



LEADING YOUR SON

INTO TRUE MANHOOD

Time for
TheTalk

STEVE ZOLLOS

Time For The Talk
© 2011 by Stephen Zollos

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-1-936908-17-2

eBook ISBN
Mobi format: ISBN 978-1-936908-18-9
ePub format: ISBN 978-1-936908-19-6

Published by Shepherd Press
P.O. Box 24
Wapwallopen, Pennsylvania 18660

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Page design and typesetting by Lakeside Design Plus
Cover design by Tobias' Outerwear for Books

First Printing, 2011
Printed in the United States of America

VP	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	
14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Zollos, Stephen.

Time for the talk : leading your son into true manhood / Steve Zollos.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-936908-17-2 (trade pbk. : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-1-936908-18-9
(mobi ebook edition)—ISBN 978-1-936908-19-6 (epub ebook edition)

1. Sex instruction for boys. 2. Sex instruction for boys—Religious aspects. 3. Sexual ethics. 4. Fathers and sons. I. Title.

HQ41.Z65 2011
649'.65088241—dc23

2011025879

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Foreword

In daily conversation, “The Talk” is usually polite shorthand for “telling children where babies come from.” Here, however, I give the phrase a big promotion and a much more significant job description. Let me explain.

This book is written to you, the father of a young son. It is built on the conviction that raising your son is really no big deal . . . unless you plan on him becoming humble, courageous, morally pure, faithful, selfless, and self-controlled: in other words, a godly young man. To get there your son will need a lot of help, and you, as his father, are certainly the best man for the job.

Through “The Talk,” as I define it in this book, you will help your son learn to trust in the Lord, and not his own understanding. You will open a channel of communication based on truth and love that will endure for life. You will talk directly to him—and with him—about difficult subjects you two have probably never ventured to discuss before. If done in the encouraging way I suggest, you will become a trusted confidant—his lifelong friend.

If this doesn’t sound easy, you’re right. In fact, if you haven’t tried it, it’s probably harder than you think. That’s why I wrote this

book. Within these pages I have made every attempt to integrate the truth of Scripture into the process and the topics associated with “The Talk.” Having “The Talk” with your son will require prayer, patience, and your own willingness to change. Think about that for a moment. Unless you are a very rare breed of father, this book is going to suggest that you need to alter certain ways of thinking and living. To serve your son the way you need to, to help him become the man God wants him to be, you are going to have to change. That’s what you’re signing up for here. Your son is getting older every day and, as I suggest throughout this book, it’s best if you can begin The Talk when he is about ten or eleven, or as soon thereafter as possible. Are you ready to help him? Are you ready to change?

This book is based largely on experience I have gained in raising my own four boys as well as my twenty years of health care experience, much of which has been working in the community. The techniques and perspectives I share are not sure-fire solutions, but I have made every effort to make sure that they line up with the gospel of grace and the relevant teachings from Scripture. To the extent that they do line up, this book offers wisdom from God—the best possible guidance you can give your son in this broken, fallen world.

One day your son will walk his own path. He will do some things right and some things wrong, because in this life we will never be perfect or sinless. He’s a lot like you that way, but through The Talk you will help him avoid many mistakes that otherwise he would almost certainly make—mistakes that can be harmful, corrupting, even disastrous. You will also be positioning yourself to be there for him when he does stumble. Because of you and how you handled The Talk, he will never have to say, “I just didn’t know,” or “I didn’t have anyone to turn to for advice.”

Using this material and building a foundation of open, honest communication that it can establish, your son can gain knowledge, wisdom, and maturity beyond his years. You will be giving him what he needs to steer through the moral and spiritual confusion of this world and make wise, godly, character-forming decisions. In the process, you will be making a friend for life.

Steve Zollos

A Preface to Mothers

Before we get started, I want to address mothers.

Ladies, everything you find in this book can be used to excellent advantage in households where a father is absent, unable, or unwilling to assume his proper role in this area. While the language of this book addresses fathers, you who may be in the role of both mother and father can take heart. There are two ways you can use this material to serve your son.

First, you can apply everything in this book by having The Talk with your son yourself. If you choose this approach, I strongly encourage you not to skip or skim over any topic appropriate to the age of your son.

As an alternative, I know households in which a trusted male leader has effectively walked boys through The Talk, either all of it or just selected portions. If you choose this route, both you and the man (perhaps a member of your immediate family, local church, or a close family friend) should become familiar with this material. Discuss what areas you would prefer to cover with your son yourself. As for the remaining areas indicate which, if any, you would like to have emphasized. As the boy's mother,

you should know everything your son is being taught. You and the trusted friend need to be clear on the goals of The Talk and the boundaries of the conversation. The trusted friend may be the one actually presenting some or all of The Talk, but it must be done under your temporary, delegated authority as the boy's parent. The responsibility that it be done, and done well, still resides with you.

Regardless of your situation, you can rest in the assurance that God cares deeply that your son be well served in this area. As you read this book and apply its teachings in ways that fit your circumstances, God will provide the grace you need to serve your son effectively.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

—Proverbs 3:1–4 niv

CHAPTER 3

Manhood as Designed by God

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Is it just me or does Christmas roll around more quickly each year? Of course I would never get all caught up in the holiday. I make it a point of pride to always keep Christ at the center. Or do I?

My oldest son Stepheno was nine years old when I took him and my son Phillip, who was seven at the time, to get our Christmas tree. Walking through a makeshift fence we entered a nearby Christmas-tree lot and into a winter wonderland of sweet-smelling pines. I could see as we entered that there was a wide array of trees: Scotch Pines with their sharp bristly needles; long soft-needled White Pines, the classic Douglas and Fraser Firs, even a majestic Blue Spruce or two stood amidst the Christmas forest.

I knew exactly what I was looking for. I was, after all, an experienced Christmas tree hunter. As a teen I had worked one

Christmas season on a tree lot up in Northern Ohio, so I knew my pines.

As we entered the display area there was a small three-foot tree that had been put aside, presumably for disposal or donation, but it was the first tree my boys saw. “How about this one?” I joked as I walked on without a second glance.

As I got to the “real trees” I turned to see my boys examining the Charlie Brown tree. “Come on guys, look at this tree,” I said, standing up a seven-foot Scotch Pine in an attempt to draw their attention away from the dying twig.

“We like this one,” Stepheno said bluntly.

Now I’m all for inexpensive Christmas trees, but not that one! I’m not sure it even qualified as a Christmas tree. The few needles that clung to the branches would certainly be on the floor before Christmas rolled around. Not only that, but my wife was expecting a nice tree to decorate our home with for the season. She would certainly think I was the cheapest dad since the Grinch if I brought that tree home.

“Yeah, that is a nice tree, but let’s look at a few others before we make a final decision,” I suggested, and the boys finally relented and came to my side. I pulled up tree after tree trying to appeal to their senses. “Look how full this one is.” “Look how tall that one is.” “This one’s so big that the star will touch the ceiling.” I even played the Mom card suggesting that, “Mom would really like this one.”

Finally, Stepheno turned to me, looked me square in the face and taught me a real Christmas lesson that I had forgotten. He simply said, “Dad, it doesn’t matter how big the tree is.”

He was right. His vision was 20/20 and mine—well, I had been nearsighted. The size, cost, and type of tree was completely irrelevant. This was the tree my boys loved, despite the fact that it had no outward appearance to attract me. It was not stately or grand by any means. It was humble and unmajestic—like my Savior.

I stood for a moment speechless as the truth of the moment washed over me. My arguments for “this tree” or “that tree”

fell like so many pine needles to the forest floor. One by one each of my arguments entered my mind and each of them were undone—I stood corrected. I paid the five dollars for the tree and we headed home.

My wife greeted us at the door as my boys proudly marched up with prize in hand. I could see the doubt as her eyes moved from the tree to catch my gaze. Raising my eyebrows I said in hinting fashion, “This is the tree THE BOYS picked out, isn’t it GREAT!”

My wife, being far more discerning than I, turned on a dime and welcomed the “beautiful” tree into our home, and I later explained the process by which it had been chosen. In hindsight we both agree that this small, frail tree was probably the best Christmas tree we will ever have.

God has put in each of us a desire to know him, to love him, to hear his voice, no matter our age or maturity. That Christmas my boys understood better than I that Christmas isn’t about things, it is about relationship—our relationship with our Savior.

This is an important lesson to keep in mind as we proceed with The Talk. We have been made in the image of God, to be known by God, and to commune with him. As you will see, our relationship with God has profound implications when it comes to being a man.

Manhood as Designed by God

God is glorious and his creation, us included, was made to reflect his glory. Think about it: God consciously created us and this world to be a reflection of his very majesty. He also made a fantastic, sinless, glorious place for us to dwell.

Unfortunately, we allowed sin to enter the world and have been watching the world become increasingly corrupt ever since. But God did not stop there. He had a plan to redeem the world through his Son, our Savior, Jesus.

We have been granted the opportunity to be made anew in God's image. But what does that mean and what does this have to do with being a man? Let's take a look.

Before the world had been tainted by sin, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Here we have the clearest picture of man as he was made to be, a created being who in some sense displays the image of the ever-existing, uncreated God.

To understand manhood as God designed it, we need to appreciate what it means for a man to be created in God's image. For one thing, how could we as males be made in God's own image if he created them male and female, each one equally in that same image?

We have to begin by recognizing that our Father God is not flesh like us. Jesus himself explained that, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). If God is spirit and we are flesh, then being "made in his image" clearly does not mean that we physically resemble God.

From Genesis 2:7 we learn that, "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." When man was first formed from the clay, he was not yet alive, but when the Lord breathed into that clay shape, it was given life and then a name: Adam.

We see from this verse that we are made in God's image spiritually, not physically.

This has important implications for our character and manner of living, as we will see in the following chapter. For now, however, let's return to the Garden and look at the "task list" God gave to this spiritual being called Adam, newly created in God's own image. Why is this important? Because it's the same "task list" God gives to us and to our sons. So that Adam would honorably represent God in the world, God called him to apply himself in four areas: his work, his sexual activity, his leadership in the home, and his obedience to God's law. Let's take a closer look at each of these.

The Cultural Mandate

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

—Genesis 1:26–28

Genesis 1:26–28 is often referred to as the Cultural or Creation Mandate. That is to say, what God “mandated” or commanded us to do when we were first created. We have been commanded to work, procreate, care for our family, and obey God.

Before we discuss these tasks it is important that we understand why we have been created. Understanding the “why” will help to keep us from straying into legalism when approaching these God-given tasks.

The first question of the Westminster Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” That means that the only way that we can fulfill our God-given tasks is to enter into each of them with a passion to glorify God that results in a distinct joy that comes from serving him with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Only when we do our tasks in order to glorify God instead of trying to satisfy our own needs and desires can we confidently approach our task list knowing that each of our accomplishments have glorified God, and our joy has been made complete. Our heart attitude is what counts, not the doing in and of itself. How we do our tasks reflects our faith and our love for our Savior.

God designed us for joy and pleasure as much as he did for work. Like our work, this pleasure must be directed at finding

joy in God and not in the desires of our flesh. We are to do everything for the glory of God, and in so doing we find our greatest joy both in this world and the next.

This means that if you can't compete in a sport or leisure activity for the glory of God then you should not compete in that sport at all. If you cannot work for the glory of God then you need to examine your heart. God even wants your sons to have sex for the glory of God, and there is only one way to do that—in marriage. Sex is supposed to be pleasurable and fun, but only if it is done for God's glory.

Because we have been created expressly to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, everything we do should work to that end. As we glorify God in the tasks that he has prepared for us to do, the result will be the greatest joy and satisfaction in our work life, our sex life, our family life, and our spiritual life. With this understanding in mind, let's take a look at what your son needs to know about the tasks he has been given to accomplish.

Work

The Lord God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground.

—Genesis 2:4–5

In this passage we see two things. First, even before man was created, it was God's intention for him to work. Second, we see that according to God's order of things, an essential role for man is to be a worker.

Adam, who represented all mankind, was given the two-fold task of working the garden and caring for all that was in it. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). This is the first duty of man before the fall: to work.

Your son needs to see that taking on the responsibilities of work is an important part of gradually transitioning from boy to man.

There is a place for fun and rest but we are commanded to work. God himself models the pattern of work and rest, as seen in Genesis 2:2–3. As for us, we are granted rest from our work. We are not commanded to play video games, or watch movies, or play sports, or go hunting or fishing—although there is nothing wrong with these things when we use them to glorify God. God commands us to be diligent and productive workers before we are granted rest. We should delight in our work as it brings glory to God and reflects our love for our Savior. This is one of the cornerstone points of The Talk, and one we will discuss in more detail in chapter 13.

Sex

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” . . . a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

—Genesis 1:28, 2:24 (niv)

God is not shy in letting us know that we have been created to be sexually active. He always intended us to be fulfilled sexually, so he set sexual pleasure into a single righteous and blameless framework: marriage. From the moment of her creation, Eve was Adam’s wife, and it is within the context of heterosexual marriage that God has given us the ability to fulfill the righteous, joyful, and holy act of sexual intercourse.

Clearly, Adam and Eve are actually encouraged to have sex in order to procreate, but only in as much as they are able to glorify God in their sexual relationship. God calls us to only have sex within the context of marriage. He also calls us to love our wives as he loves the church, with an unselfish and sacrificial love. The same is true for our sons. God expects them to be righteous and holy in their sexual relations. We are to think of our spouse’s needs and pleasure before our own, caring for her and sacrificing our own desires for hers.

When we glorify God in our sexual relations we are safe from guilt and harm; we are able to enjoy sex fully; and God is pleased.

This complex and pervasive subject will be addressed further in several additional chapters.

Family

For Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

—Genesis 2:20–22

In explicitly creating Eve for Adam, God established a permanent order within the human social framework. Adam was to lead and care for Eve, and Eve was to be Adam's helper. This does not suggest a lower position; God is clear that he made Adam and Eve equally in his image. The difference between them lies in their roles.

Listen to what God said when he reprimanded Adam. "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it' " (Genesis 3:17). Here God reminds Adam that he was commanded to glorify God by leading and caring for his wife, Eve. Adam should have not only obeyed God's command; he should have protected his wife. Leading and caring: both were Adam's responsibility, both are your responsibility, and both will be your son's responsibility when he is married. We will discuss marriage in more detail in chapter 15.

Obedience

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

—Genesis 2:16–17

Did you know that God's law existed before the fall and even before the creation of woman? It was simple, but also very clear—Adam was called to honor God through his obedience. He failed.

How many clear and simple commands have you failed to obey recently? How about these?

- Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).
- Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).
- Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:33).

Even though Adam and Eve's hearts were sinless prior to the fall, they were still tempted through the craftiness of the serpent. They chose to disobey God, though their hearts were sinless and pure. How easy it is for you, me, and our sons—who are all born with sinful hearts—to fall into temptation!

So what do we do about this? If it is so easy to fail God, and he has given us these four arenas—work, sex, family, and obedience—in which to follow him, what should we say to our sons about how to live? The answer begins with understanding the basic virtues of manhood, and what it means to pursue them in a way that honors God. That is the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 REVIEW

1. So that Adam would honorably represent God in the world, God called him to apply himself in four areas: his work, his sexual activity, his leadership in the home, and his obedience to God's law. God's call to you and your son is the same.
2. Man's first duty before the fall was to work—working and caring for the things God put before him.
3. God has designed us to be sexually active, within the protective boundaries of marriage.

PREPARATIONS

4. God has called your son to be a godly leader of his home, loving and caring for his wife.
5. We are dependent upon the finished work of Jesus Christ to save us from our sin and empower us to live a holy and godly life.

CHAPTER 4

The Virtues of Manhood

As we have seen, our calling in God—your son’s calling—will be carried out in the arenas of work, sex, family, and obedience to God’s commands. We do this as creatures made in the image of God. That is, we resemble God in that we are spiritual beings. That’s why Scripture teaches us to be holy and blameless, putting on spiritual attributes and putting off worldly ones. We are called to grow in holiness so that we might become more and more like our holy God, who is Spirit, not flesh.

I’m a Poacher!

It was a warm spring day and I sat working behind my desk. I had been to an event a few days earlier and had won a BB gun that I gave to my son as a present. Along with the gun came clear and detailed instructions on how and when it could be used.

The phone rang and I picked it up to hear my son Stepheno crying on the other end. "Stepheno? What's wrong?" I asked as my heart began pounding. I had never received a call like this before, and I knew something had to be very wrong.

Stepheno started in a halting, almost undecipherable sob, "Dad, I didn't mean to . . . I didn't think it would shoot that far . . . I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean it."

By now the sobs were making complete sentences indiscernible and I began using the scant pieces of information to paint a picture of what had happened in my mind. It had something to do with the BB gun. He shot his brother Phillip, or maybe Emerson with it, but it wasn't too close and it appeared that Mom wasn't home, or she was taking him to the hospital. My mind immediately shifted into panic gear.

"Stepheno," I replied rather sternly, "slow down and stop crying. I can't understand you. Now tell me what happened."

He tried to slow down, but instead of adding details his sobs filled all the voids. "I . . . took the BB gun and . . . I didn't know it would shoot that far. I really didn't know, I didn't even pump it up all the way," and the sobs broke out again.

"Stepheno, who did you shoot? Who did you shoot with the BB gun?" I asked as calmly as I could. My heart was racing now and I was already berating myself for ever giving him the gun in the first place. He must have shot Phillip, but was he okay? Were they in need of help? "Oh my God help us!" I thought as I awaited his response. "Stepheno, tell me who you shot!"

"It was . . . sob . . . a dove, but it was all the way to the woods and I shot him from the bathroom window. I didn't mean it! . . . I didn't know that the gun would shoot that far, I'M A POACHER!" he exclaimed bursting out in tears again.

Relief swept through me like a head wind over the bow of a ship. In a split second I went from trying to hide my panic to trying to hide my laughter. I thought he had shot one of my other children only to find out he had shot a bird, and accidentally at that. What a tender heart, what conviction, what power!

Stepheno was undone by the conviction that he had done something wrong. He wasn't scared of the consequence that I might bring, but rather what the incident itself had made him . . . a poacher.

When I got home I walked my son through the implications of his poor decision to use the BB gun without permission. He was appropriately disciplined, but my primary concern was to guard the spiritual seed within him that brought such strong and powerful conviction.

We all need to understand our relationship with God and how that relationship dictates the man we will, or will not, be. You need to teach your son how to discern the voice of God's Spirit and how to respond to that small still voice. It is that very voice of love, mercy and kindness that we can somehow find ourselves at odds with when we are tempted.

Your young man needs convictions and they can't come from you. Convictions come from hearing the voice of the Lord. They come from having a holy fear of God and knowing in your heart of hearts his will for you. Convictions allow a man to steady his walk in order to stay on the narrow road that leads to life.

To be able to hear the voice of the Lord, discern his will in your life, and to act upon it in a way that brings him glory is everything you need to be a true man.

Putting Off, Putting On

As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:3–4). Then he added,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off** your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to **be made new in the attitude of your minds**; and to **put on** the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

—Ephesians 4:21–24

How can we—creatures who are physical and spiritual and fallen in our sin—obey this verse? How can we triumph over our sin and our flesh to perform this profoundly spiritual act? More to the point of this book, if you and I have a hard enough time trying to obey this verse, how can your immature young son accomplish this?

Simple answer: Your son's spiritual victories will have the same origin as every one of your spiritual victories. To rise above the temptations of the world your son must set his mind on the things of the Spirit. Scripture teaches us to put to death those thoughts and desires that are of the earthly nature and to begin to show evidence of our new spiritual nature that is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator."

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

—Colossians 3:5–14

We have been made in God's image. We have the amazing privilege of being spiritual beings, just as God is a spiritual being. The responsibility that comes with that privilege (privilege and responsibility always go together) is that we are called to pursue

spiritual growth. We are called to become ever more “like God in true righteousness and holiness.” This pursuit is the essence of honorable manhood, even honorable young manhood.

That’s a daunting project, isn’t it? Does it seem impossible? As impossible as, I don’t know, a camel squeezing through the eye of a needle? If that’s how you see it, you’re on the right track. Not only that, but you’re in the right place to be able to communicate this truth accurately to your son. For our Savior told us that, “with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Here’s the challenge your son needs to understand. Like Adam, we are required to be perfectly blameless and completely holy in our obedience to God. The problem, of course, is that none of us ever do this perfectly. As James said, “We all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). So if we are sure to fail from time to time, yet God calls us to be perfectly holy, what does it mean to walk as a man before God? It means that we must put our trust completely in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who alone can make us holy and pure. It means that when we stumble and fall short of the glory of God we do two things. First, we return to the Lord and ask him for forgiveness, genuinely repentant yet confident that this specific sin we just committed was a sin Christ died to forgive. Second, we pick ourselves up again and keep going, continually seeking to obey God by the power of his grace. This is the basis of all repentance: turning away from our sin and in our love of God heading in the opposite direction, back to him again and again.

This is where our degree of familiarity and our current experience with God’s Word becomes crucial. Through the Bible we learn and are reminded of what God commands of us, and we recall the power and love and grace he offers us for both obedience and forgiveness. This means we should be continually growing in our knowledge of God through his Word. The Psalmist certainly got it right when he wrote, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden

your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:9–11).

The Metrics of Manhood

So then, we are spiritual creatures. We are made in God’s image. We are called by his grace to live in perfect holiness before him, and when we fail we can look to Christ for forgiveness and fresh grace. How then can we measure our progress, our success? How can we know we are becoming more like God in righteousness and true holiness? Actually, it’s not that difficult. As we press on toward this goal our growth can be readily seen in the virtues, or character traits, that rise to the surface. What virtues should we aim for? What do we want our sons to be like?

Let’s start with a definition of manhood that is currently popular in much of western culture. According to this definition, a “real man” can be described something like this:

- Muscular and athletic
- Never overweight
- Definitely not an acne sufferer
- A rugged individualist who answers only to himself
- A person who is tolerant of everyone and everything, because there are no absolutes in his life, only opinions
- Open to many views of morality, truth, and right and wrong
- A ladies’ man, with the emphasis on the plural, even if his choice in “ladies” is another man
- Basically deserving of anything he might want or desire
- Focused on being (or at least appearing to be) wealthy, smart, accepted, talented, liked, and admired

Is this the kind of man you hope your boy will become? Are these the “virtues” you want to see manifested in his life? I doubt it. In Galatians 5:19–21 Paul describes the natural tendency of our sinful nature to lead us into “sexual immorality, impurity

and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”

Paul then contrasts these detestable things of our sinful nature with the fruit of the Spirit of God in Galatians 5:22–23. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

I believe we can distill from Scripture six virtues to use as benchmarks and goals, things we can hold onto, measure, evaluate, and work to improve as we mature. It is not my intention to make an airtight case for these six being the only possible choices. Certainly there are other virtues that can be identified in Scripture. My goal here—especially as you prepare to talk with your young son—is to keep it simple by providing a biblically solid list that is easy to remember and will point your son in the right direction. A biblical description of a real man is as follows. A real man is:

- Humble
- Courageous
- Morally pure
- Faithful
- Selfless
- Self-controlled

How well do these terms line up with that first set of bullet points—the worldly view of a man? Not a lot of overlap, is there? Where is the self-centeredness, self-seeking, and self-glorification that the world continually emphasizes? Where are the themes of consumption and indulgence? Where is the sense of entitlement? In their place, we see a striking emphasis on looking outward. The second set of bullet points describe a man who takes the attitude of a servant toward others, whose life is focused not on self-exaltation but on glorifying God with his life. The world’s version of a man essentially sees others as raw material for his

own gratification and glorification. The true man, on the other hand, according to God's definition, seeks to love his neighbor and to consider others as better than himself.

Six Key Virtues for Men

These six virtues are spiritual fruit, closely and directly associated with being like God in true righteousness and holiness. The more we become like God, the more these virtues will be evident in us. For each virtue there is a short definition and a few verses for emphasis and elaboration. Paying close attention to these virtues will help you set your sights on exactly where you want to lead your son.

Humility

To pursue humility means choosing to accept the fact that your knowledge and abilities are limited, and in light of that, you are regularly seeking help and graciously receiving advice and correction.

- This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word (Isaiah 66:2).
- All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).
- Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

Courage

To pursue courage means choosing to do what is right despite the opposition of others or of your own desires (often the more difficult enemy to fight).

- Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13).

- So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me (Acts 27:25).
- Act with courage, and may the LORD be with those who do well. (2 Chronicles 19:11)

Purity

To pursue moral purity means choosing to live by the highest moral principles in both speech and physical relations, despite your own desires to do otherwise, and despite any external pressure to compromise.

- How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word (Psalm 119:9).
- Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:1–2).
- Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).
- Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure (1 Timothy 5:22).

Faithfulness

To pursue faithfulness means acting in integrity, keeping your word, and doing what is right before God, with fortitude and without complaint, because you trust God to give you the ability to complete all he has given you to do.

- So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1 Corinthians 4:1–2).
- Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD (Psalm 31:23–24).
- A faithful man will be richly blessed (Proverbs 28:20).

Selflessness

To pursue selflessness means placing the well-being of others before your own needs and desires.

- An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment (Proverbs 18:1).
- Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3–4).
- For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:16).

Self-control

To pursue self-control means to live according to the Spirit of God, choosing to glorify God with our lives and deny the sinful nature when tempted to do otherwise.

- Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).
- Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control (Proverbs 25:28).
- But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).

We All Need Help

When society settles on a false definition of what is good and desirable in a man, the streets become full of males who have never grown into biblical manhood. Guys like these might look cool, but morally they may be little more than children. What a sad and tragic thing that so many boys today fall into this trap and never get out! They buy into the world's definition of manhood and end up going to their graves morally stunted. The externals

of chasing this worldly definition of manhood—things like sexual conquests, shiny new cars, and rugged good looks—can never qualify anyone for true manhood.

Your son doesn't have to become a man like that. He has you to help him, and you have Christ, the Word of God, and fellow believers to help you.

The truth is that we all need help. Being a man is a daunting task, impossible on your own. To become more like Christ in true righteousness and holiness, a man's mind must be renewed and his heart must be regenerated. In short, your son needs divine intervention, and you must remind him of his dependence on God and the regenerating work of Jesus Christ. For your son to be the man that he was created to be requires full and complete reliance on Jesus Christ.

It is in these God-given, God-empowered virtues that your talk with your son should be wrapped. I guarantee these are not character traits or choices that have been discussed with your son at a public school. They are rarely seen on television or in the movies. If you want to be sure your son has an understanding of what it means to be a man, you will most likely need to be the one to tell him. In any event, you are far and away the best one to tell him.

CHAPTER 4 REVIEW

1. Your son's spiritual victories will have the same origin as every one of your spiritual victories. He must learn to trust solely in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Without a relationship with Christ it is impossible to walk in the holiness required to be the man God has called him to be.
2. Scripturally, a real man is humble, courageous, morally pure, faithful, selfless, and self-controlled. Your talk with your son should continually emphasize these God-given, God-empowered virtues.

3. It is in these God-given, God-empowered virtues (humility, courage, purity, faithfulness, selflessness, and self-control) that your talk with your son should be wrapped.
4. Scriptural manhood means hearing the Lord's voice, discerning his will for your life, and acting upon it in a way that brings glory to God.

Time for The Talk will help fathers walk their sons through one of the most important conversations of their lives. “The Talk” is much broader than just a talk about sexuality; it’s a conversation about manhood, about right decisions, about Christ. Time for The Talk will assist you in giving your son what he needs to steer through the moral and spiritual confusion of this world and make wise, godly, character-forming decisions. You will be equipping him to enter true manhood—a passage that many young men today never make. This book not only provides a complete framework for discussing the key areas of manhood that every boy should learn from his father; it also guides you into developing a relationship based on truth and love that will endure for life.

This book is about “The Talk,” but it’s about even bigger fish than the “sex talk.” It clearly, primarily, and practically includes that huge fish, but it’s also about how a dad (or mom) can have personal, intimate conversations with their young sons about the rich relationships Christ wants them to have with Him, with women, and with the world at large.

Rick Horne, author of *Get Outta My Face!*

Site Coordinator, The Urban Ministry Institute, Chester, PA

According to researchers over 60% of boys from Christian homes never receive “The Talk”. Many dads want to have “The Talk” but feel so ill-equipped that they never get to it. Dads (and Moms) Steve Zollos has come to your rescue. This book is comprehensive, insightful, biblical, gospel centered and above all doable.

Tedd Tripp, Pastor, Author, Conference Speaker

Anticipation of “The Talk” may terrify fathers. Be terrified no more! Time for The Talk is practical, helpful, biblical and real. When it comes to discussing human sexuality, Steve Zollos gets it right, and with his help you and your son will too.

John Younts, author of *Everyday Talk*, blogger

A comprehensive guide to a most significant father-son conversation, Time for The Talk offers sound practical guidance rooted in biblical wisdom. Zollos provides dads with every detail essential to a genuinely biblical conversation with their sons about sex. As a father of two boys and a counselor, I find this book to be a helpful and needed resource!

Jeremy Lelek, M.A., President, Association of Biblical Counselors

Steve Zollos is publishing editor of *GoodHealth Magazine*, and a community liaison helping to bring health and wellness to struggling people and neighborhoods while leading the Building Healthy Communities Initiative in the City of Norfolk. He and his wife Debbie have four sons and one daughter.

Cover design: Christopher Tobias
Cover image © Tim Pannell/Corbis



Shepherd Press
P.O. Box 24 · Wapwallopen, PA 18660

www.shepherdpress.com

ISBN: 978-1-936908-17-2



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