

Masculine Mandate: God's Calling for Men

By Dr. Richard Phillips

Chapter 1: Man in the Garden

This book is designed to help clarify, specify, elaborate, understand and apply the God-given and lifelong project of masculine living to fulfill God's calling for men. When it comes to practically every question about God's plan and intentions for men, the answer is almost always the same: go back to the garden. Dr. Phillips begins the book with Genesis 2 as the foundational chapter in Scripture to describe four (4) essential things about man.

First, we are a spiritual creation made to know and glorify God. (Genesis 2:7) The creation of man is unique in two (2) ways. First, God made no other creatures with such "hands-on care." In the beginning, during the creation of the world, God merely spoke and everything came into existence. God intentionally and intimately formed man from dust, molded him with Fatherly care. Secondly, God breathed His life into man so we are not just one more kind of creation among many. Men and women are spiritual creatures made in God's image. 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 in the world.

Second, man was intentionally put in the garden in order to gain and act out our God-given identity. Adam was placed in the garden with Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion/authority over it." (Genesis 1:28) Man does not find his identity outside God-made covenants and duties to know and glorify God.

Third, man was put in the garden to be a leader and servant. Adam was to bring glory to God, starting in the garden and extending outward to exercise authority/dominion over all creation. God placed Adam in a leadership role over his wife. Adam was not to devote himself to other endless quests for masculine identity but to serve, work and protect what God put under his care.

Fourth, man is to obey God by working and keeping. In Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God put man in the garden to work and keep it."

Definitions of work and keep:

Work: to labor to make things grow (nurture, cultivate, tend, build and guide)

Keep: to protect and sustain progress (guard, defend, watch over, care for, keep safe and maintain)

Dr. Phillips says the "Masculine Mandate" is: "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."

A biblical mandate is a command or authoritative instruction from God that conveys a responsibility to perform a task or live in a certain way. God's Word gives us the blueprint for biblical masculinity.

As men of God, our goal should not be to pursue wilderness living in the quest to satisfy our own egos and desires but instead seek to apply our biblical "Masculine Mandate" to every area of our lives, marriages, fatherhood, families, work, friendships and churches.

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Chapter 2 - The Masculine Mandate

This chapter introduces and defines God's command in the garden for man to work and keep. These two words are the summary of the Bible's mandate for masculine behavior. We are to devote ourselves to working/building and keeping/protecting everything under our care.

Work: to labor to make things grow (nurture, cultivate, tend, build and guide)

We are to invest our time, energy, ideas and passions to bring good things to being. A faithful man devotes himself to cultivating, building and growing. As men, we should be using our gifts, talents and experience to succeed in worthwhile causes that provide for our families. Christian men should desire to cultivate something to honor and glorify God and be worthwhile for other people. We should be involved in the hearts and lives of those under our care. A husband is called to nurture his wife physically, emotionally and spiritually. As fathers, we are called to intentionally invest in nurturing our children.

Keep: to protect and sustain progress (guard, defend, watch over, care for, keep safe and maintain)

The Lord frequently states that He guards and keeps us and we should do the same for those under our care. In Psalm 121, we can see our help comes from the Lord. The Lord is watching over us and keeping us. He is always on the job guarding and protecting us. Our basic mandate as Christian men is to cultivate, build, grow and stand guard to keep people and things safe God placed under our care.

If we want to be the men God called us to be - men who are admired and respected by others - men who faithfully fulfill our duty and responsibility before God - then we will need to take the "Masculine Mandate" seriously. We need to "work" and "keep" like God has instructed us in His Word from the beginning!

As Godly men, we need to stand up and be counted when there is evil or danger. Our presence should make our wives and children feel safe and secure. We need to stand for truth and godliness in our society and world.

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Chapter 3 - Man's Sacred Calling to Work

Whatever job you do, is a holy or sacred calling, a responsibility God gives you to serve Him. Too often we think of our work as being secular, second-class and little to do with being a faithful Christian man if we are not working specifically for the church. Since God made us "to work" and we find a significant part of our identity in it but also need to have a good balance and keep work in the proper perspective. We should invest time and energy in our work and find true meaning in it, but also remember to retain our primary identity in Christ.

According to Scripture man is created to work and our work should please the Lord. What constitutes the right job or career for us can change over time. At times men might tolerate, dislike or even hate the work they are doing, but there is still significant value found in the work God has given us. God placed Adam in the garden to work and keep it. Usually, our identity is found through work and what we accomplish. Work is our "sacred calling" and if we don't work hard our families can suffer. As Christian men, we should work hard giving more than what is required so we honor and please the Lord.

Dr. Phillips provides some helpful questions to consider regarding work:

Does this work glorify God?

Does it benefit others and serve them?

Do I consider myself to be called to this work or can I at least do it well and find enjoyment in it?

Does it provide material needs?

Does it permit me to lead a godly and balanced life?

Christian men should use their God-given abilities to the utmost, seeking to give God glory. Whatever season we find ourselves in our goal should always be to honor and please God through the work He has given us. (Colossians 3:17) We should do our work in a manner that is pleasing to God and not man. We need to work with biblical motivation and an attitude of holiness while diligently pursuing excellence. How we treat others and do everything unto the Lord will radically change the way others see you and the Lord. Remember we serve an audience of One, to praise God and for His pleasure.

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Chapter 4 - Man as the Image of God

This chapter is about what it means to bear God's image. While the image of God in our lives has been marred and damaged by sin, men who have been redeemed from sin through Jesus Christ have been freed from the bondage of sin and self to live for the glory of God in all things. Therefore, for the Christian man, his chief end in life and his fondest desire is that others would see something of the glory of God – His mercy, His faithfulness, His power, His grace – in him.

Man alone is able to worship (spiritual) and has reasoning ability (rational) these attributes distinguish us from all other creatures. God created us to have dominion over all creation and implement His will. We are a reflection of His original righteousness, not perfect, but being saved to represent God to the world.

Bearing God's image equips us for a life of obedience as we seek to carry out our calling to represent God in the world. Our single greatest goal is to reveal the glory of God to a sin-darkened world, so that He will be praised and lost sinners will be saved by coming to know the Lord. The great purpose of our lives is to reveal the glory and grace of God by what we do and who we are. What a difference it can make when Christian men realize they don't have to be a fighter pilot, movie star or pro athlete to make a difference in the world. Every Christian man is called to get involved in God's work no matter how small or insignificant it may seem. We can have a tremendous impact and a stunning significance on those around us by living our lives, however ordinary it may seem, by revealing the image of God through our gospel labor for Christ.

The Bible identifies three (3) key resources as "means of grace" that can transform our lives: God's Word, Prayer and Sacraments. There is really no substitute for the regular practice of reading and studying God's Word. Few things have a more powerful impact on our lives than serious devotion to God's Word. It is virtually impossible to find a man greatly used by God who is not devoted to God in prayer. When we open our hearts to God in prayer, He is faithful to provide the spiritual power we need to grow. By participating in the sacraments, we remember God's grace to us. There is no higher calling or privilege than to commune with God and be conformed to His image.

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Chapter 5 - Man as Shepherd-Lord

This chapter describes what biblical leadership for a man should look like. It is by God's design that lordship, or leadership, is intrinsic to the male calling. Even though there is a leadership crisis in America today, men are still called to lead. It is of the greatest urgency that men understand and embrace Biblical leadership within all spheres of life – in our marriages, families, workplace, friendships and church.

Picture/Outline of Biblical Masculinity:

- God *created* man in His image
- God *placed* man in the garden for God's covenantal relationship
- God *put* man in the garden to work and be fruitful
- God *gave* man the mandate to work/cultivate and keep/protect
- The ultimate goal – “*the chief end of man*” – is that we might display God's glory to the world!

There are two (2) main reasons why we have a leadership crisis in America. First, in our sinful pride, we all have a resistance to being led, especially in America where we value our independence. Second, unfortunately we are familiar with leaders who have used and abused power to enrich their own lives.

If there is one image in the Bible that sums up God's model for leadership, it is that of the shepherd watching over, protecting and leading his flock. A true Shepherd-Leader fulfills his role in a way that evokes feelings of security. A true Shepherd-Leader's passion and attention are toward the well-being of others and not ourselves. Our goal must not be to carve out success for ourselves, but to leave a legacy of blessing for those under our care.

In Psalm 23 we see three (3) main tasks of a Shepherd-Leader: guiding, protecting and caring. A Shepherd-Leader must be able to point or guide followers in the right direction. To be successful we must master the skills necessary and that is done primarily by studying the truth of God's Word. A Shepherd-Leader will provide protection and security in times of trouble, danger or adversity. Shepherd-Leaders will provide provision, caring, acceptance, blessing and belonging. God calls Christian men to bear His image and imitate His Shepherd-Leadership in the world. Christ displayed the single most important example of being a true Shepherd-Leader by sacrificially dying on the cross for our sins, so that we could be redeemed and spend eternity in heaven with God our Father.

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Chapter 6 - God's Astonishing Design for Marriage

The second part of this book begins by discussing how little most men know about marriage, how it is designed by God, or what its purpose is to be in our lives. God designed men incompletely. Only a woman, a wife, can complete us for she is good for our physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual well-being. She is the one companion who fulfills God's intention in our lives. Dr. Phillips describes the wife as a suitable "helper" who is equal in worth to man, yet she is different. The Bible teaches the husband how to love his wife.

Knowing makes all the difference. *What do most men need to know about marriage?* It is surprising and sometimes shocking how little most men know about the Bible's teachings on marriage. Even though the basic answers are given to us "back in the garden" in Genesis 2. There is certainly little help from secular society as it is hopelessly confused and deceived about most relational issues.

The Bible's teaching about marriage begins with man being incomplete and in need of a "helper." God looked at Adam and saw he was alone and said, "This is not good." Men are not created to be alone or in isolation, but to be in companionship with women who are created by God to fulfill His purpose in our lives. We do not find completeness in our jobs or friendships, but in what God created. God said Adam needed a "helper" because it places the primary focus on the mandate to work and keep God's creation. A wife is called to help her husband in every aspect of life. By God's design, a man is completed by a woman and not just any woman only his wife. God says, "It is not good for man to be alone" but men tell other men to avoid marriage like the plague. Clearly, this is not God's desire. The best thing a young Christian man can do is marry a godly young woman.

God did not merely create a woman to help man but to "fit" him. The idea is women are not mirror images of men but are like a puzzle piece that clicks or "fits" together. Our society does not place a high value on being a "helper" but it is noble in the eyes of God. By God's design, a wife is made for oneness with her husband. Differences between men (husbands) and women (wives) allow a marriage relationship to be compelling and interesting. God wants men to learn to give, serve and love similar to how God gives, serves and loves. The main place we can learn these things is in marriage.

Love is not meant to be easy. Just as God's gift of His one and only Son was costly, God intends man's love for his wife to be costly. God's love is agape - sacrificial, selfless and unconditional. God's chief purpose in our lives is to teach us to love like Him and we learn that through marriage. It's not easy and it doesn't always feel good, but nothing valuable is easy. God does not command that men and women be identical or understand each other completely. God designed us to think and feel differently, but He wants us to "bond together and become one flesh." Marriage requires us to give up things because of love. The chief end of marriage is that a man (husband) and woman (wife) should know and glorify God together through their lives and love for each other.

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Chapter 7 - Marriage Cursed and Redeemed

Dr. Phillips teaches how sin corrupted what was good. Yet, through Christ, marriages can have renewed hope and redemption. He says, "God has cursed the marriage relationship with a poisonous desire for control by the woman and a self-absorbed focus outside the relationship by the man." The good news is that the Christian couple who are forgiven and sanctified by God through Christ, are able to show compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience toward one another.

The account in Genesis 3 is not a happy story. It is the curse of sin that fell on men and women in the garden that makes marriage challenging and painful at times. Sin's curse is the best explanation for the skyrocketing divorce rate in society even among Christians. Notice that Satan's first attack was on marriage. Satan's clever attack on marriage put Adam in a quandary: He thought he had to choose between the woman (the gift *from* God) and God (the gift Giver). He thought *refusing* the fruit from his wife was rejecting her in favor of God and *accepting* the fruit meant a rejection of God in favor of his wife. Adam's assessment was only half right. By choosing to sin with his wife he walked into Satan's trap of choosing the gift over the Giver.

In order to deal with sin effectively we must face it clearly. The first thing we see is sin immediately begins to ruin the intimate relationship God created. Only through the twin graces of forgiveness and repentance can we regain much of what was lost, so the unity God intended can be restored. Before sin entered the garden Adam was enjoying the blessing of the woman God created for him, but afterward he blamed and despised Eve. We (men) find it easier to accuse and blame others instead of confessing our sins and it undermines our relationship with God.

God addresses Eve's sin first and gives a two-part curse. *First*, is the pain of childbirth. The *second* part is conflict or an unhealthy desire to control man and the marriage relationship. Next, God addresses Adam's sin of disobedience of listening to his wife instead of God. God *cursed* the ground/garden that Adam was told to work and keep. God's curse magnifies the effects of sin on our relationships. Sin doesn't make things different, it makes things more painful.

We see from the beginning God had a plan of redemption and Satan will never succeed. We cannot experience joy and forgiveness apart from submission to God's authority. The struggles we experience are meant to drive us to our knees in repentance, seeking forgiveness and restoring God to His rightful place in our lives. After the curses, we see God's redemptive plan of grace by clothing Adam and Eve with spotless, innocent animals, a foreshadowing of the atoning work of Jesus, the Lamb of God, dying on the cross for our sins. Being loved, forgiven and sanctified by God through Jesus we are able to have compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience with others especially our spouses. (Colossians 3:12)

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Chapter 8—Marriage and the Masculine Mandate explains how the husband should nurture and protect his wife according to the Scriptures. This chapter teaches men how to cherish their wives and make their wife's spiritual well-being their first concern. When it comes to protecting - the biggest threat to women (wife) and family (children) can be the man (husband's) own sin.

God has provided a solution to our biggest problem. God in His goodness has withheld the punishment our sin deserves and His saving grace brings about blessings He originally intended so that we might know His love and bear His image for His glory. His redemptive plan advances us from this fallen creation all the way to His limitless and eternal glory. God calls a husband to lead and protect his wife and family. A husband is called to build up his wife's faith and hope in Christ through God's Word and prayer. Teaching in the New Testament about marriage shows that working and keeping are the patterns of God's calling to Christian men in every aspect of our lives.

In Ephesians 5 and 6 Scripture talks about submission in different contexts: wives submitting to their husbands and children to their parents. God clearly calls men to lead their families as husbands and fathers. Men are to nurture and cherish their wives and children. Leadership does not mean control or dominance. Men should initiate and take responsibility in their homes. Husbands and wives should work together as a team to bring glory to God in their lives and marriages.

Christian men should work to love and nurture their wives and families like Christ loved the church. In 1 Peter 3, we see **three (3) ways** to do that: live together in close communion, pay attention by getting to know each other, and cherish and honor each other. Truly sharing life is not just living together because marriage was created for more than that, you should know what is going on in your wife's heart and mind, honoring and cherishing her shows you truly value her. Be involved, know what is going on in her life and encourage your wife.

Men have been given the covenant responsibility and obligation to lead their families according to the Word of God. God calls husbands to guard and protect their wives and family. There is nothing more powerful in the lives of our children than for them to see their parents enjoy a loving grace-filled marriage. A strong Christian marriage is a blessing and spiritual legacy for generations to come.

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Chapter 9 - To Work: The *Discipling* of Children

One common lament from Christian fathers is: "I don't know how this happened! They (my children) have gone to church their whole lives. We took them to Sunday School, VBS and monitored their friends." Now they are not interested in church. Remember the enemy (the father of lies) is trying to deceive, distract and destroy our families. Make no mistake, his goal is to alienate and sever our relationship with God, our wives and children.

The book of Proverbs is filled with Biblical wisdom. Proverbs 23:26 says, "My son, *give me your heart.*" The **heart** is the key to everything! Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." The **heart** *includes our thoughts, desires, affections and will.* A wise father understands he needs to reach his child's **heart** and can do that by "*giving and sharing his own heart.*" A father needs to continually demonstrate love, patience, grace and mercy to gain the trust and heart of their children.

Christian fathers need to **disciple (teach)** their children and **work** hard to plant good things in the **heart** of their children:

- The seeds of his own faith
- A longing for truth and goodness
- His hopes and dreams for the godly man or woman his children will become
- His confidence that his children have all the gifting and capacity needed to serve God faithfully in whatever way God might call them

Here are **four (4) simple ways** a father can forge and create a strong relationship with his children by **READING** God's Word, **PRAYING**, **WORKING** and **PLAYING** together.

There is no substitute for **reading God's Word** with our children and for them to hear the Word of God from our mouth and lips. Fathers need to make reading Scripture a priority in our homes and live out God's Word in our lives. Fathers do not have to be Bible scholars, but have to share our hearts and lives with our children to bind our hearts together in unity.

Prayer is a nonnegotiable in the life of a faithful parent. Our children need to know and hear their parents praying for them. **Prayer** demonstrates our reliance on God through sharing burdens and praises for God's love and provision in our lives. **Prayer** is communicating and listening to God.

If fathers want to have a close relationship with their children they must **work** together. Fathers have to be involved and help provide support and encouragement to their children. Allow your children to be a part of **work** projects such as chores, yard work or general maintenance. Fathers need to be sincere, genuine and involved in their children's lives so they can create a bond of love.

Fathers should **play** alongside their children, have fun and share light-hearted moments together. We need to show interest and appreciation for what our children enjoy. We need to be actively and intimately involved in our children's lives to demonstrate how much we love them.

When children are little, parents have authority to tell them what to do and children are called to obey. But as children get older our power decreases and we will need to use our influence instead of authority. Parents need to gradually change over time as we release control and our children start making decisions. One day our children will face temptations from the outside world and our ultimate goal is to prepare and point them to Jesus.

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Chapter 10 - To Keep: The Discipline of Children Dr. Phillips discusses how we are to keep our children's heart through loving discipline. As we seek our children's obedience, we need to also exercise self-control. In fact, the most common way to provoke our children to anger is by erupting in anger ourselves. The author then gives practical advice on keeping the child's heart by both physical reproof and verbal reproof.

According to the Bible, the greatest threat our children face is not physical but spiritual - the dire threat of sin's power at work in their hearts. In Proverbs, it tells us to "guard our heart because everything flows from it." We need to address the internal sin problem of our heart to weaken the power of external sins. We (fathers) need to seek to keep our children's heart through obedience and self-control. Fathers are to make and enforce decisions through obedience and discipline. To be effective fathers we need to master our emotions and control our speech.

There are two (2) main ways we can "keep our children's hearts" through physical and verbal correction. According to the Bible, spanking our young children is absolutely necessary to help restrain their sin and teach them wisdom. It is important that parents discipline (correct) their children in a highly intentional way that will encourage repentance. The goal of spanking is not physical punishment, but to discipline (correct) them to acknowledge their sin and accept correction. Here are a few things that could help when using physical discipline (correction): seek privacy, clearly communicate the offense/sin, require acknowledgement of offense/sin, reassure/embrace and exhort/encourage. As a father it is important to remember we are not our children's pal or friend, but need to be an authority figure in their lives. Fathers need to speak in a firm, commanding, authoritative voice, so our children's sinful heart is not confused about the option to disobey their parents. Fathers need to enforce compliance and submission to authority, so their children understand and can be more successful later in life.

Fathers need to protect, discipline and correct our children from internal and external threats. Here is some practical advice for disciplining/correcting our children: be the bad cop, maintain a sense of humor, do not provoke or anger our children and bathe everything in prayer. Fathers need to take the lead in being responsible as the more stern disciplinarian in the family. Fathers who are tender and kind to their children usually find their children more receptive to receiving discipline and correction. In order not to provoke our children we need to be fair and judicious in our discipline. Try to be respectful to your children and encourage them even when disciplining them. Remember the importance and privilege of praying for and with your children.

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Chapter 11 - This chapter is based on the friendship of the biblical story between David and Jonathan. The author wisely comments, "The best friend is always one who turns our hearts to rest upon the Lord." If you want to serve Jesus well in your friendships, then "stand by your friends, speak to them the words that strengthen their faith, and, in Christ's name, share in their troubles and sorrows."

One mark of a godly man is his faithfulness in friendship to other men, especially Christian brothers. The Bible celebrates true friendship and most men find godly friends among the most blessed and treasured resources we have in our lives. The greatest friendship recorded in Scripture is the brotherly love between King David and Jonathan.

From a worldly perspective, people would expect Jonathan to be bitter but we see nothing, but a heart filled with faith and love for God's people. As the son of King Saul, he stood to inherit the throne and David's rise threatened his future. Instead of being bitter Jonathan embraced God's plan and supported David even when it was difficult. He modeled godly and manly friendship.

When Saul was pursuing David trying to kill him, being aware of David's dire situation Jonathan took the initiative and exposed himself to help David during this difficult time. Jonathan was sensitive to David's desperate situation and was used by God to provide the encouragement David needed. A true friend has to be willing to make sacrifices and not just in the good times but especially during hard times.

Jonathan strengthened David's faith and hope in the Lord. True friends point others to the Lord in their time of need and remind them of God's promises. Good friends are rare and difficult to find because they think of others before themselves. Christian friends need other Christian friends to speak the truth of God's Word to help build them up and protect them when they are afraid, helping restore their confidence and faith.

A true friend is someone who always turns our heart and focus on the Lord. We should treasure true friends and desire to be one by sacrificing our time and offering assistance to others in need. A friend sticks closer than brother (Proverbs 18: 24). The ultimate example of a friend is Jesus who willingly died in our place to free us from our sins and provide a way for us to be restored to a right relationship with God. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

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Chapter 12 - The Masculine Mandate in the Church

In the book of Nehemiah when he went back to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. We see the principles of Genesis 2:15 “to work and keep.” Jeremiah had half the men “work/rebuild the walls” and the other half “protect/safe guard” the city. Within the church men are called to “work” and “keep” in service to God. By doing these things Christ's church grows strong and remains safe for its mission to spread the gospel.

The foundational message about teaching and exercising spiritual authority in the church is clear: those roles are reserved for Christian men. Women can and should play important roles in the church, but they are encouraged to primarily teach their children and other women.

Men need to take their faith seriously and examine themselves according to 1 Timothy 3. They should strive to prepare and equip themselves to serve in church leadership roles as God has called them. Christian men who are not yet called to serve in formal church roles should never complain and should spend time devoting themselves to learning God's Word and seeking Him in sincere prayer.

The calling of Christian men to work in the church includes the idea of building and strengthening other believers. God has given each of us gifts: teaching, serving, leadership, exhorting, encouraging, mercy and administration. These are not an exhaustive list and we should find our spiritual gift(s) and use them to glorify God. Most often spiritual gifts are not revealed through a diagnostic test, but through the experience of serving the Lord. The sooner we start serving, the sooner we can begin to learn where the Lord is leading and calling us to serve Him.

Just as we are called to play a part in building the church, we are also called to build up one another in our faith. Back in Chapter 11, we talked about the importance of Christian friendship and strengthening each other. In Ephesians 4, God calls church leaders to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” and to preach and teach the Word of God “to build up the body of Christ.” Any Christian man who wants to serve the Lord must begin by devoting himself to learning and knowing God's Word. We need to equip ourselves and use our gifts to honor and serve the Lord.

Strong Christian men and leaders need to guard the doctrine (beliefs, teaching, principles) of the church. Doctrine must take precedence over all other matters and the preaching and teaching of Scripture faithfully and accurately is critically important. Christian men are called to safeguard and ensure people are treated properly. Godly men should step in when they hear destructive influence (gossip) or division to help protect the church and people. A healthy church functioning correctly by godly leaders who know and apply the whole truth of God's Word is a safe church where women, children and others may blossom in the grace of the Lord. Despite persecution or difficulties, the Bible calls men to “work” and “keep” the church until the day of the Lord's return.

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Chapter 13 - Servants of the Lord

In the final chapter Dr. Phillips writes about what it looks like to be a servant-disciple of Christ. The model of service to Christ is one that includes – a key principle – joy, a key attitude – humility and a key resolution.

There are many things we look forward to in life, but it doesn't matter whether we are successful or not according to the world. What truly matters is if we are faithful followers, disciples and servants of Christ. God has given us the blueprint in His Word on what we are called to do as Christian men and that is to work and keep what He has entrusted to us (wife, children, marriage, friends, work and church).

We need to truly understand what it means to be a personal disciple of Jesus Christ. It only comes through the power of the Holy Spirit and spending time at His feet learning from His Word and communing with Him in prayer that we became His disciples. True disciples seek to know, serve and bring glory to Jesus. John the Baptist was a model to follow that includes – a key principle - joy, a key attitude - humility and a key - resolution.

The first key principle we see from John the Baptist is serving the Lord. We need to be content with the place and provision God has given us and understand everything we have is a gift from God. We need to replace self-centered ambition with God-centered ambition and it will free us from envy and strife. We need to understand our place and role in life seeking to faithfully fulfill our calling to glorify God and not seek the praises of the world. We need to continually point others to Jesus as Savior of the world.

The next thing we see is an attitude of joy. Joy is part of the fruit of Spirit and is a deep emotion of gladness that we can experience regardless of our circumstances as we focus on our relationship with Jesus. True joy doesn't come from external circumstances. True joy comes from an internal faith in God. We have joy not because of our circumstances but because of our faith and trust in God. Joy enables us to serve because of our love for Jesus and our awareness of His greatness. Our goal should be to lead others to know Jesus and experience the joy we have.

The final key is humility. Humility is thinking about and putting others before ourselves. Humility is being content with our roles and responsibilities and seeking to bring glory to Jesus and not ourselves. This does not come naturally and must be something Jesus does. John the Baptist and Jesus modeled true humility for us by being obedient and selfless.

The Lord's calling to "work and keep" is simple to understand, but is not always easy to live out. God calls us to faithfully love our wives, disciple and discipline our children, be faithful in our friendships, work unto the Lord and serve the church. May God raise up a host of men following these Biblical principles so that He will be glorified!

As men of God, our goal should be to seek to apply our biblical "Masculine Mandate" to every area of our lives, marriages, fatherhood, families, work, friendships and churches.