

ABOVE REPROACH

Our culture is confused about manhood.
Look at the images you are given in film and on TV.

There you'll find that
men are often portrayed
as the brute and the bully
who cares for no one but himself,
and who is willing to do anything
and abuse anyone
to get his way.

Sometimes men are depicted as the clueless father
who is unaware of who his children are
or what his wife needs.

Successful at his work,
he becomes a complete dolt once he walks
through the front door of his own home.

There's men as the personification of anger and prejudice,
their bodies full of raging testosterone,
their brains lacking in self-awareness and
their hearts empty of compassion and kindness.

And, of course, there's the weakling,
lacking the strength to stand up for
himself, his loved ones or his principles.

But there are other portraits of manhood,
more positive and inspiring.

There's the noble warrior who is willing
to risk life and limb or
reputation and standing
to fight a battle that matters.

There's the friend and brother
who cares deeply about the other men in his life and
who can be counted on to show up when needed
and to come through when the chips are down.

There's the sensitive artist
who can reveal to us the feelings
that most of us bury so deeply within our chests
that we're not even aware they exist.

And there's the protector
who will go to any length and
make any sacrifice
to defend his family.

There's more than one way to be a man.
Some –
the brute, the bully, the uncaring,
those who are unwilling to face the challenges of life –
who don't deserve the title "man."

But there are other ways –
different ways,
many ways –
to live in this world as a man
who is worthy of admiration.

We have
different gifts,
different personalities,
different callings.

So, there's no one way to be a man.

But there are some traits
we should all aspire to.
A way of being that transcends
our different temperaments and abilities.
A way of being that glorifies God
and brings good into the lives of those around us.

We find these traits in Paul's first epistle to Timothy
and in his letter to Titus.

He tells them, before you appoint someone to be a leader,
make certain he possesses these qualities.

In total, there's something like twenty characteristics
that God's word portrays as making a man
someone who is mature and worthy of respect.

Over the next eight weeks we will examine many of these
and encourage you to make them a part of your life.

We're calling this session of Quest
Blueprint: God's Design for Manhood.

I'm aware that architects don't use blueprints much anymore.

Decades ago they started using
computer aided drafting.
Shortened to C-A-Ds or CADs.

But somehow
"CAD: God's Design for Manhood"
just didn't seem right.

We find these traits in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1.

They include things like:
being self-controlled,
exhibiting kindness,
showing hospitality,
overcoming materialism and being generous,
being faithful to our wives
and good fathers to our children.

Today we start with the first qualification that is listed
both in Timothy and in Titus.

In essence,
it is the overarching, primary trait that we should aspire to
and the qualities that follow simply spell it out in detail.

A different word is used in Timothy and Titus,
but they possess a similar meaning.

1 Timothy 3.2: A leader, then, must be above reproach.

Titus 1.6: An elder must be blameless.

Wow, I bet you're thinking what I'm thinking.
If being a leader and a man of God
requires being blameless –
that leaves me out;
I'll never be that.

What we know is that
we're not told to be,
we're not expected to be perfect.

1 John 1.8: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth
is not in us.

This is the Apostle John writing
and he includes himself when he says,
“if WE claim to be without sin”
we are deceiving ourselves.

John is not just a leader in the church;
he is an apostle.
A member of the Big Twelve.
And I'm not talking about the college football conference
that only has ten teams playing in it,
and are scheduled to lose 2, but may gain 4.
It's all very confusing for a Rice grad
who doesn't even know what conference the Owls are in.

John was one of the twelve apostles
sent out by Jesus to be his primary representatives on earth
when he returned to the Father.
And John tell us that he's not sinless.

Then what was Paul getting at when he wrote that leaders should be
“above reproach” and “blameless.”

He was talking about a man whose life is characterized
by integrity.

Integrity is a great word.

It comes from the same Latin root
that we get the word integrate from.

Integrate – you take different parts and put them together
so that they are no longer separate and divided,
but unified and one.

The man of integrity,
the different parts of his life –
his beliefs, his words, his actions –
they are in alignment,
they are one.

He doesn't believe one thing
and act a different way.
He doesn't promise something with his words
and live something different with his life.

And for the Christ follower to be blameless
what he believes must be in line with what Jesus taught
and his behavior must be true to what he believes.

There are men we know who we would describe as good guys.
They're positive and fun to be with.
They don't make problems for others.
If you need some help,
they'll probably come through for you.
They may or may not believe in Jesus.

And then there are those we don't describe as being good guys.
We point them out to others and we say,
“Now, **he's** a good man.”

The way he lives,
the way he treats others,
the principles he lives by,
the depth and the maturity he brings to a situation,
the example he sets –
he's not just a good guy.

He is – a good man.
He is a man of substance and character.
He's the kind of man you want in your life
because you know he can make you a better man.

I've told you this before.
When we began Quest in 2002,
more guys showed up for our first Tuesday morning breakfast
than I ever imagined.
As a matter of fact,
we ran out of food.
And it kept growing
and growing.

I once confessed to one of the guys who helped us start Quest –
he's a self-made multimillionaire;
he hunts,
he fishes,
he rides horses,
and before he met Jesus
he played poker for a living in South Texas in underground games
where there were piles of cash and pistols on the table.

I waited until I met Jesus
to start playing poker.

I said to him,
Chuck, I don't really get it.
All these guys are coming to Quest and
they let me talk to them about what it means to be a man.
And it's bizarre to me.

I don't hunt or fish.
 I've never been good at sports.
 I can't repair anything at home.
 I'm so bad at parallel parking,
 I don't even try anymore.
 The only woman I've ever kissed is the one I'm married to.
 And you don't know anybody with a worse sense of direction
 than me.
 I'm about as far from being a man's man as you can get.

And my friend,
 who was and is everything I'm not, said,
 "Rob, a man's man is just a man that other men respect.
 And somehow, you've got these guys fooled into respecting you."

I think that's close to what Paul meant when he talked about being
 blameless and above reproach.
 A man that other men
 can respect.

Not perfect,
 but more than a good guy.
 Not sinless,
 but a man of substance and integrity and character.

And trust me,
 if I guy like me can fool some guys into respecting me,
 it's going to be a piece of cake for you.

What makes someone a man of character?

A MAN OF CHARACTER

1. A Man of Character is true to his principles.

Men are driven by something.
 Something tells them:
 If I can just get this into my life,
 I'll be who I want to be,
 I'll have what's most important.

I'll be happy.

Some men are driven by

(Men May Be Driven By)

A. Pleasure

Wine, women and song.
 A hobby they enjoy.
 Friends they like being around.
 Travel to exotic locales.

Not necessarily anything wrong with these things.
 But if these are the things that drive you,
 if this is what you think about
 and live for,
 if this is how you define the good life,
 you may be a good guy,
 but you'll never possess the substance
 and the character to be called a good man.

Some men are driven by

B. Possessions

They won't say they are,
 but look at how they live.
 Look at all they accumulate
 not because they need these things,
 but because they believe these are the signs of
 being successful and having arrived.
 They may not even know who they're trying to convince they've made it –
 others or themselves.

But you can be sure of this.
 The guy who thinks some thing determines and displays his success,
 you can be sure that he's a success
 only in the eyes of other men who are as shallow as he is.

C. Position

Climb the ladder.
 Get to the top.
 Sit in the big office
 with an impressive title.
 That says something, doesn't it?

It does.
 Usually it means you are person with real talent
 and you work incredibly hard.

And if this world is all there is.
 If at heart you are a human doing
 instead of a human being.
 If you believe that
 the title of CEO is more important than the title of father;
 if you think success is defined as how high you rise in your career
 instead of how low you're willing to go to serve others;
 if in your mind "making it" is about making a name for yourself
 rather than making the Name of Jesus known,
 then when you climb and claw your way to the top,
 you win.

But there's another way to determine success.
 And that to be driven by and faithful to your

D. Principles

You know the Mike Tyson line:

Mike Tyson: Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

Well, everyone has their principles until there's a price to pay.

Everyone believes in honesty,
 until there's a price to pay.
 And then some discover they don't.

Everyone believes in doing the right thing,
 until it gets costly.
 And then some discover they don't.

Everyone believes in standing up for the truth,
 until they suffer for speaking out.

Everyone believes in paying their debts and making things right,
 until it's hard and humiliating to do so.

You know the story, supposedly true,
 when the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw
 asked an actress:

“Madam, would you sleep with me for a million pounds?”
 The actress responded: Well, my goodness, I'd certainly think about it.
 Shaw continued: Would you sleep with me for a single pound?
 The woman huffed: Certainly not! What kind of woman do you think I am?
 Shaw's reply: Madam, we've already established that. Now we are haggling
 over the price.

The world will always want to know your price.
 To remain silent.
 To go along.
 To cut a corner.
 To get ahead.
 To do what you got to do to get what you want
 and decide that later you'll think about the morality of your decision.

Unless you have decided what kind of man you are –
 a man who will
 be honest and
 speak up for truth, and
 do the right thing
 not because it's easy or cheap or advantageous
 but because that's who you are,
 the world will always haggle with you
 over the price of your principles
 and the worth of your integrity.

Whether you will be blameless and above reproach,
the kind of man that other men can respect.

Here's one of my favorite scenes from *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.
The movie is set in 1931,
in the hear of the Depression.

Clip: Bagger Vance

It's painful sometimes,
being a man of integrity.

Humbling yourself,
being misunderstood,
letting others look down upon you when they have no right to,
paying your debts when others don't.

Or speaking up when you're certain the truth will not be well received.
Doing the right thing when it's painful
and only you will know.
Saying no to pleasure and position and prestige
because you have decided that you will say yes to your principles.

Because you have decided
that being blameless and above reproach in the sight of God
is more important than the pleasures and the prizes and the praises
of this world.

2. A Man of Character Takes Responsibility for his Life.

Novelist and journalist Joan Didion writes

Joan Didion: Character – the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own
life – is the source from which self-respect springs.

Foundational to being a person of character is accepting responsibility
for our lives.

I know,
you seem like the last crowd who needs to hear about being responsible.

You go to work.
You pay your bills.
You send your kids to college.

Got it,
only that's not the kind of responsibility I'm talking about.

I'm talking about taking responsibility for
who you are,
how you respond to great challenges and huge disappointments,
what your marriage is like, and
where your spiritual life is right now.

Are you where you need to be in your relationship with God?
Well, no, not really.

Still have a problem with anger?
Yep.

Having a daily time with God?
Not really.

Still drinking too much?
Sometimes.

Still giving into lust too much?
Uh, how much is too much?

Still struggling to be patient and attentive with your wife?
C'mon, brother, that's not fair.

Ask guys these questions,
and usually they have a reason why they're not doing better
in these areas of their lives.

I work long hours.
My job puts me under a lot of stress.
My wife doesn't understand me
and I sure don't understand her.
My parents weren't there for me when I was growing up.
Anger runs in my family.

And all of a sudden, very responsible men
have all kinds of reasons why they're not responsible
for who they are,
how they respond or
where they are spiritually and emotionally.

Their job is.
Their spouse is.
Their past is.
Their stress is.

Anything and everything but themselves.

I know many of you are in difficult situations at home.
Others of you were mistreated when you were young
and it still lives with you.
Life may have been cruel and unfair to you.

But once we say those things are responsible
for where we are spiritually and emotionally,
for how we handle our anger or
for our drinking or
for our marriages not being what they should be,
we're saying what?

We're saying that we're not responsible.
And we give ourselves permission
to be irresponsible in the areas of our lives that matter most.

A man of character says, "I am responsible for my life.
I am responsible for the choices I make.
I am responsible for my emotions and
I am responsible for where I am spiritually."

I can say that without even an ounce of being judgmental.
I'm telling you this because
(1) I need to hear it and
(2) accepting responsibility is empowering.

When you believe that you are NOT responsible for your life,
not only are you believing a lie,
but you are giving away your strength.

Listen, brothers and sisters,
You are not a string of excuses.
You are not a victim of your circumstances.
You are not a powerless pawn of life's unfairness.

You are a human being.
You are made in the image of God.
If you have accepted Christ,
the power of the Holy Spirit lives in you.

You can overcome your past.
And you can succeed in the future.

You can make whatever changes you need to make.
You can succeed at all the things that matter most.
And it's never too late to become the person
God created you to be.

Believe that.
Claim that.
Be responsible for that.

Here's my observation.
Men are often different at home than they are at work.

At work, when we see a problem,
we make a plan, and
we work the plan.
If need be,
we are attentive, proactive and intentional.

But when we come home,
some of us, anyway,
it's a different story.
And here's why I think it is.

At home the problems are usually of a very different nature.
At work the problems and the challenges are
rational and pragmatic.
At home the problems are
relational and emotional.
And most men are better equipped,
to handle the rational and the pragmatic
than they are to deal with the relational and the emotional.

If a woman was a mathematical formula that could be figured out,
most men would do ok as husbands.
If a wife was a car that needed to be repaired,
most men could get the manual and do the job.
I couldn't.
But most of you could.

If kids were rational business men, looking for a deal that's win-win,
most guys would be great fathers.

But when you realize that your wife is not a mathematical formula,
and your kids are not rational creatures
waiting for you to tell them what's best for them,
that they communicate in ways that are foreign to you
and need things that you don't need and don't get,
that means you're going to face problems
that you are ill-equipped to figure out and fix.
nor is she another guy who looks at life the same way a man does;

And the natural tendency is to resign yourself to the way things are,
 duck for cover,
 ignore the problems if you can,
 and hope everything gets better.

But kids need a father
 and wives need a husband.

And men need to face their problems,
 even the ones that are difficult because they're emotional and relational
 and don't make any sense in the universe that is our brains.

And to be blameless and above reproach,
 we need to take responsibility
 for our lives and
 for our relationships and
 for our families.

3. A Man of Integrity is willing to Suffer to Overcome His Self-Centeredness.

There's this thing that lives inside us
 that believes we are the center of the universe.
 You can call it ego or pride.

Whatever it is,
 it's first instinct is self.
 What will this do to me?
 What will this cost me?
 What will this take from me?

What will I have to put on hold, give up or walk away from?
 What will this do to my plans and my happiness?

It's there inside every one of us.
 It's the part of us that Jesus was talking about when he said,

Matthew 16.24: Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to
 come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

There's something inside of us,
 every one of us,
 that has to go to the cross.

It has to be denied.
 It has to be crucified.
 It has to die
 if we're going to follow Jesus.

And unless it does,
 we will never be the husbands we should be,
 we'll never be the fathers we want to be,
 we'll never the faithful followers of Jesus we were created to be, and
 we'll never be men of true integrity,
 blameless and above reproach.

Listen:

Our lives are not worthy of respect because of what we receive,
 but because of what we give.
 Our value to others is not determined by what we hold onto,
 but by what we let go of.
 Our becoming a leader who others may look up to
 is not created by our successes,
 but by our sacrifices.

It comes when we do not run from the challenges of life
 but only when we embrace what life brings
 and we suffer so we might die to self
 and be fully alive to God and others.

Some of you will recognize the name Mort Kondracke.

PICTURE OF MORT KONDRACKE

He was the Chicago Sun-Times White House correspondent,
 a regular on the McLaughlin Group,
 and the Washington Bureau Chief for Newsweek.

He also served as the executive editor for Roll Call.

Twenty years ago now,
he wrote a book called Saving Millie.
It chronicles his life with his wife,
especially the years after Mille was diagnosed with Parkinson's.

In the book he describes how he had lived for his own ego
most of the years of their marriage,
trying to get ahead
and promote his career.

So much so that he often ignored his wife and his children.
He wrote about how Millie had helped him
when it became obvious that he had a problem with alcohol.
It was her influence that got him to AA
and got him to stop drinking.

The first sign of Millie's Parkinson's was that she couldn't sign her name
and then over time she had problems with walking and then talking
and then problems with eating and drinking.

She got to where she couldn't turn over in bed by herself.
Eventually she got to the place
where she couldn't control her most basic bodily functions.

In the book he writes what it was like to learn to love another person.
To learn to spend time with someone,
just to talk to someone,
and stroke her face,
even when she couldn't respond.

To bathe her,
to feed her
and when food gets caught in her throat
to reach in and pull it in.
He described what it's like to change your wife's diapers
and how you do it because you love her.

Of course the book could have been titled
Saving Mort as well as Saving Millie.

Because he writes that he prayed for Millie over and over
and he also prayed for himself, saying,
God, what is my purpose here on earth?

And he writes that he expected some grand mission,
but every time he prayed he got the same answer:
Take care of Millie.

And in an interview in Christianity Today

he said: So that's what I did.

And in the process I've become a different, better person -- someone I
never expected to be.

That's what happens when we love and serve others.
Yes, it helps them,
but it changes us.

By God's grace,
loving and serving others causes us to grow spiritually
and it changes us more into the image of Jesus.

Here's something I can promise you.
Serving others will make your life better in every way.
Even if you have to put your life and your plans
and what you once defined as your happiness on hold.

It will change you.
It will crucify that
me-first,
it's all about my plans and my happiness
part of you that promises such joy
but makes us so miserable.

It may not make you successful
in the eyes of the world.
It may not get you to the corner office
or cause your name to ring out.

But it will make you pleasing to your Lord and Savior.

And it will make you a man that other men,
real men,
it will make you a man of integrity and substance
that other men can respect.