

**Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies** 

# Manly Purity A Father-Son Conversation

By Dr. John P. Splinter

As he sighted his rifle on the grizzly's chest he knew a heart-shot was his only chance. As he leveled the weapon he could smell his own body odor — he'd been in the wilderness now for three weeks without a bath ~ perhaps that's how the grizzly found him. The roar of the grizzly snapped his mind back to 750 pounds of 2" teeth and 4" claws. The bear was now on his hind legs ~ male grizzly ~ had to be eight feet tall ~ walking toward him ~ less than 18 feet away and closing. His bearded cheek pressed against the stock of his Winchester 30-30. The pre-war carbine had killed many a deer, but never a grizzly. "Don't fail me now," he whispered ~ squeezed the trigger....

Those two words, "Manly Purity," can seem like an oxymoron ~ like jumbo shrimp or military intelligence. Many men often don't associate the two. The word "Manly" evokes mental pictures of physically powerful, athletic, rugged guys ~ rough-cut, hunter, Jeremiah Jones, sexually active, Semper Fi, mentally tough, Harley rider. By contrast, the word "Purity" evokes thoughts like innocent, slightly perfumed, skinny, sweet, naïve, gentle, virgin, tame..., boring. Joining "Manly" and "Purity" creates weird mental pictures ~ like combining Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mr. Rogers ~ a perfumed lumberjack ~ a feminine linebacker ~ a castrated Marine. Pffffffffffff...............

Rather than defining manliness in terms of how much a guy can press, or how many women he's had, this study will focus on five components of manhood, and discuss how these interface with the subject of purity. The five components are: 1) Focus, 2) Connection, 3) Core Values, 4) Balance, and 5) Vulnerability. If you have sons 12 years of age or older, we strongly encourage you to take your son(s) through this study with you. Do it side-by-side, two men on the same bench. Talk about each of the five components.

### **Focus**

You can tell a great deal about a man by observing the direction of his focus. Like a surveyor's transit, there are numerous directions to take into account. Here are four "focus directions" to consider.

<u>In, or out:</u> Is the guy primarily <u>focused inward</u>, upon himself, his needs, his self-advancement? Or is he primarily <u>focused outward</u>, toward others, their needs and their betterment? Nobody is ever completely internally or externally focused. We all focus both directions. However, there are tendencies we can observe in all men, and these tendencies say a lot about their character. Our highest and best example is Christ, who articulated his purpose statement as follows: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life s a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28)*. Christ was externally focused.

Children tend to focus more upon themselves than adults do. So it is that the three-year-old screams because he can't have a cookie before supper ~ he is totally self-focused. So it is that weight-lifting rooms are frequently surrounded by mirrors, so men can watch their muscles. Self-focus can help a person achieve objectives, but maintaining a self-focus tends to get us lost. As we begin to believe that it's all about us, the value and meaning of others begins to fade. In the end, self-focus often ends up hurting those around us.

Oddly, people who have been emotionally wounded often become more self-focused, unless they leave their wounds at the foot of the cross. For example, people who grew up in alcoholic homes, in divorced families, or in other situations of deep and ongoing pain, often tend toward an internal focus. Part of the reason is that when they were children and had needs for being parented and affirmed, nobody took care of them. So they learned they were alone in this task of meeting their needs. This grew into a lifestyle of self-focus. In extreme cases, this dynamic is called "sociopathic." It's a belief that I can take whatever I need from you, and if that hurts you, too bad, so sad. I's a belief system that says, "I got screwed when I was young, so now I'm into taking what I want even if it screws other people ~ because it's all about me and what I need."

By contrast people who are <u>externally focused</u> place the higher value upon others ~ and are often highly praised for it. It's the mother who exhausts herself in caring for her infant. It's the soldier who throws himself upon the live grenade, saving the lives of other soldiers. It's Mother Theresa. It's Ghandi. It's Christ. St. Paul made the observation, *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die (Rom. 5:7)*. It happens ~ rarely, but it happens ~ and when it does, it blesses those around us.

There's a spiritual principle underlying this discussion ~ a principle that wise parents model and teach their children. This principle has much to do with the discussion of manliness and purity. Here's the principle: **Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.** This principle comes from the teaching of Christ ~ "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 7:12). He taught the same principle again, using other words: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn. 13:34).

Let's apply this to the subject of manliness and purity. It takes a stronger, more mature man to truly focus upon the needs and betterment of others, than it does to focus upon his own desires.

Both self-absorption and impulsivity are immature traits that mature men work hard at weaning from their characters. The higher standard of loving others above ourselves is a trait of strong character. It is far more difficult than yielding to one's personal goals, impulses or passions.

Loving others more than ourselves has a lot to offer to the discussion of sexual purity, because it is **a**) based upon a "higher standard" than that of impulsivity and self-absorption, and **b**) it takes into consideration the value of the other person. Sex outside of marriage tends to be extremely self-focused (narcissistic), whether it's using a prostitute or merely looking at pornography and then masturbating. Here's a spiritual principle: Impurity is always a statement of compromised moral standards, plus self-focus. So where are you headed right now, in or out?

<u>Up</u>, <u>or down</u>. Another way of observing a man's focus is whether his primary attention is focused toward God, or toward whatever is in front of him at the moment. Those men whose focus is "up," march to a different drummer than those whose focus is "down." They have a different purpose in life  $\sim$  it is to truly serve God to the best of their ability. And that always leads them away from the pack. It's not because faith in Christ is a solo journey. Rather, it's because faith in Christ is a unique journey, taking us places we never thought we'd go  $\sim$  leading us through the inevitable swamps of life, toward wisdom and healing, and character.

By contrast, a "downward" focus is anyplace *except* toward God. Just as there are 360 degrees on a compass, and only one of them points to true North, so there are many ways of engineering a life away from God. A downward focus often creates the appearance of success ~ that is, until one looks at God's definition of success. A downward focus may make a person wealthy or powerful. But don't ever be fooled by wealth or power. In spite of the fact that churches often put wealthy and powerful people onto their boards, both wealth and power are often statements of *internal* plus *downward* focus, which is why Christ said what he did in Matthew 23:24, Mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25.

So notice a man's focus (in or out; up or down), and without his ever intending to do so, he'll express volumes about his integrity, values, maturity, stability, and character.

#### Connection

The study of person-to-person connections is inexhaustible. Much of the field of psychology is dedicated to this subject. And some connectional traits absolutely leap off the page once you know what to look for. Here are a few broad generalizations that, though broad still carry some clinical weight regarding inter-personal connections:

- *Men whose <u>only close</u> connections are to women*, often had emotional problems with their fathers. Later in their adult years they don't want to risk the male/male relationship again because it was so difficult in their younger years. So they hang out with women.
- Women whose <u>only close</u> connections are to men often had difficulties with their mothers. So these gals often hang out mainly with men.
- *Men and women who have connectional (relational) problems* often tend to "hide" them through over-achievement in business or sports. Some become risk-takers ~ others become "control freaks."

- We often tend to marry someone who has the most psychological similarity or behaviors as the parent with whom we had the most "unfinished business" in our childhoods.
- If you want to know how a man will treat his wife, watch how he treats his mother and sisters.

Now obviously, all of these are broad, generalized statements. Yet each carries a kernel of truth and has application in the lives of many who fit the description in the first section (the italicized phrase) of each statement.

Now let's apply them to real life. <u>The objective of healthy manliness</u> is to be able to enjoy close, loving, functional relationships with any number of men and women ~ regardless of what happened to us during our childhoods. <u>The objective of purity</u> is to be able to enjoy these relationships without the need to sexualize them.

People who have "unfinished business" in their past often tend to sexualize their anxiety by turning non-marital relationships into sexual relationships; or conversely in some cases they run away from anything that could possibly become sexual, even within marriage. The ability to maintain close, loving, non-sexual, functional relationships with between 20 - 50 people is an important trait of successful adulthood.

This implies, therefore, that the "rugged individualist" who is close to nobody, isn't a role model to copy – he's a problem waiting to happen. The "Clint Eastwood" character who lives alone on a ranch somewhere in Montana and only speaks to people when he needs groceries, is a person to pity, not copy. Interestingly, the "Clint Eastwoods" often tend to marry "Chatty Cathy" types ~ talkative, emotionally up-and-down women who seldom have an unexpressed thought and who fail to realize that certain things are just too silly to say out loud. Clint and Chatty then form a "balance," like a "teeter-totter," with him at the far end of silence and isolation, and her at the far end of emotional expression. She often "manages" the entire family's emotions, telling everyone what everyone else is feeling.

That's just one of a thousand examples of how couples meet and match up. In some ways it's comforting to know that there really is a lid for every pot, no matter how badly cracked or misshapen the pot may be. No matter how weird you may be, Bucko, there's undoubtedly someone who'll marry you. On the other hand, the *quality and quantity* of one's interpersonal connections are at least one expression or symptom of the person's emotional stability and ability to attach.

A person isn't more "manly" just because he doesn't know how to make and keep friends. Males tend toward isolation anyway, but that doesn't make us more "manly." Actually, it takes better adult skills to *build and maintain* a healthy stable of friendships than it does to live like a hermit.

This leads to an important point regarding purity. People who are socially isolated often tend to struggle far more with purity issues than those who have learned the art of building and maintaining numerous strong, healthy male and female relationships. God created us to be emotionally and socially connected to one another. One of the underlying premises of the field

of Adlerian psychology is that we function better when we are well connected to others. As police and therapists try to gain insight into the latest child sex offender, one common trait they frequently find is that the pedophile is almost always socially isolated and emotionally empty.

Models of attachment flow from the pages of scripture. Christ traveled with 12 male disciples, and there was a small retinue of ladies somehow in the near background. St. Paul had many close friendships – Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Luke, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla, and others. King David had his thirty Mighty Men.

Obviously, the most meaningful connection in most people's lives is with the person we marry. One of the most significant traits of maturity is seen in fidelity to one's mate. Fidelity doesn't only apply to not having affairs. It applies equally to what we do in our heads. If a person fantasizes about sex with someone other than their mate, it's the same as if they're "doing it" ~ at least according to what Christ taught in Matthew 5:28. Sexual fantasy and sexual reality are the same music ~ just different instruments. Fidelity isn't just about purity – it's about character and maturity.

Physical fidelity is easier to maintain when a person doesn't allow mental <u>infidelity</u> into their heads. This is because the core of the fidelity thing is spiritual, not physical. Generally speaking, those men who enjoy a broad personal support system of meaningful relationships will tend to have fewer struggles with mental and physical infidelity. This is because their "buckets" are filled up with real relationships with real people. They're not as emotionally need-driven, and hence are not as much at risk for fantasy relationships.

Here's the point: Men and their sons need to be wise about the relational and emotional connections we establish. We need to teach our sons to build and maintain strong male friendships. And we need to teach our sons that both physical and mental purity are expressions of manliness.

#### **Core Values**

One of the most significant lessons a dad can teach his son, is how to build a life upon Core Values rather than just letting life "unfold and happen" around him. Core values are the bedrock of character. They determine whether a young man will respect and value, or use and then toss, a girl on a date. Core values determine whether the young man will be a goal-oriented self-motivated achiever, or a slouch who gets by with as little effort as possible. There are two essential components to teaching core values to one's son:

1) They must come from within. Kids read parents like parents read newspapers. Kids rapidly pick up on inconsistencies, but they also respect their parents when they see them honestly living out their personal values. If a store clerk gives back too much change after a purchase, the son watches to see if dad treats it as a "lucky break" or a "moral responsibility." When dad gets a speeding ticket, the child watches to see if dad trash-talks the cop, or accepts responsibility for speeding. The NASV translates Prov. 23:7 as saying, "As (a man) thinks within himself, so he is."

Parents can't teach something they don't have, because the teaching which leads toward manliness and purity isn't mainly about learning words, any more than teaching about faith is mainly about learning a catechism. *It's about building an internal moral structure*. So if dad wants to teach his son to guard his eyes and not mentally undress women, then dad must himself do what the Old Testament character, Job did when he said, "*I have made a covenant with my eyes, not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1)*. Sons watch their dads' eyes, and learn more from what dad looks at than from what dad says. What dad says will either reflect or compromise what dad does ~ and therein is the lesson.

2) **They need a foundation.** As boys pass out of childhood and into early adolescence a transition occurs: Dad's words no longer are considered gospel truth. Dad becomes just one more voice in the kid's life. At some point in the son's maturational process, the boy must learn that dad's values and format of treating people is based upon something larger than himself. Hopefully, dad will be able to show his son that dad's life is built upon the rock of faith in Christ ~ because if that lesson isn't learned, then the boy is likely to seek his <u>own</u> system of truth and faith, and who knows what that might mean.

The core of Post-Modern thinking is that there are no absolute values in the universe – there are only personal opinions. It's like 25 boys from 25 families all trying to create their own sense of right, wrong, values, and meanings. Naturally, the people teaching Post-Modern philosophy fail to recognize the inconsistency of their own words as they say "there are no absolute values...," ~~ as they make that very statement into an absolute value. Duh.

Christ once taught a parable about a wise man and a fool (Mt. 7:24-27). Both built houses. Both houses faced storms. One house collapsed; the other survived. The house that collapsed had a foundation built in sand; the other's foundation was upon rock. *Today's culture is based upon the assumption is that there is no such thing as "rock."* This means that the cultural and moral foundations of those who don't believe in foundational rock, are sand. Here are some examples of sandy foundations:

- "It's no big deal for us to live together for a couple of years before we marry."
- "People who believe the Bible are homophobic."
- "I deserve the very best in life."
- "He wins who dies with the most toys."
- "Everything in moderation."
- "There are absolutely no absolutes."
- "Cheating only counts against you if you get caught."

Core Values are what provide strength, stability and durability for one's life-structure. But they need a basis – they need a rock. And that rock is Christ. Dads who don't teach their sons about The Rock of Ages, are launching their kids into a world of philosophical chaos and moral deterioration ~ and *in the end our kids will pay more for our mistakes than we ever will*. If you're a Dad, here are ten Bible texts you and your son should read together and discuss. Each text is a basic, strategic component in building an internal moral structure:

- Genesis 1:1, 26-27 ~ Creation; creation of man
- Genesis 2:23-25 ~ Marriage and sex
- Genesis 3:1-13 ~ Sin enters the world

- 2 Samuel 11:1-27 ~ David commits adultery and murder
- Psalm 51 ~ How to repent when you've sinned
- Psalm 111 ~ The character of God
- Proverbs 3:5-6; 5:21 ~ Wisdom
- Isaiah 1:18 ~ God's invitation to a relationship
- John 1:1-5 ~ The person and purpose of Christ
- John 3:16 ~ Salvation through Christ

Dad, you need a basis, a Rock. You are not that rock. God is. Be sure your sons know it. It will give them guidance and strength as they wrestle through adolescence and early adulthood with their own growth toward manliness and purity.

## **Balance**

One of the more succinct texts in scripture covers the years from Christ's early adolescence, to the moment he launched his earthly ministry. The only verse that says anything about that seventeen year time span says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). Four components of young manliness are captured in that short verse:

Wisdom ~ Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." One of the mistakes of immaturity is to assume that knowledge and wisdom are the same thing. This belief is easily disproven by getting to know a few people who have excelled in the "knowledge game" – people with MD or PhD or LLD after their names. Scripture teaches that knowledge "puffs up" (1 Cor. 8:1) ~ i.e., academic prowess is an ego booster. Yet many well-educated people are burbling idiots when it comes to wisdom.

By contrast, Christ grew in wisdom. Wisdom is most easily understood as being <u>God's</u> interpretation of how things are ~ how life is ~ right and wrong. And the only source of that information is the Bible. Dad, does your son ever see you reading it?

<u>Stature</u> ~ Stature is the physical side. Christ may have played on the Nazareth Neptunes La Crosse team (OK, that's a joke). But he grew physically. He didn't sit inside and get thumb-work-outs playing video games all day. He grew up and likely became an apprentice in his dad's carpentry shop ~ no power tools ~ strong back, legs, arms and shoulders ~ leathered hands. Dads, don't let your sons sit around picking fuzz out of their naval. Make sure they are learning how to use their bodies in positive and productive ways, whether through sports, hobbies, hiking, or whatever.

**Favor with God** ~ God liked what he saw as Christ grew up. That undoubtedly had to do with the wisdom thing. So if Christ dated, he kept his hands at home. If Christ competed athletically, he didn't take cheap shots. If Mary asked him to take out the garbage, he did it with a positive attitude. He was respectful. This is to say, Christ internalized the wisdom he learned from his parents and from the scriptures. God liked what He saw in the emerging young man named Jesus. Three times in later years, God would speak from heaven and say, "This is my beloved son" (Lk. 3:22; 9:35; 20:13).

Dad, do you like what you're seeing emerge in your son? If not, what do you need to build into him? What's your plan? Is your plan built upon God's plan?

**Favor with men** ~ Everyone else liked Christ too. He wasn't a show-off or a punk. He made friends easily and he didn't rip people who were jerks. He valued others above himself. He made others feel good when they were around him. He cared about them. We know all this because later in his life he hung out and did well with lots of different crowds ~ religious right wingers ~ hookers and morally loose rich types ~ disciple wannabees ~ in fact, crowds of thousands followed him just to hear him teach. That's "favor with men." Is your son learning the skills he'll need as an adult, skills that will gain "favor with others?"

One of the greatest disservices many parents do to their kids in this culture, is either pushing or allowing them into the *hugely self-focused world of "performance*," where crowds cheer them and make them feel like they're more than they really are. It's the 5<sup>th</sup> grader who is on the "elite" soccer team, and thinks he's God's gift to the world because he occasionally kicks a ball into a net. It's the prima-donna 7<sup>th</sup> grade ballerina with her pre-emergent stick figure who thinks her mother is a humiliation because she's overweight and can't do splits. It's the college scholarship athlete who thinks he never has to obey the rules again because he's the hottest jock on campus.

Many thousands of parents have totally lost balance in their families. They have built their entire family system around some kid's sports, or singing, or dance efforts. Some family systems become angry systems because one kid gets all the time, money and attention ~ because they can shoot a puck or sing an aria better than others. Christ had balance.

If you're a Dad, more than anyone else, your family's balance will be a reflection of *your* values and your own balance. Watch it. You're creating a legacy, one way or the other. Keep things balanced. Of all the hundreds of thousands of wanna-be little jocks, ballerinas and singers in grade school, middle school or high school, only a few thousand will ever perform at college level. And of all the thousands of kids playing on college teams, only a handful will ever play at the Olympic or pro levels. And of those who reach pro levels, high percentages of them will morally fall because their swollen egos will not be able to manage being treated like mini-gods. *So is this the dream you want your kids to chase?* And *whose* dream is it anyway?

Another piece of "balance" involves dating. Although a 14-year-old may have the adult physical equipment for sex, he or she absolutely does not have the adult brain to go with it. The prefrontal lobe will not finish developing until the child is approximately 24 years of age. That's the part of the brain that is most involved with wisdom. Ponder that thought as you watch your son begin dating. Ponder also the fact that today's kid culture is enormously sexualized.

Coach your son about purity and dating ethics. Don't allow your son to slide into an emotionally binding, sexually active relationship with some girl, even if she is a cheerleader. Balance in adults involves moral boundaries. That's part of your objective as a dad – to impart moral boundaries to your sons. Be wise, dad. Be balanced. Create balance.

## **Vulnerability**

Years ago an experiment was done with pre-school boys. Two of them were placed in a room with two chairs. They were told to arrange the chairs however they wanted, and then talk. Most of the groups of two little boys put the chairs against the wall, facing out into the room, and then without making much eye contact, they talked. When they did the same experiment with little girls, the girls pulled the chairs to face each other, knees touching, and they gave full eye contact as they talked with one another.

Watch men's eyes as they talk. Who do they look at? For how long do they look? Guys who have problems connecting with guys, usually look anywhere <u>but</u> into the eyes of other guys. Male vulnerability is an interesting study. Many (perhaps most) men have only one person with whom they are vulnerable – it's their wife. In divorce recovery groups it was discovered that although the same numbers of men and women divorced, the ratio in these groups was often between 3-1 and 5-1, female to male. Men are much less likely to do the vulnerability thing than women. Men often attempt to overcome wounded vulnerability through either performance (work-a-holism, sports) or some sort of "medication" (drugs, sex, booze).

So when scripture says that Jonathan loved David as himself (1 Sam. 18:1), it's pretty much of a mystery to many men – to the point that some suspect perhaps Jonathan was gay. But there's very little that is as healthy and upbuilding as a deep and loving, non-sexual relationship between two men. Some men develop what they call "accountability" relationships, in which they openly share their deepest stuff with each other, and then pray for one another. Others maintain deep friendships with men they may have grown up with as children, or played sports with in high school or college. [If you want to form up a really terrific men's group, start a *Men's Fraternity* in your church (www.mensfraternity.com). It's one of the best things going for men of all ages.] Close man-to-man friendships can be phenomenal tools for helping guys maintain moral purity, and also for helping guys overcome sexual addictions.

If you don't have that sort of friendship with another man, then you should work at developing it. It can take you deeper into yourself than you may let yourself go with your wife. If you work at developing vulnerability and trust with another man, you can talk about male issues that you'd probably never discuss with your wife ~ sexual struggles ~ issues with your dad ~ self-esteem issues ~ as well as fidelity struggles you may have. In this connection, you will teach your sons about the significance of male vulnerability with men, and someday if the Lord is exceptionally good to you, you may have learned enough to have this level of depth and connection with your own son.

The thesis of this study is that it takes a far stronger man to be pure, than it does to be impure. Men are more likely to grow in manliness, and purity, when they are deeply connected to other men. So, yo ~ are you manly enough to take up this challenge? If so, it'll make you a much better dad. If not, you can easily hide out among the herd of chickens who try to convince the world they're manly by how much money they make, the number of women they "do," or number of pounds they bench press.

What makes you a man? Seriously. If you were to write down five things that makes you a man, what would they be? Here's your chance to define your manhood.

## Here Are Five Character Traits That Define My Manhood:

| 2   | 1.       |   |
|---|----------|---|
| 4   | 2.       |   |
| Second-to last thought. How do each of the things you listed above, play into the subject of spiritual obedience to God, and purity in your life? Here's a chance for you to write your thoughts about that question: | 3.       |   |
| Second-to last thought. How do each of the things you listed above, play into the subject of spiritual obedience to God, and purity in your life? Here's a chance for you to write your thoughts about that question: | 4.       |   |
| spiritual obedience to God, and purity in your life? Here's a chance for you to write your thoughts about that question:  | 5.       |   |
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Final thought: What you just wrote (above) is critical for you to understand about yourself as you teach your son what it means to be a man.

Vaya Con Dios ~ Go with God.