

## *Endorsements*

“Egalitarian and chauvinistic thinking have corrupted our ideas about godly manhood. With boldness of heart and pastoral wisdom, Rick Phillips leads us back toward biblical manhood—masculinity grounded in the cultural mandate, the cross, and the ordinary means of grace. May men of the church answer the call of this mandate to stand up and be counted, and to live out their faith courageously as workers, protectors, nurturers, and leaders for Christ.”

—*Eric C. Redmond*

Senior pastor, Reformation Alive Baptist Church, Temple Hills, Md.

Author, *Where Are All the Brothers? Straight Answers to Men's Questions about the Church*

“In the face of the widespread confusion in our culture, Rick Phillips lays out the biblical mandate for men to work and keep the world around us. This book carefully avoids stereotypes and legalistic rules, while unfolding with clarity and practical simplicity the biblical vision of men as individuals and in relationships to other men, to our wives and children, and to the church of Jesus Christ. I learned much from this book and look forward to sharing it with my sons.”

—*Iain M. Duguid*

Professor of religion

Grove City College, Grove City, Pa.

# The Masculine Mandate

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God's Calling to Men

Richard D. Phillips



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*To Sharon,  
my greatest help in this world,  
and to our sons, Matthew and Jonathan*

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*Part One*

*UNDERSTANDING  
OUR MANDATE*

## *Chapter 1*

# Man in the Garden

I think it's not a bad idea to begin this book on masculinity by recalling something I read in a sports magazine in a barber shop. Not a hair salon—a barber shop! The article was about the new nonconventional sports, focusing especially on Moto-X freestyle motocross. These are the sports of people who jump motorcycles over buildings or hang from the handlebars while somersaulting their bikes fifty feet in the air. The leading figure in this sport is Brian Deegan, who, it turns out, recently became a Christian.

In 1997, Deegan formed the Metal Mulisha freestyle motocross team. Over the next eight years, Deegan and his friends won numerous races and jumping competitions while establishing their reputation for mayhem, destruction, and violence. Their lifestyle was emblemized by their tattoos and Nazi symbolism, and focused mainly on motorcycles, alcohol, drugs, sex, and fighting.

Three things happened to Deegan that led to a radical change. The first was that his girlfriend became pregnant and insisted on keeping their child. The second was a failed attempt at a high-speed midair backflip in the 2006

X-Games that nearly ended Deegan's life and led to months of physical rehabilitation. The third was his agreement to attend church with his girlfriend. To his surprise, he didn't hate it and, before long, he had come to saving faith in Jesus. As a result, he married his girlfriend and quit drinking and drugs; another result was that he invited his fellow Metal Mulisha bikers to study the Bible with him. One by one, many were born again to faith in Jesus. "He kept telling us how much the Bible changed his life," one recalled. "I felt like I had to listen." Deegan, once the epitome of the angry, foul-mouthed insurrectionist, now sits with a Bible open on his lap and tells sports journalists that he wants his daughter to be able to look up to his example as a Christian father.<sup>1</sup>

I have kept up with Deegan from time to time since reading that article. If you check up on this young Christian, you will find that he has plenty of growth in godliness still to do, but what is most important is that he knows it. When asked in one interview about the obvious changes in his lifestyle, Deegan answered with these immortal words: "I had kids and I have to be a role model to represent to my kids. . . . I had to grow up, had to be a man, had to be a father, and so I did it, dude."<sup>2</sup> My guess is that as Deegan grows as a Christian, he will learn more and more that he has not yet "done it, dude." There is plenty of growing up that all Christian men still need to do. But here is the question that comes to my mind: once a Brian Deegan realizes God is calling him to be a man, where can a dude like him find out how?

When it comes to practically every question about God's intentions for men and women, the answer is almost always the same: go back to the garden. When Jesus was asked about marriage (Matt. 19:4–6), He answered from Genesis 2. Likewise, when Paul was discussing the role of women in relation to men (1 Tim. 2:11–14), he found his answers in Genesis 2. The New Testament sees issues of gender and male-female relationships answered in the opening chapters of the Bible: the basic teaching on creation in Genesis 1 and the record of God's specific dealing with the first man and woman in Genesis 2. It is here that we should search for the Bible's most basic teaching on manhood.

## MANHOOD: THE WHO, WHERE, WHAT, AND HOW

Just as we will never understand God's rules for marriage and His calling for husbands and wives unless we understand Genesis 2, we likewise will never understand what it means to be a man—single or married—without studying this vitally important chapter. Genesis 2 tells us four essential things about man: *who* man is, *where* man is, *what* man is, and *how* man is to fulfill his calling. This is obviously very important stuff, essential to an accurate understanding of our calling as men.

### *Who We Are: Spiritual Creatures*

Genesis 2:7 tells of God's special formation of man: "then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." This creation of man is unique in two ways.

First, God made no other creature with such hands-on care. To create the animals, God simply spoke, and His declaration was enough. But God formed man from the dust, molding us with fatherly care.

Second, God then breathed into man His own breath—the breath of life eternal. I'm going to come back to man's creation identity in Chapter 4, but for now we should realize that this means God made man to be different. We are not just one more kind of creature among many. Men and women are *spiritual* creatures. Earlier, the Bible says that God made man "in his own image" (Gen. 1:27). Both in our mortal bodies and in our immortal spirits (that breath of life from God) we have been *enabled* to know God and *called* to bear His image in the created world.

God has given us a spiritual nature so that we may bear His image as His worshipers and servants. This is who we are as men.

### *Where God Put Us: Covenant vs. the Wild at Heart Fallacy*

The next verse, Genesis 2:8, tells us important information that is easily overlooked. Once God made this man into something unique—a spiritual creature—where on the great globe of the earth did He put him? After all,

there was only one Adam, he could only be in one place, and throughout the process of creation God was clearly being very intentional in His every action. Certainly the placement of man would be equally intentional. The answer is: “the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.”

The Garden of Eden is described in the Bible as a small corner of the originally created world that God had made rich and beautiful. Adam was put in the garden, along with Eve, with the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” (Gen. 1:28).

How are we to think of this garden? The garden is the place where God relates covenantally to his creature man and where God brings the man into covenantal relationships and obligations. In terms of the Bible’s story of man, the garden was originally where all the action was. Adam was to enter into God’s work of creation, starting in the garden, which he was to cultivate and work so that God’s glory would grow and spread, and the knowledge of God would extend throughout the cosmos. The *where* of man, at least prior to Adam’s fall into sin (Gen. 3), is the garden—the God-made realm of covenantal relationships and duties to the glory of the Lord.

At this point, I have the unpleasant duty of correcting some erroneous teaching that has gained prominence in recent years. Since its publication in 2001, the top Christian book on manhood has been John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart*. This book has become practically a cottage industry, complete with supporting videos, workbooks, and even a “Field Manual.” In my opinion, *Wild at Heart* gained traction with Christian men in large part because it calls us to stop being sissies, to cease trying to get in touch with our “feminine side” (mine is named Sharon), and instead to embark on an exciting quest to discover our male identity. I can add my hearty “Amen!” to the idea that Christian men should reject a feminized idea of manhood. The problem is that the basic approach to masculinity presented in *Wild at Heart* is almost precisely opposite from what is really taught in the Bible. For this reason, this book has, in my opinion, sown much confusion among men seeking a truly biblical sense of masculinity.

We encounter major errors in *Wild at Heart* right at the beginning, where

Eldredge discusses Genesis 2:8: “Eve was created within the lush beauty of Eden’s garden. But Adam, if you’ll remember, was created *outside* the garden, in the wilderness.”<sup>3</sup> Eldredge reasons here that if God “put the man” into the garden, he must have been made outside the garden. While the Bible does not actually say this, it’s plausible. But even assuming it’s true, what are we to make of it? Eldredge makes an unnecessary and most unhelpful leap of logic, concluding that the “core of a man’s heart is undomesticated,”<sup>4</sup> and because we are “wild at heart,” our souls must belong in the wilderness and not in the cultivated garden. That is, Eldredge assumes and then teaches as a point of doctrine a view of manhood that Scripture simply does not support.

It’s easy to understand how this teaching has appealed to men who labor in office buildings or feel imprisoned by the obligations of marriage, parenthood, and civilized society. But there is one thing Eldredge does not notice. God *put* the man in the garden. The point of *Wild at Heart* is that a man finds his identity outside the garden in wilderness quests. In contrast, the point of Genesis 2:8 is that God has put the man into the garden, into the world of covenantal relationships and duties, in order to gain and act out his God-given identity there. If God intends men to be wild at heart, how strange that he placed man in the garden, where his life would be shaped not by self-centered identity quests but by covenantal bonds and blessings.

#### *What We Are: Lords and Servants*

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” God tells Adam and Eve together (Gen. 1:28). Here we begin to see the *what* of maleness, namely, that Adam was put in the garden to be its lord and servant. Adam was to bring glory to God by devoting himself to bearing God’s fruit, starting in the garden and extending outward to all of creation. For this reason, Adam was God’s assistant lord, exercising authority over creation: “Subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

This is the calling of mankind as a whole—men and women together—but of males especially. God placed Adam in a leadership role toward Eve, referring to her as Adam’s “helper” (Gen. 2:18, 20). God made the woman

for Adam, and it was Adam who named the woman, as he had named all the other creatures, for Adam was the lord of the garden, serving and representing the Lord his God, who is over all. Adam was not to devote himself, therefore, to endless quests for his masculine identity, but he was to be lord and keeper of God's created realm, bringing glory to the Creator as he sought to bear the image of God in servant faithfulness.

*How We Obey God: Work and Keep*

Genesis 2:7–8 tells us *who* man is, a spiritual creature made so as to know and glorify God; *where* man is, placed by God in the heart of the garden that God made; and *what* man is, the lord and servant of God's created glory. Finally, by going forward a handful of verses to Genesis 2:15, we learn *how* man is to fulfill his calling: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."

To work it and keep it: here is the *how* of biblical masculinity, the mandate of Scripture for males. It is my mandate in this book, therefore, to seek to specify, clarify, elaborate, and apply these two verbs to the glorious, God-given, lifelong project of masculine living:

**Work.** To work is to labor to make things grow. In subsequent chapters I will discuss work in terms of nurturing, cultivating, tending, building up, guiding, and ruling.

**Keep.** To keep is to protect and to sustain progress already achieved. Later I will speak of it as guarding, keeping safe, watching over, caring for, and maintaining.

Conceptually there is some overlap between these terms, and in practice acts of working and keeping frequently intermingle. It seems that God was using these two complementary terms to indicate the package of attitudes and behaviors that would constitute manhood as He intended it to function. It is helpful, therefore, to see the Genesis 2:15 "work" and "keep" roles as separate but related. Two words that serve as good summaries of both terms

are *service* and *leadership*, modern words that relate closely to the biblical words *servant* and *lord*.

Based on the teaching of Genesis 2, men are to enter into the world God has made as the men He has made us to be—lords and servants under God’s authority—that we might fulfill our mandate: to work and to keep.

## THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Let me end this chapter by going back to Brian Deegan. The last thing this brother needs to be told—newly married, with his little baby on his lap, and through his God-given talent holding a position of influence among his generation—is that God wants him to look on life as a series of ego-adventures in the wilderness so that he might find his masculine self. That is precisely what Deegan was doing *prior* to becoming a Christian. Indeed, this is what modern and postmodern masculinity has been all about—men behaving like little boys forever, serving themselves in the name of self-discovery. (Can we imagine someone like Ronald Reagan or Winston Churchill talking about going on a quest to find his masculine self? They were too busy changing the world.)

God has something far more exciting for Brian Deegan, for you, and for me. For it is in obedience to Scripture that the adventure of a man’s life truly begins. God calls us to bear His image in the real world, in this garden that has become corrupted by sin but is being redeemed by the power of God’s grace in Christ. He calls us to do this by being leaders and servants in the ultimate cause of displaying God’s glory and bearing the fruit of God’s love in real relationships. That is the Masculine Mandate: to be spiritual men placed in real-world, God-defined relationships, as lords and servants under God, to bear God’s fruit by serving and leading.

If you think this sounds boring and that you might prefer to pursue wilderness living on a quest to gratify your own ego, let me encourage you to stick around through Chapter 5 as we mine more deeply the teaching of Genesis 2. Then, if the case I will try to make doesn’t seem convincing, if you still want to drop out and live the rest of your life for your own glory, go right ahead.

But the rest of us are going to press on to apply our masculine calling in all of the covenant relationships of life: marriage, fatherhood, friendship, and church. As we do this, we will find that pursuing God's simple mandate for men provides clarity and meaning for our lives—and, yes, adventure too. To live for God's glory, fulfilling our calling "to work and to keep" with respect to those people and pursuits placed in our care—this is what it means as men, created for God and placed in the world, to bear fruit in His name.

I hope you join us.