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ACTING LIKE MEN

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.¹

I WAS PRETTY EXCITED WHEN I walked into the diner and saw a table full of good ol' boys hungrily forking their breakfasts. Truckers, retired farmers, and guys with military insignia on their baseball caps made up the group. These dudes were no-nonsense to be sure and looked up pretty suspiciously as I approached their table.

Our church has a 650-acre camp in Croton, Michigan, and I love to go there when I'm working on a writing project. Croton is located in Newaygo County, a mostly woods, lakes, and small towns area of Michigan. What is lost in bling and bright lights is more than made up for in "real as it gets," straight-shooting authenticity. The particular diner I love to hang out in has no name but the sign says "good food," and it isn't a lie. The place gets pretty packed, overflowing with regular folk who want fresh food for a fair price.

Arriving at the crowded table, I sensed the men stiffen up and wondered if I had made a mistake. "Hey, you guys have a second to answer a question for me?" Everyone froze. "I'm working on a book," I continued. "I recognize a table full of good ol' boys when I see one and I want to know what you think it means to 'act like a man.'"

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The first guy to break the silence objected gruffly to my use of the term “old.” I scratched my beard and said, “It takes one to know one.” Everyone laughed, the tension broke, and they began to eagerly answer my question.

“Acting like a man means doing what you say you’re gonna do,” the first guy offered.

“It means not doing anything under the table when you are making a deal,” another added.

“Keeping your word,” a man they called the “Mayor” declared.

“And not making any excuses,” added the first man, jumping back in.

“Yes.” They all seemed to chime in at that. “Nothing worse than a man who makes excuses, blames others, and refuses responsibility for his own actions.” No doubt there were real experiences that underlined the worthlessness of excuse makers for these men.

You can learn a lot from regular folk who are too immersed in life’s realities to posture for anyone. Every one of those guys is a Joe Screwdriver of sorts, and I renewed my determination to write a book that could connect with good men like them.

The Bible asserts that the words it contains are God’s words and they are “**living and active.**”² I know this is true because I have been studying the Bible for more than three decades but I never open it without finding stuff I didn’t see before, even in places I have studied in depth. That’s why I shouldn’t have been surprised when a recent journey through 1 Corinthians yielded an observation that had evaded me these many years. How could I have missed Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 16:13 to “**act like men**”? I have witnessed the consequences for many men who have refused this exhortation by their practice, and to my shame I have at times failed to meet this standard myself. In what seemed like my very first reading, the command hit me like a sledgehammer. I wrote the phrase down and began to pray that God would advance my understanding of what it really means to act like a man.

Over a period of weeks and then months, I went back to this phrase again and again. Of course Paul has all believers in mind with his five

imperatives; however, it appears that these specific aspects of biblical maturity were best illustrated as expressions of masculinity. I like what Kistemaker states, “Like a general in the army of the Lord, Paul gives short orders in rapid succession and expects his people to put his commands into practice.”³ Clear, direct, succinct, just the way men like it, and while applicable to all, for the purposes of our study we will apply to men what Paul seems to indicate should come naturally to men. The power of these phrases is in their simplicity, and the more I have reflected on them, the more impactful they have become. “Act like men” means a lot of profound things that I hope to share as this book unfolds, but before it reveals anything super deep and insightful, it has to mean the following basics. Because it’s just you and me communicating here, let’s make Paul’s plural into singular: Act like a man!

ACT LIKE A MAN MEANS DON’T ACT LIKE A WOMAN

Obvious, right? I have been happily married for more than thirty years and I have no problem acknowledging that I am a big fan of women in general and my wife, Kathy, specifically. I enjoy some days away with the boys, such as our Idaho bear hunt coming up in a few weeks, but I am always happy to get back to my wife, daughter, and two daughters-in-law. If you have read Genesis, the first book in the Bible, then you might remember that Adam, the first guy, was only around for about ten minutes before God declared, “**It is not good that the man should be alone.**”⁴ Who knows what trouble this guy was already into, but God was not going to let it continue and provided woman to be “**a helper fit for him.**”⁵ I think we would all agree that men and women fit together beautifully in every way. Not just physically but emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. One man with one woman for a lifetime is God’s plan. Men and women are designed by their Creator to complement and complete, not compete with one another. Each is to become more because of the other than they could ever become alone. That has certainly been true in my life because of Kathy.

I know we live in a world where distinction based on gender is frowned upon but that doesn’t alter reality one bit. Men and women are

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equal under God in every way, but they are not the same. It is possible to make some general observations based on gender. For example, you may have noticed that your woman has a different emotional makeup than you. She is scared by things you don't even notice, like driving with your knee while you hold a coffee and answer the phone, or walking down a dark alley late at night. She is touched by things that may seem silly to you, like a romantic scene in a movie or a person in need who might make you more suspicious.

Proverbs 18:22 says, **“He who finds a wife finds a good thing.”** And just like every man needs a good woman, women need men. Most of all they need their man to be a source of strength, stability, and leadership. The major decisions and responsibilities of your home are on you, not your wife. They're your call. Listen to her, learn from her, but don't fail to lead her. Not many things are sadder than a passive man acting more like a woman while his wife is allowed to dominate and usurp the role God has called him to fulfill. It's on you to make sure that doesn't happen, so step up and lead. Lead with love, service, and tenderness to be sure, but act like a man and lead.

Men are made to provide security for their wives. Men are designed to cover women with their strength, offering the protection and security God made them to need. As men we reap the benefits of our wives' emotional tenderness, and we have to make sure we are reciprocating with the strength they need. Sadly though, how many families do you know where the husband is counting on the wife to lead and in some cases even to be the main provider? There are a ton of acceptable divisions of labor that can work in a home, but none where you are not leading. It doesn't matter if she cuts the lawn and you cut the vegetables; it just matters that you lead. Failing to lead is failing to act like a man.

I just checked with my wife and she said it was okay for me to say this.

ACT LIKE A MAN MEANS DON'T ACT LIKE AN ANIMAL

Across the spectrum from the passive man who abdicates his God-given role as leader is the dominant, hypermacho pseudo man, who

doesn't love his wife selflessly as Christ commands. Instead he expects to be served and barks selfishly whenever he feels he is not the obvious priority.

Years ago we were honored to welcome a famous special guest into our home. Every preparation was made to present ourselves in the warmest and most hospitable, respectful manner. I will never forget the horror on my wife's face when our dog dragged its hind parts across the carpet in front of our guest in an apparent attempt to itch himself where he couldn't reach. How is it possible that our dog missed the requisite delicacy hospitality demanded? Answer: he's an animal! Animals are wonderful, but when men act like animals, everyone around them is in big trouble. We are not to put our own needs ahead of our wife or children. We are to honor our parents and do our best to remain **"aloof from strife."**⁶ We are to spend ourselves and deny ourselves and exhaust ourselves in servant leadership of our loved ones. Don't worry if it's been awhile since you golfed or hunted or hung out with your buddies. Those things have a place and can fit in if/when possible, but refusing to make your own needs top priority is what makes you a man and not an animal. Much more on that later.

ACT LIKE A MAN MEANS DON'T ACT LIKE A BOY

I have five grandsons all under the age of five. Each one is a special joy but I must say they have reminded me of what I forgot since my kids were small. In a moment they can go from crying to laughing to fighting. They are loud, needy, and demanding. They are constantly on the search for new thrills, and their life revolves around the "itch" of the moment. Paul reports in 1 Corinthians 13:11 that **"when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child."** Kids are not able to figure that the sun and moon don't revolve around them. Men are supposed to know this. Acting like a man means developing a non-anxious presence that sees the big picture, remains calm in a crisis, and won't cave in under pressure. Godly men respond; they don't react. I confess to having taken far too long to learn that truth. God had to put me in

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some very hot water before I was forced to realize the importance of being silent when slandered, merciful when in the right, and lovingly patient when wronged. Any kid can join a meaningless scrap in the school yard, but Paul completes the passage I just quoted by saying, **“When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”**

ACT LIKE A MAN MEANS DON'T ACT LIKE A SUPERHERO

For some, forsaking the superhero persona may be the most important distinction. The above exhortations call a man to strength and stability, but those do not mean men don't feel things deeply and at times struggle profoundly. We are not Ironman. Every man needs a place to be open and vulnerable with brothers leaning together upon the Lord. I hope you have a small group of men you meet with regularly where you open your life up and seek the strength of numbers focused on a common goal. A circle of men who will hear your confessions and assure you of God's grace is a nonnegotiable for biblical manhood. None of us is everything God calls us to be and like James says, **“We all stumble in many ways.”**⁷ Acting like a man does not mean “acting.” The term actually means “conduct yourself.” It's the idea of intentionally choosing your behavior to reflect the best of what God calls us as men to be. We will talk about that on day two, but for now take a moment to answer the questions below and pray for God's help.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What can you do today and this week to be a better servant-leader to your family?
2. In what ways might recent actions have appeared selfish, and what can you do today to correct that?
3. Do you agree that a man keeping his word and refusing to make excuses is a good summary of manhood? Why?

JAMES MACDONALD

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven,

Thank You for creating man in Your own image. Today I want to be more conformed to Your image by more fully expressing Your design for manhood. Please forgive me for the times I have acted selfishly or passively and failed to cover and care for my family as You have commanded. Please help me today to feel the weight of my strength and to use it wisely and carefully so those You have given to my care will sense my strong love for them. Stir faith and hope in me now. I pray that the careful reading of these forty studies will take me into a deeper experience of Your plan for my life than I have ever known before. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

NEXT TIME:

MEET THE QUALITY MAN