

5 Ways Men Need to Step Up as Husbands and Fathers

Lesson 26

Like soldiers, we are called to do our duty even when the storms of life tempt us to abandon our posts.

By Dennis Rainey



In 2003, Hurricane Isabel slammed into the East Coast of the United States, lashing North Carolina and Virginia, then moving northward all the way to Canada, leaving 16 dead and cutting power to six million homes. The edges of the hurricane passed through Washington, D.C., prompting the president and members of Congress to find safer quarters.

That was not the case at Arlington National Cemetery, where guards have relentlessly stood vigil at the Tomb of the Unknowns every hour of every day since July 1, 1937. When the hurricane hit, the soldiers remained at their posts even though they were given permission to seek shelter.

That's what a soldier does. He acknowledges the storm, but he doesn't give in to it. He stands firm. As a friend told me, "If these men can stand guard over the dead, how much more important is it that I stand guard over the living—my wife and children?"

Like these soldiers, we are called to stand and do our duty while staring down the very storms that seek to rob us of courage, taunting and tempting us to neglect our duty and abandon our posts. These storms are packing some power.

Storm Number One: Damnable Training by Fathers

I once met a man who grew up in a remote section of our country. He admitted that the only advice he received as a boy from his father about women was, “Get ’em young. Treat ’em rough. Tell ’em nothing.”

I wonder how that advice worked for him in his marriage.

You could say this is a legacy of the “strong, silent, tough man” image often passed down from father to son. This is the type of misguided training in manhood that has corrupted so many men as the leaders in their homes—selfish men who control their wives and children so that their own needs are met.

And that’s just one part of the problem. Many boys grow up with fathers who are distant and passive. Fathers who rarely engage their families, and when they do, their half-hearted attempts to train their sons may promote irresponsible, or even immoral, behavior. Like the father whose idea of sex education for his 12-year-old son was to take him to a strip joint. There they sat for three hours as the women did their thing onstage. No words were spoken. When they arrived home later that night, the dad told his wife, “There, I did it! Now I’m going to bed.”

Too many men today were raised by fathers who didn’t step up to their responsibilities. Is it any wonder we have a generation of men who feel lost and aimless, not knowing how to face their fears or think rightly about themselves, women, and their own passions?

Storm Number Two: Fatherless Families

The relentless, howling winds of a culture of divorce have uprooted the family tree, and with it at least two generations of men. With our high divorce rates and the increasing number of births to single women, the number of children in the United States who live in a single-parent household has more than doubled since 1978.

Children are the innocent victims of this raging storm. The bottom line: Dad is AWOL in far too many homes today. This phenomenon has prompted David Blankenhorn, founder of the Institute for American Values, to pronounce that the fatherless family “is a social invention of the most daring and untested design. It represents a radical departure from virtually all of human history and experience.”

The social implications of fatherless families are endless. For example, the greatest predictor of a child dropping out of high school, committing a crime, and going to prison is his or her experience of growing up in a home without a dad. Many young people grow up today in areas where the only adult male role models they know are live-in boyfriends or gang leaders.

The fallout has only just begun: a crop of weak young men, and frustrated women who are looking for real men.

One of the greatest challenges any boy could endure is trying to become a man without a father to show him how. How can a boy know what it looks like to behave as a man, love like a man, and be a man in the battle if the main man in his life has abandoned him?

My friend Crawford Loritts works with young men to build their skills as leaders. In his book, *Leadership as an Identity*, he writes that the issue of courage keeps coming up in their conversations:

Many of [these young men] grapple with fear. ... I think that the dismantling of our families over the past 50 years or so has almost institutionalized fear and uncertainty. Divorce, the rise of single-parent households, and the tragic assortment of abuse and dysfunction in our families have produced a generation with many young people who are afraid of risk, and afraid to make mistakes.

So many of our young men grew up in homes in which they had limited or no contact with their fathers, or they had dads who were detached and didn't provide any meaningful leadership. We are left with a legacy of men who in varying degrees have been feminized. They are uncertain about who and what a man is, and how a man acts and behaves. They are fearful of assuming responsibility and taking the initiative in charting direction.

Storm Number Three: A Culture of Confusion

My son came home one weekend from his university—a large southern school not exactly known for being the center for liberal thought—and shared with me that he had been taught in class that there weren't two sexes but five: male, female, homosexual male, homosexual female, and transgender. No wonder young men are confused and young women are left wondering where the real men are! We're living in a multiple-choice culture: Are you an A, B, C, D, or E? Male sexuality and identity have become a bewildering array of options.

Think of what it must be like for young boys growing up today. Media outlets and educational elites attack the traditional roles of men and claim that a man who seeks to be a leader in his family is actually oppressing his wife and children. Our culture is permeated with sexuality, where children are exposed to explicit messages and distorted images at a far younger age than their parents were. The educational system doesn't seem to know how to teach boys, and as a result, girls are leaping ahead in test scores, college enrollment, and graduation rates. Boys are increasingly medicated because their parents don't know how to channel their masculinity, adventure, and drive.

Is it any wonder that boys grow up so confused?

“I don’t know how to do family”

In the wake of these storms lies a generation of men who don’t know how to be men. They don’t know how to have real relationships—with women, with their children, or with other men. And many grow up with what I call a courage deficit—they have little idea what courage looks like in a man, or what types of courageous choices they need to make as they move through their lives.

One of these men came to my front door one Saturday morning. I’ll never forget him standing sheepishly in the doorway. “Mr. Rainey, in the past couple of years, I’ve gotten married and had two children,” he said, “and I’ve determined that I don’t know how to do marriage. And I don’t know how to do family. Could you help me?”

This young man articulated what millions of young men are feeling today—inadequate, fearful, angry, and in desperate need of manhood training and vision.

“The Bible tells it like it is”

The Bible tells many stories of good men behaving badly—single men, married men, and fathers gone mild or gone wild through compromise, lust, murder, jealousy, anger, passivity, or cowardice. Scripture paints men as they really are, hiding none of their blemishes or barbaric ways. The honesty of Scripture is one of the reasons I knew that the Bible would be the place to go to learn what a real man should be and do. I began looking through the Scriptures, focusing on passages that talk about men and manhood, and along the way, I discovered five prevailing themes:

A Real Man Should Be:

1. A man controls his emotions and passions.

Whether single or married, a real man tames his passions. He doesn’t abuse women and children; he protects them. He keeps his hands off a woman who is not his wife, and he treats his wife with love, respect, and dignity. He keeps his eyes off pornographic images. He protects a single woman’s virginity and innocence. He’s not a jerk defined by his exploits below the waist. He’s a man with a heart, a head, and a conscience.

2. A man provides for his family.

First Timothy 5:8 exhorts us,

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

These are strident words. When a man doesn’t work and provide for his family, he feels a sense of shame. His self-worth sinks. A man who doesn’t work, who can’t keep a job, who moves from job to job, or who refuses to assume his responsibility creates insecurity in his wife and children. Every man needs to provide for his family.

I find that most men feel a natural sense of responsibility in this area, but many don't seem to understand that providing for their family means more than meeting physical needs. It also means taking responsibility to provide for emotional and spiritual needs. A father should train his children and prepare them to become responsible adults who know how to negotiate the swift and sometimes evil currents of culture.

3. A man protects his family.

To borrow an illustration from John Piper and Wayne Grudem on the essence of masculinity: When you are lying in bed with your wife, and you hear the sound of a window being opened in your kitchen at 3 a.m., do you shake her awake and say, "The last time this occurred, I was the one who took our baseball bat and investigated to see if someone was breaking into our house. Now it's your turn, Sweetheart. Here's the bat!"?

No! That's when the man gets up. But being a protector calls for more than ensuring physical safety.

Proverbs 4:10–15 describes a father who protects his son by passing on wisdom, helping him build godly character, and teaching him to reject the lies and temptations of the world.

"Listen, my son, accept what I say, and the years of your life will be many. ¹¹I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. ¹²When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. ¹³Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. ¹⁴Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. ¹⁵Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way."

This father is protecting not only his son but also the generations to follow as the wisdom he shares gets passed on and on.

4. A man serves and leads his family.

Those two words—serve and lead—may seem like a contradiction, but they are inseparable according to Scripture. While the Apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians 5:23** that:

"the husband is the head of the wife,"

he quickly puts to rest any notions that this leadership allows any form of selfish male dominance. He completes the sentence with

"as Christ also is the head of the church."

Then the passage goes on to say that husbands should love their wives:

"just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (verse 25).

This paints a picture of leadership that is contrary to how the world views it. A man is called to be a **servant-leader**—to take responsibility for his wife and children and to put their needs ahead of his own. He is called to demonstrate selfless, sacrificial love—the type of love we see in God toward His children.

5. A man follows God’s design for true masculinity.

Micah 6:8 tells us,

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The core of a man’s life should be his relationship with God. The man who walks humbly with God is motivated and empowered to step up and assume the difficult responsibilities that come his way.

You see, a courageous man is never off duty.

Adapted by permission from Dennis Rainey’s new book, [Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood](#), 2011, FamilyLife Publishing.