



Some men become like coal, which is darkened, dirty, and fragile. But God sees you as rough diamonds. You aren't yet sculpted into what you can become. But you've got the right properties: hardness, durability, transparency, and the potential for beauty when you let the divine Gemcutter go to work.

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Chapter 1

Show Us What You're Made Of

*“How many a man has dated a new era
in his life from the reading of a book.”*

– HENRY DAVID THOREAU, WALDEN

*“Men are anxious to improve their circumstances, but are
unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound.”*

– JAMES ALLEN, AUTHOR

AS A SCHOOLBOY, I remember standing on a freezing, hard pitch in shorts that wouldn't fit for five years, hating the humiliating soccer game I was so inept at that nobody wanted me on their side. I longed for the game to finish so I could thaw out my hands on the white dusty pipes inside. Despite my best efforts to keep out of the action the ball would cruelly roll my way as the teacher shouted, *“Delaney! Show us what you're made of!”*

Men are under pressure, feeling the heat. From the boss, from their family, from impossible stereotypes that the media set up of what a “real” and “successful” man should be or do. We feel compelled to strive toward our own unreachable goals, or the targets others set for us that too often we fail to meet—or the ones that we set ourselves. It’s only afterwards we realize they are often Pyrrhic victories, ruinous to our souls, relationships, or character. Instead of being elated, we’re deflated again. Wrestling inner doubts and strong temptations, outer struggles and “spare tires,” we wonder why we bothered.

It was considered “character building” when as a sixteen-year-old police cadet I was told to go out for a morning run across bitter mountainous areas, before breaking the ice off a stream and submerging myself in subzero waters. No whimpering permitted as your breath was taken away, or push-ups were the punishment. The only character trait this developed in me was a reservoir of latent loathing for sadists with a little power. “*Show us what you’re made of!*” rang in my ears again.

Some men climb mountains or base jump to show that they are made of something strong, resilient, and manly. Dissatisfied with life as they know it, others seek sexual conquests, to seek to prove they’ve “still got it.” Trophy wives, company bonuses, or certificates on the wall may paper over the gaps, but not for long. So they keep looking.

Can athletics, acquisitions, or achievements really validate our manhood? Do the 300 workout or “going Paleo” show that we’re tough, or sensitive, or whatever we think a “real” man should be like?

The problem is, nothing external shows what we are really made of. If we want to know what we truly are, we need to look inside. To dare to go below the surface. Ask those who live closest to you, who know you best, if you dare. Look in the mirror and ask yourself.

Who is the you that nobody else can see? Who are you when you’re under pressure? When you feel the heat?

I believe you also need to ask the God who made you. If you're not there yet, come along for the journey, as I hope to convince you why you will never understand yourself—your limitations and your potential—until you know what He made you of, and for.

Why go to God for answers? For many the thought of religion or church is repulsive. Here in the United Kingdom a recent study suggested 54 percent of men considered themselves atheist or agnostic about the existence of God and nearly 50 percent of men under thirty left church in the last twenty-five years. A survey in the men's magazine *Sorted* found the vast majority of blokes would feel more comfortable visiting the lingerie section of a department store than their local church. What has Christianity got to say to men today?

At least you have a choice. As a little boy I remember being made to go to a church service. As I knelt down at the front, where the sickly smell of incense was strongest, the priest smudged dirt and oil on my head, intoning what I later discovered was a very biblical and also scientifically accurate notion. "Remember you are dust—to dust you shall return." Not a very nice thing to tell a six-year-old. I didn't understand it. Now I do.

In my journey from police officer to church minister I have become very familiar with our mortality. I have stood at thousands of gravesides and realized that the mortality rate is still running at 100 percent. Nobody gets out of here alive! One day the atoms we are made up from—all those protons, neutrons, and croutons—will return to dust. Carbon. All that will remain of you as a carbon-based life form will be some mercury from your fillings and whatever kind of legacy your decisions created, which will really show what you were made of.

COAL MEN

A lump of coal can look quite big and impressive, pretty tough. But, put it under a bit of pressure and it will crumble. Expose it to heat, it will burn. It won't last. I know too often I have been like that. Content with the outward show of looking like I have got it all together. Men are like that. Not some men. Every one.

To protect a vulnerable inner self and project that "I'm doing okay," we put on a show. We don't really know who we are or what it is to be a man and what we want from life. But we know that there must be more than this.

Karl read too many comic books and became convinced he could fly. He was always making some kind of wings or jumping off the prefab buildings at my junior school. When you heard the ambulance siren, it was a safe bet he'd discovered gravity again! From the time we put on a cowboy outfit or climb high to test our superpowers, men become skilled at play-acting. We put on a mask that says everything is happy and okay in my little world, inside of me, with my friends, my family, my work. Occasionally something happens that gives us a buzz or a taste of what we were really made for, that can keep us smiling or distracted for some time. But whether we make the sale, get the girl, or score the goal, eventually men ask, "Now what?" and settle back into the phony role playing.

Do you know why coal is black? Two reasons. First off, it's loaded and mixed up with all kinds of impurities. Second, the structure of the atoms in coal is such that it absorbs light of all wavelengths. It doesn't allow for the transparency that makes a diamond so precious. If we're self-absorbed and we don't let anyone look at what's really going on inside us, we end up in darkness.

Coal men (no offense to anyone in the solid fuel delivery business) have perhaps never known the genuine love of a father in a way that they can understand and relate to. Therefore they are not

able to form good relationships with others. They don't understand themselves, so good luck trying to understand others, especially women. Their networks of friendships are often shallow, superficial, and short term. Coal men often end up with their wives divorcing them and their kids not talking to them. They throw themselves into their work to try to show themselves that they are successful somewhere, then die early from stress.

Coal looks impenetrable, but when you examine it up close you can see it's actually full of holes. A coal man has nothing at his center but emptiness. Isolated, lonely, always competing with someone he can never win against (himself). Emotionally stunted, never quite able to make the difference that in his best moments he would like to make in the world—because he would have to deal with his inner world first.

Some coal men are violent, aggressive, patriarchal, resentful, misogynistic, or abusive, embittering those they are supposed to love and protect. Others are New Age luvvies trying to project sensitivity as the appropriate response to fearful feminism's advances, but too weak and afraid of healthy conflict to be respected by women, or to bring the guidance and discipline that are actually required to be a good parent.

Look a little closer. Coal men are male, but not real men. Our society is considerably populated by anxious little boys who never grew up to attain the glorious maturity of maleness that is their true destiny and inheritance. Many men never become who they were truly made to be.

Men commit about 90 percent of all acts of violence.¹ They comprise over 90 percent of the prison population.² Tragically, far too many, tired of the outward show and the emptiness of their hearts, decide the best contribution they can make would be to step out of this life sooner rather than later. Males account for three-quarters of suicide deaths, making this a "silent epidemic," the single biggest

killer among men under forty-five.³ From my intake year at high school I can think of five men who never saw their thirties because they topped themselves. They never got to fly.

Coal men, whether of the hard and scary or soft and wimpy variety, have a very hard time getting married (because of fear of commitment) and an even harder time staying married (because of failing to do what they said they were committed to). They are stuck in front of the TV or computer, or stifled in jobs they don't find meaningful. They get into debt for pastimes that don't satisfy or to fill the internal void, buying things to impress friends they are not close to. They make slow progress through the levels of real life they discover no computer game could actually prepare them for.

If you tell me none of this connects with you, you are in denial. Someone may have given you this book for a reason! Years of policing and pastoral experience give me confidence that I am not talking here about extreme cases. Conversations at men's events, at retreats, and in counseling rooms tell me that this is the unspoken truth about the vast majority of men in our society. It's getting worse with every new generation.

Despite outward indications, most men under some kind of pressure will be liable to crumble one way or another. The high cost of low living is that integrity and reputations lie in tatters, with families in ruins.

There but for the grace of God go I—and I really mean that.

ROUGH DIAMONDS

I'm certainly not a perfect man. I'm just an ordinary bloke who discovered the grace of God is more than a saying, it's a reality. I believe there is a better way for us to live passionately, positively—as a perfect man (under construction!).

You may disagree with what I say—but please don't dismiss

anything out of hand, even the stories of Bible characters I'll use throughout. Because the Bible is not just "the good book," it is the most honest book in the world as it tells the stories of its characters' warts and all. If you don't believe in God yet, come along anyway and at least believe that I believe God has a great plan for you. He sees your value and potential. In fact, the heat and the pressure of life are His tools to shape within you something better and brighter.

God didn't make you to be a coal man; they are ten a penny. He sees you as precious and valuable, a rough diamond. Diamonds are not brilliant to look at when first found. The process of diamond recovery sifts out 180 million parts of other material to yield one part of diamond. They differ in color, character, and clarity and can be cut in many ways. The cut greatly impacts how they shine. If a diamond is cut poorly, it will be less luminous and may even be permanently damaged.

We are going to examine six facets of life. If I pushed you on these facets, would you crumble, or shine?

The chapters are about vital issues and will be challenging for every reader. They stand alone as tests of clarity and quality and you might be tempted to skip straight to one that interests you immediately. I know that's what most men do when they read books but I'd be grateful if you didn't. Please check out all sides of the stone in turn.

I'll ask questions now and then. You might want to ponder them or get together with others who are reading the book too. If it helps you engage with it, make notes and use a highlighter. Commit now to finishing the book. Much of what I'm saying only hangs together because of what comes later and I know you're the kind of man who finishes what he starts, right?

Remember, a diamond is still carbon, but deep in the earth's mantle, way below the surface, it has been formed under high-pressure, high-temperature conditions. Rather than crumble or

burn up, its very nature is changed. Impurities disappear, and the more that happens the more transparent it becomes. It is reflective rather than self-absorbed. The closer you examine its luster you see that something wonderful and precious shines from within. What matters most is what is at the center.

You can unleash the potential you were created for and intended to live, with nothing to prove, nothing to hide, and everything to live for. Before we continue, I wonder what you would place at the center of your life right now.

Many men would say their family or friends are at the center, which is admirable. Others live lives centered around past failures, or their finances, or their football team. None of those are of course bad in themselves (unless it's Manchester City), but they are not meant to be the center you live from. Try to live with any of those things at the center and you will crumble when the heat is on.

I will tell my own story too and tell you about the best decision I ever made. It affected all the other areas because real change only happens from the inside out. It happened when I decided more than anything else I wanted to become more like the only perfect man. While you might admire a sports or movie star, I say that throughout history the only contender for that title is Jesus Christ.

The following chapters are all to do with your decisions, your actions, and your attitudes. Difficulties with health, parenting, screwing up at work are just symptomatic of the hole we men have in our hearts. We can pretend this doesn't apply to us, put on a happy face or a show of bravado. But when the pressure comes it isn't how much you can bench-press but what is in the center that matters most. That's true core strength.

If I were to sit down one-to-one with you and look you in the eye as I have with many over the years and ask you some questions relating to these areas, you would see how they are linked and intertwined.

For example, what if I were to ask you some deep questions with regard to how you have coped with life's inevitable *failures*?

How would you assess how you really are as a *family* man—as a son, a sibling, a parent, or a husband? How would you rate yourself on that? (Maybe it would be better to get your family in the room and ask them to rate you!)

Men in our society have been radically *under-fathered* for generations, but how you relate to the concept of an earthly father is one of the biggest determinants of your psychological health.

When I joined the police force I worked with men who I knew would die for me if necessary and vice versa. Some of them wrote commendations for this book and I maintain *friendships* with them many years on. True friendship is not a slap on the back or a drink in the pub. Does anybody know your heart, your secret thoughts, what makes you laugh, makes you cry, makes you mad? Would your friendships last over time and under pressure?

Many men are lazy slobs. Others become body-obsessed to the point of idolatry. I maintain a good level of *fitness* for my age by going to the gym regularly and training for the occasional charity challenge. I want to be fit for purpose, to look after my body well, and to be able to give the best that I can give to everything I do.

If I asked you questions in regard to your *finances*, how would you respond? Your bank statement portrays your priorities. What would true financial freedom and balance mean? It will be very interesting to look at that together later. You're in for a few surprises.

SOCKS AND SANDALS AND OTHER SCANDALS

I love being a man, with lots of mates younger and older than me, a wonderful son, and three young grandsons I pray every day will become real men—the way God wants them to be: men who love to laugh, men who love their wives if they marry, men who are strong

and yet compassionate, men who pray and act with courage, men who are great in any kind of relationship, men who become great dads, great husbands, great and mighty *men of God*.

Most unchurched men of my acquaintance seem to want to remain that way believing the church is for “women, weirdoes, and wimps.”⁴ The Christian stereotype turns my stomach as much as yours. That’s not what I’m advocating for. God doesn’t want you to add a Sunday religious mask to all the others. He wants to give you a cause worth sacrificing for, a battle to win, and brothers to fight alongside you in the war for the world. He wants the very best for you—which is to shape you to be like Jesus Christ.

Somebody asked a sculptor, “How is it that you can take these lumpy pieces of wood full of splinters and knots and can make such beautiful horses from them?”

“Easy,” he replied. “I hold them up to the light, I see the stallion inside, and I cut away everything that isn’t horse.”

In the 1800s, Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “There has got abroad a notion, somehow, that if you become a Christian you must sink your manliness and turn milksop.”⁵ No way! God wants to take you on a journey throughout your life where He will use pressures and heat to transform you. Sometimes He may cut away at things you wish He would leave well enough alone. Sometimes He will be very gentle and patient. But the Bible promises that if you put yourself in His hands, if you cooperate with Him, God will shape you in various areas—then one day, when you see the only perfect man, Jesus Christ, you will find that you will recognize Him, you know Him—because you will be like Him.

The word *diamond* comes from a Greek word that means “unbreakable.” Inner strength is more important than outer. Are you ready to stop chipping away at life from the outside and learn to live from the inside out? Are you ready to become the man God made you to be?

Eric Delve first explained this great good news in a way that helped me get it and he is fond of reciting the following poem by Henry F. Lyte (who wrote the famous hymn “Abide with Me”). It illustrates very well how God shapes men.

Read it aloud (if you're not on public transport), and if you don't understand it now, one day soon you may.

Whom God Chooses

*When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man,
And skill a man,
When God wants to mould a man,
To play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
When He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!*

*How He bends but never breaks
When His good He undertakes;
How He uses whom he chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendour out—
God knows what He's about.*

*Go then, earthly fame and treasure!
Come disaster, scorn, and pain!
In Thy service, pain is pleasure;
With Thy favour, loss is gain.*

*I have called Thee, Abba, Father;
I have stayed my heart on Thee.
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather;
All must work for good to me.*

— HENRY F. LYTE

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