes them or not.

A man gets the door. Without thinking.

He stops traffic when he must.

A man is comfortable being alone. Loves being alone, actually. He sleeps.

Or he stands watch. He interrupts trouble. This is the state policeman. This is the poet. Men, both of them.

A man loves driving alone most of all.¹

Esquire also reminds us that "Just being male doesn't make you a man." I would tweak *Esquire's* description of manhood a bit, but on this point, they've got it right. Just being male doesn't make you a man; a man in the sense of living out your manhood as God created you to express it.

Manhood is under siege today and we're suffering the consequences of relinquishing it. Think back: When did you know you were a real man? How long has it been since you felt affirmed in your manhood?

When Fear Birthed a Man

At the skinny age of twelve, I was ready to prove myself as a man, ready for the initiation. But standing at the top of sheer bluffs,

looking twenty feet below into the deep pool, the drop stretched much longer than what it looked at the water's surface. I was afraid, but resolute.

My assignment: survive the dive, push myself to reach the bottom, grab the rock of "proof" from the riverbed, and resurface before running out of oxygen. I knew what I faced, at least I thought I did, but looking down into the murky water below, I wasn't too sure. I'd tried this before, but every time the dive ended the same way:

THINK BACK:

**WHEN DID YOU KNOW
YOU WERE A REAL MAN?**



Epic failure.

I'd tried, but never been able to stay below the surface long enough to make it all the way to the bottom. The dive had to be near perfect for the initial plunge to send my boyish body as deep as possible. But today, no matter what, I had to do it. I had to make it to the bottom.

The innocent, lazy summer afternoon and the cheers of my buddies gave way to a colder, darker, and more sinister reality as I broke the water's surface and plunged beneath sunlight. Motivated by the challenge and the dread of failure (again), I kept pushing downward. But just like every other time, as the water's temperature grew frigid with depth, the blackness became disorienting and my lungs began their burn.

This was the point when I usually turned back.

This was the point when fear always kicked in.

At twelve, I wasn't completely free of night terrors and monsters that hid under the bed. In the darkness, my lack of fresh oxygen and disorientation grabbed hold of my boyish imagination. Fear was triggered big-time.

"If I make it to the bottom . . . what *will* I touch?"

Ignoring the burn, I pushed a little deeper. But as my outstretched hand groped for the elusive bottom, fear only increased.

Surely, I was too far to make it back to oxygen and sunshine. Who would pull my lifeless body from the water?

The temptation to turn back kicked in with greater intensity than I'd ever experienced. My lungs reached their limit, but I'd made my decision. I would reach the bottom dead or alive. No retreat this time! The moment I sealed that decision, my hand brushed something. Instinctively I recoiled, fearing the unknown and unfamiliar.

Did I touch bottom?

I reached out again and brushed the floor with my hand before grabbing a small rock. At the same time, I coiled my body and pushed hard against the rocky bottom with my feet to propel my body upward. Seconds later, I broke through the surface, gasping for air and gulping in mouthfuls of water, but holding my rock high above my head, while my buddies cheered.

They cheered because I conquered the river. But I knew that grabbing that rock signified more than pushing past burning lungs. The dive brought me face-to-face with my repeated failures and invited me to cave to fear again.

This time fear didn't win.

This time fear was conquered at the bottom.

This time fear birthed a "man."

My buddies celebrated the small victory, but were oblivious to its significance—the significance of learning one of the important lessons of manhood: courageously face your fears and push past the pain to conquer the prize.

All little boys see themselves as the hero in the battles fought in their minds, or the kingdoms they conquer on the playground. I cannot count how many times as a boy that I was up to bat, facing Catfish Hunter in the World Series, in the ninth inning, game tied, two outs. My hit over Reggie Jackson's head put the game away. I regularly shot baskets in my backyard after "weaving my way

through a maze of defenders,” fighting to make it to the backboard, my layup making the game-winning shot to bring home the victory to “my team.” Personal victories fought and won in my adolescent mind encouraged me to defy the odds in real life.

Don’t all men dream those dreams as boys?

Didn’t you?

Maybe not now, but can you remember the time when you knew you could rise to the challenge? Defeat the fiercest enemy? Press into the pain, push the envelope, ignore the taunts, demonstrate skill, and embrace the agony?

Daring to do what you have never done before?

Manhood isn’t born overnight, isn’t dreamed into existence, but within every little boy lies the drive and desire to exert the strength, courage, skill, and knowledge that manhood requires. Manhood may be under siege today, but its DNA still flows through our veins. Its pulse may be faint, but it’s there—you can’t deny it.

What does it mean to be a man?

What is manhood?

It’s been more than three millennia since that same question was asked by a real man’s man, David—the warrior king of Israel. As a boy, not much older than I was when I took my dive to manhood in that frigid pool, David took down one of the nastiest enemies the armies of Israel had ever faced. So significant was his defeat of Goliath that women wrote songs about it. They danced in the streets while singing ballads of David’s courageous victory (1 Samuel 18:6–8).

The ideal man that was praised for his courage to face the hairy Philistine giant (just guessing, surely he was hairy, lots of testosterone going on there), later penned this inquiry:

“What is man . . . ?”

Good question.

It's a question we men need to consider as we evaluate our place, our role, our purpose.

It's the question David asked when pondering the immense universe:

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3–4).

WHAT IS MAN?

What is man? Not in reference to other men, but in reference to “who is man” before God? Who is man, that God would be mindful of us—our lives, our condition, and our struggles? The fact that God would “be mindful of us” indicates that He had something in mind in creating us. Man was not created as a possibility to become something, but in the creative heart and mind of God, he was created with intention. God created man in such a way that we would reflect what He had in mind for us.

From the opening lines of Scripture, man is given an incredible designation that provides us with an understanding of our true worth and value as men. Only after heavenly bodies were put in place, paradise was prepared on earth, vegetation, plant, and animal life were set within an orderly structure, and all was deemed “good” by its Creator—only then, on the final day of creation, did the Master Designer take dirt in His hands to form one who would bear His image.

“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Genesis 2:7–8).

Man, the earthly reflection of God: man of dust—man of heaven.

Man's core identity and purpose are intimately tied to this event. Man was created to "image God." Adam's personality, work, daily schedule, (future) relationships, responsibilities, and very life, all flow from this distinction as God's image bearer. Man's role and assignments portray the character and ways of his Creator.

Working, managing the resources at hand, laboring, and producing, was Adam's commission from the very beginning, before the fall, before the eviction, before death entered creation. From the beginning, man's worth and value were not determined by his accomplishments, but by his identity as the image bearer. But as the image bearer, man was to apply himself to the noble pursuit of fruitful labor.

What was in the mind of God when He created the mind of man? Was man's assignment more than just tilling the earth and producing? The assignment to care for the garden implies the garden needed guidance in a certain direction, not left on its own. The animal kingdom needed its master to demonstrate his regency by naming each member. Creation needed Adam's management, oversight, and leadership.

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. (Genesis 2:19–20)

God extended to man a measure of latitude and freedom to exercise his dominion and leadership over creation. God gave Adam the assignment to name the creatures as an exertion of his authority and headship over them. Creation was not to be left to its own.

This Is NOT Good

Man also was not to be left alone. In fact, that is where we see God's first declaration that something is "not good." The Genesis narrative, punctuating each divine act with affirmation of its goodness, is abruptly interrupted by this assessment—man's solo existence is deemed as "not good." Creation awaits completion.

Man, the first of his kind, regent over the world and all things in it, stands in need of his consort. Intelligent, productive, strong, in close relation with his God, but man waits, standing incomplete without his perfect complement. The divine Artisan moves to produce a most beautiful and excellent crowning jewel:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'" (Genesis 2:18).

"Woman," according to Matthew Henry, "was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."²

With woman, God brings creation to a state of perfection. All is now complete and assessed as "very good." Woman wasn't created as an afterthought; rather, she was part of His glorious plan from the beginning and His dramatic delay holds within it mysterious purpose.

Before sin, before the fall, God placed a longing in Adam's heart for something that was not found within all of the perfection of creation. God created a need within man that would only be completed by one thing that nothing else in all of creation could fulfill. God didn't observe a "loneliness" in Adam and then determine that he needed a mate. No, God planned the woman before the first molecule of earth was ever put in place, but in His wisdom, God refrained from giving man his perfect counterpart until man could be given opportunity to fully realize his need.

My Perfect Counterpart

The last bell for class was sounding. At its last note, she came flying through the door. Her dark hair swung across her shoulders and she seemed to take the fifteen steps from the door to her desk in one smooth stride. Her dramatic entry brought me out of my morning stupor and suddenly I was at full attention. That was my first encounter with the woman God had prepared for me. Something happened the moment I saw her. I felt it surge through my entire body—desire. Not a lustful desire, but a true desire that God put within man's DNA, the pure desire that finds its completion in the woman.

Adam's reaction to his perfect counterpart must have been similar to the surge I felt at the first glimpse of my future bride. After Adam spent time with the entire animal kingdom functioning in pairs, God pulled him aside to perform sacred surgery. God took from Adam, to give back to him that which he would be incomplete without. Man was the physical source God used in forming the woman. Eve was given life as an individual, but her original composition was designed from the man's own body. Think about it: Adam's body was broken sacrificially to provide the necessary physical components to produce his bride.

God had a perfect and noble purpose in creating woman from man. Woman is intimately connected with man as her fleshly source. The heart of fallen woman may seek to dominate man, but actually woman was created from and for man (1 Corinthians 11:9). And God saw that it was good, even *very good!*

Adam didn't have to pursue his bride: God brought her to him. God presents what is beyond Adam's wildest dreams, a woman, made for him, given to him, perfectly fulfilling the longing that God placed within his heart. Now, not only would Adam lead all of creation, but this one—his counterpart—was also entrusted to his leadership; the zenith of all creation, not formed from dust, but created from man.

This woman would serve as his coregent over creation.

God brought the first woman to the man. As a father bringing his daughter to the groom, God entrusted His gift to Adam. All things were created by Him and for Him—Jesus Christ Himself. The rescuer in the gospel story is here in this sacred ceremony uniting man and woman into one flesh; the first Adam and the second Adam were both participants in the wedding . . . the gospel portrayed.

What could possibly go wrong? It all seemed so right; all was so good. Perfect paradise.

Women Who Eat Men for Breakfast

The first conversation I had with my future bride didn't go so well. I offended her right off the bat with a lame question. Can you believe that, after class one day, I followed her to the cafeteria (not officially stalking . . .), I'd never spoken a word to her, and the first sentence out of my mouth as we stood in the lunch line was, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?" What did I just say? A "personal question?" That's smooth. What a way to introduce myself. Pathetic.

My opening line didn't totally turn her off . . . at least she let me ask my "personal question." I simply wanted to know why she was taking Greek. I'd never known a female who studied the original language of the New Testament. We had about thirty-five wannabe preachers in our class and two females, one of whom wore Army fatigues every day (and that definitely would not be Kim).

I knew immediately that I'd hit a land mine with that question. She looked at me like I was some kind of male chauvinist, a dragging-the-wife-by-the-hair caveman. And she didn't bat an eye as she responded that she was studying the language to prepare herself as a pastor. She pretty much shut me down.

**THE FIRST
CONVERSATION I HAD
WITH MY FUTURE BRIDE
DIDN'T GO SO WELL.**



By the time we'd made our way through the cafeteria line to check out, she turned to me and let me know that, actually, she wasn't really planning to be a pastor, she just wanted to learn the language for her own personal growth in Bible study. And with an air of finality and superiority, she tossed her head, picked up her tray, and walked away in defiance. Another man down. We can be so pathetic when it comes to verbally sparring with women, you know?

The confidence that led me to pursue her evaporated pretty quickly in the first five minutes of interacting with her. But I didn't give up. From the beginning, it was evident to me that she was one fierce woman. And I liked that. Kim's fierceness both attracted and intimidated me.

Kim's spirited response in that first conversation fueled my interest in her "like being drawn by the beauty and danger of climbing Mount Everest—the climb is filled with breathless anticipation and excitement, but woe to the man who attempts that climb unprepared!"³

Growing up in the foothills of the Ozarks, hunting was a way of life. Don't mean to offend, but we used guns. Double-barreled 12-gauge shotguns, single shot .22 caliber rifles, lever action 30-30s, and my personal favorite, Dad's M-1 carbine. We raised our own meat: chickens, hogs, and cows. What we didn't raise on our "rock farm," we shot—venison and squirrel. Combined with homegrown meat was the large supply of homegrown vegetables from the garden. There is nothing quite as good on a Sunday after church as "fresh fried chicken" (chicken that was walking around that morning).

When I met my wife, she'd never shot a gun or even been exposed to guns. Kimberly was a city girl—a genuine "Southern belle debutante." Her dad was a white-collar professional. The only hunting trip her family took was for a Christmas tree each year . . .

no firearm required there! She knew absolutely nothing about guns and had no interest in learning.

But right after we married, I decided to train my bride in the safe and proper use of a firearm. On a trip to my parents' home, I took her outside by the chicken house, walked off twenty-five paces, and put an empty can of evaporated milk at the base of an old locust tree. You could still see a fading picture of Elsie the cow on the label. I spent time showing Kim the basics of gun safety and carefully explained how to actually shoot the weapon.

When Kim raised the .25 caliber pistol to fire for the first time, she quickly lowered it and said, "I can't do this." I smiled and told her, "Sure you can, you can do this!" She raised the pistol again, this time with more determination. She took a breath and gently squeezed the trigger. The bullet left the chamber with a loud POP—bouncing the can and making dust fly. I thought to myself, "At least she was close," and went to see if I could tell where the bullet struck dirt. I picked up the can and was shocked to see a hole right through Elsie's nose!

Kim's shot couldn't have been more accurate. I said, "Lesson's over, great shot, we're done here." She seemed unimpressed and unaware of her natural skill. It would have taken me three or four shots to hit that can, and she nailed Elsie's nose her first try at firing a weapon.

As Kim's husband, I wanted to be her protector, defender, and rescuer, but once again, she unknowingly proved her superiority. She was a better marksman than I was and seemed to possess more skill at everything we attempted to do together. Can you relate?

Your wife may seem superior to you, but the reality is—she still needs you. She needs you to protect and lead her. She needs to be led by a man who is led by the Savior. That's God's design.

**YOUR WIFE MAY SEEM
SUPERIOR TO YOU, BUT
THE REALITY IS—SHE
STILL NEEDS YOU.**



Why is fierceness in women so appealing to us? Let's admit it, we like the challenge. We admire the strength, courage, loyalty, and determination of a fierce woman. We like their spunk and passion. Fierce women don't grovel for attention and aren't desperate for a man to meet their deepest needs. I admire a woman who doesn't depend solely on a man for her identity or happiness.

But there are significant challenges that come with fulfilling the leadership role in the life of a fierce woman. Believe me, I know. I learned early on that I was no match for my fierce woman. She could outdebate me, outwit me, outshoot me, and definitely outdo me in levels of intensity.

Courage: It's Your Spiritual DNA

Adam was the first man to attempt to lead a fierce woman. God put him in a position that would require courage. Adam was given the opportunity to take a stand to obey God's command. As men, God places each of us in situations where we have the opportunity to reflect His ways and His character through exerting leadership. But leadership requires courage. And somehow it seems that a strong woman can be so intimidating that it sucks all desire from our hearts to lead. I felt like I could face the fiercest battle with men, but would run from the thought of facing a battle with my fierce wife.

But God created us to lead. He assigned us to lead. He's given us the mission to lead. That is at the core of what it means to be a man.

As we look at the first Adam—man of dust—do you sense a faint recollection like a dream, of what you were created to be? What you should be, what you desire to be? This is your DNA to live out courageous leadership, true manhood. When you read of men doing the extraordinary, of soldiers who give their lives in battle, when you watch the bravery of a hero, do you sense that stirring? Most of our lives, it lies buried beneath the drudgery and tedium of life,

but when we hear of a true man who steps out courageously to face impossible odds . . . that stirring within is the remaining residue of the innate knowledge of what we were created to be before the fall. Our Creator's purpose for us rises within and reminds us of our mandate and our true identity.

We are the earthly reflection of Jesus: man of dust—man of heaven.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COURAGEOUS LEADER:

1. In strength and dignity he bears the image of God and his deepest identity is found in his relationship with Christ.
2. He fears God alone. His love for God is the motive that allows him to lead well.
3. He knows his assignment and lives to accomplish it.
4. When faced with overwhelming obstacles, and daunting challenges, he pushes past the pain and trusts in His God.
5. He accepts the mantle of leadership that God has placed upon him, seeing it not as a burden, but a privilege.
6. He knows that his strength lies solely in his humility before God and his complete dependence on Christ.
7. He is not ashamed to love with passion, conviction, and sacrifice.
8. If required, he willingly lays down his life for his God, God's truth, his wife, his children, or anyone else who should need a defender or rescuer.
9. He is generous with all he has, regretting only that he does not have more to give.
10. While others may wither, complain, or retreat in the storms of battle, trial, and affliction—by God's grace he is the warrior that continues to stand.
11. He is known as a man of his word.

12. He is known by his strength of character, and his tenderness of heart.
13. He wears the mantle of a prophet with conviction and courage but with a heart to administer grace to the listener.
14. As a recipient of God's grace and forgiveness, he freely extends God's grace and forgiveness to others.
15. His singular purpose is to glorify God.

Man, the earthly reflection of Jesus: man of dust—man of heaven.

You, me, we are both created to bear God's image. We can easily forget that. We can feel more like the “man of dust” (aka just a dirt-bag), instead of realizing our significance as “men of heaven.”

God knew we'd need that reminder and He included this encouraging word for us men of dust:

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:45–49)

As “sons of Adam” we struggle under the fallen conditions that plague us daily, but when we come to new life through the second Adam, we bear the image of the “man of heaven” and we operate from a position of victory. The battle is fierce, but the victory is already secure:

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast,

immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:57–58).

As we struggle to live out our purpose as men, and typically fail in our attempts to be courageous leaders, we can lose sight of the “victory.” I know that I have. Early in our marriage, my courage was tested and I failed repeatedly. I wanted to live that courageous life, I wanted to be the man of God that my wife needed, I wanted to be that tender warrior that could protect her from every danger, but leading a group of soldiers onto a real battlefield would’ve been less intimidating to me than actually leading my wife. In so many ways I felt like I was a disappointment.

The Man of Every Woman’s Dreams

When I think of a real man, the epitome of manhood, the image of a Navy SEAL comes to mind. The Navy SEALs are one of the most elite Special Operations units in the world. Their motto: “Ready to Lead, Ready to Follow, Never Quit” inspires me to press on. I’m called to follow my God as I lead those entrusted to my care, and never quit—no matter how hard the assignment. These noble warriors stir my sense of duty. They live out the definition of a true hero: one who goes into harm’s way for the benefit of another.

One of these heroes, Michael Monsoor, gave the ultimate gift of sacrifice as he laid down his life to protect his teammates. On September 29, 2006, Monsoor demonstrated exceptional bravery while standing guard on a rooftop in an insurgent-held sector of Ar Ramadi, Iraq. While under enemy fire, Petty Officer Monsoor took a position on the outcropping of the roof that protected his teammates, but exposed him to an insurgent’s lob of a grenade. The grenade came from an unseen location, bounced off Monsoor’s chest, and landed in front of him.

What is important to note in this heroic account is that Monsoor

was in the position to take flight. He was the only SEAL on the roof that day who had an avenue of escape, and yet he chose to save his comrades. He was intentional and selfless, showing no regard for his

**MANHOOD AT ITS BEST
SACRIFICES IN ORDER
TO PROTECT OTHERS.**



own life, as he threw himself on the grenade, absorbing the blast with his own body.

In 2008, President George W. Bush posthumously awarded Monsoor's parents their son's Medal of Honor. In the written citation

from the president, Monsoor's sacrificial service was described and the closing comment states: "By his undaunted courage, fighting spirit, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of certain death, Petty Officer Monsoor gallantly gave his life for country, thereby reflecting the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."⁴

Monsoor's sacrifice was manhood on display. Manhood at its best sacrifices in order to protect others. Man of dust and man of heaven meet at the point of ultimate sacrifice. Every heroic sacrifice is an echo of that ultimate sacrifice as seen at the cross.

Jesus Christ is the true man that demonstrates the heart and soul, the core essence, of manhood. He is the One who laid down His life to secure our eternity. As the man of dust, He took on flesh to come as the warrior servant who would rescue His own. As the man of heaven, He will one day return as the warrior king to rescue His bride, the Church. He is the Man of every woman's dreams. He is the Man every man is created to image, to reflect. He is the example we're called to follow as real men.

But honestly, for many years I failed. I gave up. I lost hope. And I lost the courage to pick up that mantle of manhood. This book tells the story of how God rescued me, as a man, and how He rescued our marriage.

This warrior Savior invites you to follow Him into the battle. He is your faithful comrade, and He will not desert you or let you down.

It isn't too late. Will you join me as we pick up that mantle of manhood and courageously position ourselves to lead and protect those we love? As we walk through these pages together, I'll share with you more of our story, we'll look honestly at the common relationship dynamic between strong women and men like you and me, and I'll give you some practical help that has made a real difference in my life and in our marriage.

How about it? Are you up for the challenge?

Are you man enough to join me?

— ✧ DIGGING IN ✧ —

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At the end of each chapter, we're going to dig into Scripture and I'll challenge you with a few diagnostic questions. We're calling this section "Digging In" because we're going to apply ourselves to a hard task—uncovering heart issues and mining out truths from Scripture that will provide weapons for our warfare. Make no mistake, you may feel like you're in a never-ending conflict with your wife, but we're not in a battle with flesh and blood. Your wife is not your enemy: ultimately, your battle is with the enemy of your soul, your own flesh, and the anti-God world system that surrounds us.

Jesus is our pattern for manhood and our model as a husband (Ephesians 5:23–32). In each section, we'll use His example from Scripture to help us dig in and discover what He has for us.

1. Today, begin this time by reading through John 1.
2. In our first chapter, we saw Jesus presented as the man of dust and man of heaven (1 Corinthians 15:45–49). We see Him literally become that when He takes on flesh (John 1:14). Spend some time thanking Him for being willing to step into history and come as your Rescuer.

3. Jesus' first public action was to begin His ministry by submitting to baptism, not because He was sinful, but because this was a public "sign" of His commission by the Father (John 1:29–34). After this, He began inviting men to "follow Him." Are you willing to "follow Him" as we take this journey together? What kind of sacrifices did men make to follow Jesus? What kind will you make?
4. Your purpose, as a man, is to reflect this Man, and that is a significant calling. As you read through the list of "Characteristics of the Courageous Leader" (pp. 25–26), which ones encouraged you? Choose three today that you believe are most needed in your life right now and ask God to begin supplying the grace and power to walk in obedience to Him by intentionally applying God's Word to those areas.
5. Before going on to the next chapter, spend some time asking God to provide you with His help as you work through the material in this book. Make prayer a priority as we take this journey together (1 John 5:14–15, 20).