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# Introduction

*Made for Manhood* was written in response to a pressing need for an effective, biblical guide toward Christian maturity for boys and young men. Over recent times, it has become clear that the book has made an impact fathers and single men as well. And we are encouraged to know that mothers and wives have also gained a greater appreciation and understanding of what makes their sons and husbands so very different, so...*masculine*.

It has been our observation that the concept of true, biblical masculinity has been nearly lost in our culture. To be sure, it is not wholly lost; many of us are acquainted with numerous men who know what it means to be a real man, one who is complete in Christ. But for a variety of reasons, a full, accurate expression of biblical masculinity is the exception, rather than the norm, within most American families, and sadly, many churches.

It has been well documented that our country has suffered the brunt of an all-out assault on biblical masculinity (and for that matter, any semblance of defined manhood) for over a generation. In many segments of our culture, the attack has been so severe and thorough that the forces behind the onslaught have blurred the concept of manhood altogether. The Church has largely held its ground, affirming the distinction between man and woman, but too often it has veiled the full meaning of the distinction with teachings laden with political correctness. The result: a population of young males who suspects that manhood involves more than gender but doesn't really know what to conclude about the concept, let alone confidently express it.

In fairness, certain church leaders have declared their own wars on political correctness, but too many times the pendulum has swung—hence the various sects that have emerged suggesting that manhood involves either an effeminate, back seat approach to leadership, or conversely, the imposition of unnecessary control.

*Made for Manhood* aims to bring an empowering, doctrinally sound balance to the matter of being a mature, Christian man. It may help the reader to understand our primary core convictions and intentions in relation to generating a narrative that we hope is both effective and engaging.

### **Our Core Convictions and Intentions for the Reader**

- ***We believe that complete maturity can only be realized through Jesus Christ.*** We believe in His Deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

We also believe that God has fully revealed Himself to us through Jesus Christ and that we can know Him by way of the Bible. There are over 250 Scripture references throughout *Made for Manhood* to assist the reader in a fuller understanding of the content.

- ***We believe that the godly fellowship of fathers and sons with other like-minded fathers and sons is one of the most desirable ways to grow in the Christian faith.*** For this reason, the text highly esteems fatherhood and the relationship between fathers and sons (or appropriate mentors for fatherless boys). Likewise, it identifies biblical, communal brotherhood as a vital part of being the Church.

We have partnered with Teleo Scouts, an optional, parent-led program in which like-minded men join with their sons for the purpose of mutual adventure and godly learning. *Teleo* is a Greek word which signifies well-roundedness, maturity, and completion. For this reason, the reader will see the phrase *Completion in Christ* throughout much of our printed literature. For those interested, guidelines for forming a Teleo Scouts group are found at the end of the book.

- ***We believe that it is healthy and essential for boys and men to have occasional opportunities to learn, play, and work with each other in settings where males are the sole participants.*** It is for this reason that *Made for Manhood* is used by Teleo Scouts. In addition to the chapter lessons, fathers and sons engage in a variety of activities that they plan together.

Likewise, *Made for Manhood* may be used in certain youth or men's settings. Of course, the text can also be used for independent study. Regardless of whether or not you become part of Teleo Scouts or another group, we encourage men to frequently fellowship with like-minded Christians of the same gender.

- ***We believe that the potential of godly young men knows few bounds.*** *Made for Manhood* encourages and empowers the reader to be all he can be in Christ. We embrace the philosophy that the Christian life is an adventurous journey. While it is full of trials, it is nevertheless one full of expectant success by way of a wonderful and omnipotent God who has great things in store for His children.

We also embrace the philosophy that “doing right” is a privilege, rather than a chore, and that it can be natural for one to consistently submit to the leadership of Christ. We resist the notion that the Christian walk is a burdensome, nearly impossible thing. On the contrary, “...His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Hence, the narrative expresses the Christian journey as an exciting one, whereby abundant life is expected.

In this regard, we “talk up” to the reader, rather than down. That being said, the narrative is pointed, challenging, and quite frank in cases where it needs to be.

- ***We believe that mature men are ones who are properly informed.*** *Made for Manhood* aims to cover a wide variety of subjects. In doing so, it offers a forthright presentation of its contents. It is our impression that too many programs and teachings disregard or downplay certain biblical principles, and thus shortchange their recipients. The narrative does not mince words; it tells the reader “as it is” in a graceful yet forthright manner. Attempts are frequently made to incorporate humorous elements into subject matter without compromising the content.

Although the narrative is direct and thorough, it does not attempt to impose a legalistic list of prohibitions that the Bible does not explicitly address. And while the text celebrates the law of liberty in Christ, it does not do so to excess. In the end, the reader is left with clear, moral direction which emphasizes the golden rule of love.

- ***We believe that the development of godly young men is essential to a healthy society.*** We believe that God created mankind to be communal, and that any society void of godly, masculine influence will eventually self destruct. God intended men to be effectively influential, rather than be the unfortunate victims of ungodly influence. For this reason, the narrative in *Made for Manhood* encourages the reader to assertively engage with his culture, rather than withdraw from it.
- ***We believe God ordained men to be the leaders of the family unit.*** Therefore, young men should be encouraged and taught to be prepared for this important responsibility. *Made for Manhood* explains the biblical precedence for familial leadership and equips the reader to be successful

in his calling as both husband and father. An emphasis is placed on an assertive, confident, and loving expression of leadership as modeled by Jesus Christ.

- ***We believe that parents are ordained by God to be the primary educators in their children's lives.*** We believe children are a blessing from the Lord and that the responsibility of childrearing rests upon fathers and mothers. Parents should exercise caution when delegating portions of this responsibility to others, and in fact should refrain from doing so when the risk of danger is obvious.

We strongly encourage frequent parental input for readers who are in their teens or younger. When the text is used as a curriculum lesson for Teleo Scouts, parents should review the content with their sons as they see fit before a meeting time. Occasionally, certain content in the narrative directly suggests to younger readers to seek their parents' input.

- ***We believe God ordained the institution of marriage to be between one man and his wife, and that young men should be properly prepared and encouraged for this important relationship.*** Central to this conviction is the importance of instructing about dangers associated with the conventional dating system. In its place, *Made for Manhood* teaches conservative, godly principles which empower young men to make wise decisions.

The narrative throughout the text highly esteems godly womanhood. Among other things, it equips the reader with the ability to identify a godly woman, whom we fondly refer to as “God’s crowning achievement.”

We hope that *Made for Manhood* will be a blessing to you on your way to *completion in Christ!*

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# Being a Good Steward

Imagine a life where there are no responsibilities. In this world, a boy has no chores, no schoolwork, and no bedtime. He does not have to eat what is put before him, nor does he have to brush his teeth unless he wants to. He can leave his bike out to rust, and he can make his cat fend for his own dinner if he doesn't want to feed it. He can leave his toys lie behind his parents' car, and he can place his dirty laundry wherever his heart desires.

This type of life may appeal to an aimless and slothful boy, but an orderly young man on his way to maturity (which probably best describes you) would cringe at the thought of such a world, for he knows that in the absence of responsibility is the presence of chaos.

A *steward* is someone who manages another's property, finances, or other affairs. You may have not thought about yourself as being a steward, but in reality you are. Everything that you possess has been given to you by God, your parents, or other people. And the things that God or others have given to you are not to be squandered. Rather, they are to be taken care of, and the benefits of doing so are many.

## **Ownership**

We encourage you to embrace a Christian worldview in

regard to ownership, and that is *to consider that nothing you possess is truly yours*. It may appear that your muscles, skin, and hair are your own. The fact that some of your favorite tools and toys have your name on them may indicate they belong to you. It may seem as though the things you have earned by way of work or made by way of your talents are yours. But none of these things are truly yours, for if they were, they would also be *solely yours*.

However, nothing is solely yours, for everything you have was at one time allowed into your possession by God, and we should always remember what our Lord has said to this effect: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing*.” (John 15:5, emphasis added). So if you can do nothing apart from God, this must include ownership. If you own something, so does God.

### ***All of It***

There are some people who don't want to quite acknowledge that everything they have is jointly owned by God. Some resist this simple truth altogether. Such people are not likely Christians, and so we shouldn't expect them to think otherwise. But there are others, who for whatever reason, acknowledge God but want to think they can have some things to themselves.

Some people believe that God is somehow blessed if they recognize a certain percentage of what He gave to them, but the better way is to simply acknowledge God as the giver of *all* good things (James 1:17). And as we have freely received, so we should freely give (Matt. 10:8). Rather than thinking in terms of how much is yours or how much is God's, we admonish you to consider *everything* as His, for Jesus dwells in you, *and apart from Him you can do nothing*.

If you have something that you are not sure is God's, give it

to Him, so that you will have nothing of your own. How do you do this? Simply let it be your sincere heart's desire, and your offering will be done.

If you can get a hold of this view and make it your own, you will go far in protecting yourself and your future family from greed, envy, strife, and a host of other attitudes that will compete for true prosperity and peace. In addition, you will be better able to utilize your strengths and talents and thus be better equipped to love and serve your neighbor. In short, you will be the better man for it.

### *A Proper Grip*

What we are really saying here is that it is useful to have a “proper grip” on the things that you possess. If your attitude is always “Mine, mine!”, then your grip is likely too tight. It's all right to get a bit self-centered if you don't want to share your ankle with a shark, but most of the time “mine” is a sure sign of selfishness.

On the other hand, your grip may be too loose if you don't care at all about your talents or the things you possess. If your attitude is usually along the lines of, “I don't care if my gun barrel rusts; it will still shoot okay,” or “I can do yesterday's chores tomorrow,” or “Somebody else will help the neighbor; I just don't want to,” then you are not being responsible with things given to you.

### *The Brevity of Life*

There was a popular bumper sticker a few years back that said, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” The drivers who sported this bumper sticker were justifying their desires to stockpile things that would bring them fun and pleasure. Shallow-minded readers thought this saying was cute and funny, but anyone who gave it much thought could easily recognize its

depressing conclusion. In time, this bumper sticker gave way to one that attempted to sum the matter up more accurately. It read, “He who dies with the most toys, still dies.”

The Bible provides a more thoughtful statement on this matter: “...you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The psalmist also states, “...Surely every man at his best is a mere breath” (Psalm 39:5).

Perhaps Job had the best attitude toward possessions when he stated succinctly, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there” (Job 1:21).

### ***Temporal Treasure vs. Eternal Treasure***

Knowing that our life on Earth is but a fraction of eternity is useful, for it helps us to put our possessions and talents into perspective. Life is simply too short to be worried about temporary things. We need to practice the admonishment of the Lord, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal, for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

This world will often promote the message that the way to riches is through the collection of material things and money. This message will even come by way of religious people. But we admonish you to not believe them. While material goods and money can be a blessing from God, they can also be serious distractions to loving others and doing effective ministry.

King Solomon enjoyed unparalleled wealth at the time of his reign (Eccl. 2:4-9). While he found pleasure in his possessions (10), he nonetheless considered all he had done and all he had

owned as a “vanity and striving after wind” with “no profit” (11). He admonished his readers by saying, “Do not weary yourself to gain wealth; cease from your consideration of it” (Prov. 23:4).

## **So What Does Belong to Us?**

Our discussion of stewardship so far has helped us to understand that what we have is God’s as much as it is our own. But what exactly do we own? Knowing what we own is essential to knowing how to be a good steward, and so we need to know the answer to this important question.

### ***Toys and Tools***

Toys and tools constitute a good portion of the things you own. Some of these are not so easy to categorize, like a slingshot. Is a slingshot a toy, or a tool? It’s kind of like a toy in that it is fun to play with, but it is more like a tool in that it is useful in serving certain purposes, like scaring the neighbor’s dog when it gets in your trash.

The same holds true for things like hammers and wrenches. Normally these are considered tools, but a case can be made that they are toys because they are fun to work with. Many moms and just as many wives have not been able to tell the difference between a man’s toys and his tools. We acknowledge there is little difference.

The point here, however, is discussing the importance of taking care of your toys and tools. So we will get right to the point. Toys and tools cost money (we’ll be talking specifically about money in just awhile). The longer your toys and tools last, the better. Simply put: take care of them!

There are few things under the sun that frustrate parents more than having to constantly remind their children to take care of their belongings. If you are the kind of boy who needs constant

reminding in this regard, then you would do well to repent and make an about-face.

When you are playing or working with your belongings, have some sense about you. We hope you would have second thoughts about taking your BB gun into the sandbox to bury for safe keeping from pretend Indians. At best, you will cram sand into the seals and other working parts, and at worst you could forget that you buried it and thus ruin it forever. And we hope you would have second thoughts about setting small components to your bike in your uncut lawn. At best, you will take longer to make your repair, and at worst you will lose one or more key parts altogether.

Consider the boy who left his wagon, full of important tools, behind his father's truck all night long in the rain. You might guess what happened when his father left for work in the morning. This unlucky boy was left with only a few tools worth keeping and nothing to tote them in. The father was left with a flat tire and a loose exhaust pipe. A stupid boy concludes that his father should have looked where he was going. The respectful boy recognizes his own foolish error. But the wise and prudent boy stored his belongings in their proper places the night before so as to avoid this scenario altogether.

Know this: Sand and rain are public enemies to most toys and tools. Keep your belongings from these elements, and you will be over halfway to becoming good stewards of them. The other half involves having a "place for everything, and everything in its place."

We offer two final words on the subject of toys, tools, and good stewardship. The first is this: buy, trade, or otherwise obtain the best available tools within your means. There is something to be said for "getting what you pay for." Do your research, and make wise purchases. A tool that costs one and a half times more than a similar tool is usually worth it if it will

last twice as long.

The second is this: share your belongings with others. Assume that others will be responsible until shown otherwise. Remember, “Mine, mine” is the way of the selfish and immature. In fact, be glad when you share. Enjoy knowing the recipient is using your belongings. Doing so provides an unmatched blessing.

### *Collectibles*

In our culture, we are conditioned to own a vast array of items. There are many men who have moved their families into larger homes simply to accommodate the accumulation of so many items. This habit of collecting things starts when a man is young. Think about it—if most boys had all the birthday and holiday presents ever given to them placed in a pile, it is doubtful that a full size excavator could fit them all in its bucket.

For the most part, the ability to own and collect things can be a privilege, and so we don’t want to make collectibles sound like an evil thing. But we should all pause at the matter occasionally to consider one of Jesus’ most probing questions, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Be a good steward of the items you collect. If they are accumulating space, don’t assume that more storage room is your answer. It may be that they need a new home elsewhere. But while they are in your possession, take care of them, and be willing to share them appropriately with others.

### *Special Gifts*

From time to time, you may receive a gift that has a special intended meaning from the giver. Your Aunt Mildred may have given you a rare coin that she never wants you to sell, or

you may never want to part with the cool pocket knife your grandfather gave you. We encourage you to honor the giver by taking special care of these things, but know that it is impossible to keep anything forever. The day will come when it will be appropriate that you pass these things on to someone else, and in doing so you can honor the spirit in which they were given to you.

### ***Your Clothing***

The day will come, if it has not already, when you will be buying your own clothes. It will be then that you fully understand why laundry and the care of apparel was ever made an issue in your home.

We wish there was no need to address this seemingly simple topic, but alas. There is something in the heart of many boys (and some men) which gives reason for many moms (and some wives) to think their sons and husbands purposefully *try* to dirty and even ruin their clothing.

Of course, you and I know this isn't true. From our vantage point, clothes just kind of snag on things and collect dirt by being near it. The matter of remaining snag and dirt-free is simply out of our control.

Whether or not we can maintain a perfect wardrobe will likely remain in the realm of wishful thinking until the Lord comes back. But one thing is certain: you and I can *temper* the degree by which our clothing becomes worthy of the rag-bag. For starters, we can at least attempt to stay dry. In case you haven't noticed, dirt likes to cling to fabric more so when water is involved. The exception may be when soap is added, but we will leave a comprehensive laundry lesson for another day. Simply stated, stay out of the mud, unless of course you must track a wounded animal through it. No one should fault you for this exception.

And there are certain things, to be sure, that you have complete control over. For one, there is simply no reason you have to ever lose an article of clothing. When you are taking off your socks to go after a frog, take note so you don't forget them. The same is true whenever you shed a coat or shirt because you get too warm. For goodness sake—return home with the same clothes you had when you left!

Another thing: It is almost a certainty that your bedroom has some kind of hamper. If you are a messy boy, it may be that you will have to find yours. Use it for its intended purpose. And if laundry is part of your weekly chores, then keep up on it! A laundry pile is intended to stay small, not for a potential nesting ground for bedbugs or mice.

You and I live in a country where we are blessed to have good clothing at relatively affordable prices. Be a good steward and respect your apparel accordingly.

## **Money**

The Bible speaks about money frequently, and so we need to know a few things about it. Listen carefully, for if you are not the master of money, it will master you.

### ***The Love of Money***

For starters, do not love money, for the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Treat money like it is a necessary tool to do certain things, rather than a means by which to gain riches.

However, you will encounter a number of Christians along the course of life who are in fact wealthy. Are these people sinning because of their state? Not necessarily, for the fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. In fact, some of the most respected Christians are wealthy. While there are several warnings in the

# Made for Marriage

The subject of marriage is one that we are most proud of. How privileged we are to present to you some of what we know about it!

If you are new to this book, you would do well to first read our previous lesson entitled “Treating Ladies Properly.” Those who have already studied this lesson might benefit from a review. Indeed, “Treating Ladies Properly” and “Made for Marriage” go hand in hand as much as any two lessons can.

You will find, in the lesson that follows, encouragement upon encouragement regarding this wonderful topic. To be sure, we will include cautions, but each point made will guide you toward truth, wisdom, and sound reason.

## ***In the Beginning...***

As you know, God created the world and all that is in it. But did you know that when He did so He also created the first *institution*, and that this institution was marriage? This fact is wonderfully laid out for us in Genesis, and it is one of the most revealing narratives of God’s intention for intimacy ever written:

*The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and*

*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being...Then the Lord God took man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it...*

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." ...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.*

*And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*

*For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.* *Gen. 2:15, 18, 21-24*

### **God Ordained**

When we say that marriage was the first institution, we are stating that it was purposefully put into place by someone. The Genesis narrative makes it clear that this Someone was God. Indeed, He is the one who created and ordained it. That is why some people refer to marriage as *holy matrimony*.

There are those who do not want to acknowledge that God created marriage, for if they acknowledged Him, they would also have to be accountable to Him. Instead of believing marriage was God ordained, they have convinced themselves that marriage is a *social construct*, meaning that certain societies long ago "invented" marriage to suit the needs of their culture.

But marriage is not something invented by man. How

foolish to think this were even possible! Man could not have invented the institution of marriage any more than he could have spoken himself into existence. On the contrary, marriage is a heavenly construct, and as sure as the heavens reflect the glory of its Maker, matrimony is “clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.”

## **Marriage—A Perfect Design**

Could a man improve upon the splendor of the heavens by tossing tinsel in the sky? Of course not; so neither could he hope to improve upon God’s design of holy matrimony. From the beginning, the institution of marriage was a perfect one. And within His design, there are clear qualities which comprise this perfection. Let’s discuss some of these now:

### ***One Man and a Wife***

Marriage, as God has intended, is the holy union between a man and a wife. One would think that this quality would be self-evident, but unfortunately this is not always so. In fact, certain adherents to worldly ideals have made a downright mockery of holy matrimony. In this regard, they have attempted to redefine marriage altogether. This mockery has resulted in a variety of expressed ideas, ranging from the ridiculous to the grotesque.

We do not want to spend too much time describing what marriage is not. Sufficient to say, marriage is between a man and a wife, nothing less. Suggesting that it could be anything less would be like comparing the Grand Tetons to a termite hill, or the Pacific Ocean to a mud puddle, or the Great Plains to a briar patch. You get the idea. One simply cannot take the majestic and make from it the mundane.

### ***A Lifelong Commitment***

There are some who have concluded, for selfish reasons, that

a man and woman can just live together as long as it conveniences them to do so, instead of honoring God's original intention. Not surprisingly, God's intention involves a *lifelong commitment*.

Some religious leaders once asked Jesus a question related to this topic:

*And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*

*Matt. 19:3-6*

There are a number of important things that we can gather from this passage. For starters, we note that Jesus Himself, when posed a question, went to the Scriptures to present His answer, for He knew that Holy Scripture is the supreme authority on all matters. This is true not only for the subject of marriage, but for all other subjects as well.

Another key point is Jesus' emphasis that a man and woman become *one flesh* upon the marriage union. This is a vital component to your full understanding of the matter. One day you will likely be married, and you must understand that you and this lucky lady (although you may be the luckier), will no longer be considered two people in God's eyes. Rather, you will be one.

This passage also emphasizes the importance of honoring commitment. Jesus said that no man should attempt to separate what God has joined together. Just as God has merged the ocean with the shoreline and the forest with the field, so too has He

joined man and woman through holy matrimony. The two are as inseparable as can possibly be.

Oh, how we lament that not all who are joined in holy matrimony understand the strength of their bonds! Perhaps you, like us, have been witness to the awfulness of divorce. Divorce is never ideal. At its worst there are casualties, and at its best there is an awful state of confusion one must recover from, like waking from a horrible dream yet thinking you are still caught in it.

We will say a final word on the subject of divorce and then be done with it. Simply stated, you must purpose that divorce will *never* be an option for you to initiate.

### ***Love and Commitment***

We are proud to report that we have been witness to thousands of blessed, rich, and wonderful marriages. And we know that there are millions more than those we have witnessed. What accounts for the success of these marvelous relationships? To be sure, there are several contributing factors, but central to them all is an understanding of the relationship between love and commitment.

Perhaps no greater passage describing the essence of true love can be found than the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. In part, it says...

*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails....*

While we can glean several things from this wonderful passage, one thing seems to stand out. If you consider the various phrases used to describe love, you will notice that *not one of them suggests that love is an emotional feeling*. So we can see that love is a commitment more so than anything else.

How does one exercise patience? By *choosing* to do so. How does one exercise kindness? By *choosing* to do so. How does one exercise belief, hope, or anything else that comprises love? The answer is always the same—by *choosing* to do so. Perhaps no other thing that you will learn during your journey to manhood is as important as the conclusion that you will find here, and that is that *love is a choice, rather than a feeling*. If you are to be married one day, you will do well to dwell on this truth.

How does one choose to love? By commitment toward this purpose. So you can instill the important virtue of commitment toward your future wife now, even though you may not yet know her face or name. You can do so by thinking of her and praying for her, all in a spirit of awe, commitment, and anticipation.

To what degree should you love your wife? The love you express for your wife should be greater than your love for anything else. In fact, the measure of your love for your wife should be proportional to the love that Christ has for His church. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” So your love will need to be a *sacrificial one*.

### ***Sacrificial Love***

What is sacrificial love? Among other things, it involves a willingness on your part to become lesser so that your wife can become greater. It also involves accepting her for who she is, rather than trying to make her become something worthy of your acceptance. After all, does Jesus make a person behave perfectly

before He will accept him or her? Of course not (although there are plenty of religious people who would suggest otherwise).

You will see plenty of men getting angry at their wives for trivial things, but we implore you not to follow their ways. Getting mad for simple matters is really a waste of everybody's time and energy, and we would like to spare you (and others) of this. To the degree that Jesus tolerates your behavior, you should tolerate your wife's, and always give her the benefit of the doubt in this regard. In doing so, remember that "love is patient, love is kind...." Emulate Jesus, and you will do right.

We should know that sacrificial love can be taken to an extreme not intended by God. We have witnessed plenty of men who let their wives have their ways in just about everything. Perhaps these men think they are somehow demonstrating sacrificial love, but more often than not they are likely just "giving in" to avoid a fight, or they may not know any other way. Some of these men, though they may be aware of their calling to lead, are nonetheless ill-equipped to do so.

### ***Leadership and You***

Simply stated, you are to lead your wife and the rest of your family as God gives increase. The Bible says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23).

Does this mean that you will simply declare the marching orders and your wife will follow suit? Not exactly, although your leadership may in fact need to be direct at times. But just as often as not, you will be leading by being a *servant* to her.

God often allows us to make decisions simply because He wants to fulfill the desires of our hearts (Psalm 20:4). Likewise, you should want to serve your wife by granting her desires. Of course, God does not always give us everything we want, and so

you will need to discern God's will in regard to her desires. But when in doubt, listen and respond accordingly to her. If you have a wife who loves the Lord, you will be wise in understanding that she will often be able to discern God's will in ways that you cannot.

Of course, leadership as a husband involves more than interaction with your wife. It involves an understanding that the various responsibilities of decision making rest on your shoulders and a willingness to live up to this calling. The good news, as you likely know, is that *you were made for this purpose*. We have no doubt in our minds that you can meet or exceed all expectations in this regard.

It is our view that the wisest and most efficient means for a man to provide for his family is for his labor to be the primary means of income for the family. In fact, it is our conviction that he should make enough money to meet the family's budget without his wife having to work. Are we saying it is wrong for a wife to work for income? By no means! We just think it is usually best if the family does not have to *depend* upon her income. We hope you follow our advice in this regard. Needless to say, you will have to be a good, steady worker.

It will also be up to you to set various policies in your home. Where will you live and what kind of house will you live in? Who will pay the bills, and who will be in charge of cleaning? What kind of vehicle will you buy? Will you have a garden? Of course, these decisions and many others will need to be made with your bride in mind. You will want to seek her insight, her desires, and her counsel. Together you can make these decisions. But the responsibility of the whole matter rests on you.

We will offer two cautions in regard to the leadership you will one day exercise as a husband. The first caution is to not take the calling of your leadership to an extreme. It seems there are always a few so-called men who think that leading their wives

means controlling them in some way. We have seen certain men become so arrogant in this regard that they make their wives follow them around, rarely letting them speak for fear of losing public respect. How sad this is. It is as though these men were teased on the playground during grammar school and are now trying to make up for their insecurities by oppressing their wives. You shall have no part of this nonsense.

However, there are those men that do not take their calling to lead seriously enough. These men will let their wives overspend, over-plan, over-direct, and over-lead in all manner of daily living without bringing a balance to the order of things. Some of these men may be victims of overly assertive women, but we wonder how many of these women are overly assertive simply because their husbands won't lead. This is a common trap that many couples fall into, and the consequences often trickle down to the children who are never sure of the family's order.

## **Planning Your Marriage**

“Wait a minute!” you protest. “I’m only halfway through this lesson and you already want to plan my marriage. I’m not ready...Slow down!”

Relax, we are not wanting to determine what kind of cake you will be having or whether or not your wedding will be held indoors or outdoors (although we do recommend a splendid pig roast with all the fixings). What we mean by “planning your marriage” is thinking about your wife now, even though you may not have yet met her. If this seems odd, hear us out....

Too many couples never give a thought to marriage before they tie the knot. In fact, there are those who literally elope and get married within an hour of deciding to do so. While some of these foolish couples may be spared their due folly, more often than not they will somehow pay for their lack of preparation. Indeed, they would have been better off to study the concept of

marriage beforehand.

### ***Do Not Be Unequally Yoked***

What kind of woman will you marry someday? We hope you have some ideas founded in wisdom, but if you don't, we will be glad to offer a few. For one, we admonish you to marry a lady who loves the Lord as much as you do. It will be acceptable if she loves Him more than you do, as long as you don't argue about this in public.

Do you love the outdoors? If so, would you marry someone who spends her day under the bed? Do you love fine food? If so, would you marry someone who would rather eat cardboard than steak? If you love dogs, would you marry someone who prefers the company of fleas? Of course not! Why then, would you ever think of marrying a non-Christian who, at the core of her very soul, was opposed to everything you knew to be right and true?

The Bible offers clear direction on this matter: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14, KJV).

A "yoke," in case you don't know, is a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals (like horses or oxen) are joined at the heads or necks for working together. If this team of two animals are "unequally yoked," they will not be able to travel in a straight line, for one will be strong and the other weak. At best, they will wander off the intended course many times. At worst, they will go in many circles and be forever lost. God wants neither; rather, He wants you to marry a lady who is as spiritually strong as He intends you to be, so that you can work together in a straight line toward the place of His leading.

So picture yourself as a strong and able ox, and behind you

is the master of the field and the plow which you are honored to pull. But yoked alongside you is a droopy-eyed basset hound whose feet don't come anywhere close to reaching the ground. And every time a rabbit or chipmunk comes in sight, this hound sounds off and tries to shake himself free.

We wouldn't blame you if the thought of being teamed up in this way took the spunk out of you. Yet this is kind of what it would be like if you were unequally yoked to a non-believer in marriage.

### ***Role Models***

If you have been blessed to be raised in a godly home, then you likely need to look no further than your own mother as a wifely role model. Is your mother perfect in this regard? Probably not (although she may be), but you should consider and appreciate everything and all that she does in the way of being a godly wife to your father, and look for a woman one day that will be somehow like her. Of course, you will find enough variance within the similarities to keep you on your toes. But you will be a blessed man if your wife is like your mother in at least a few ways.

Consider also some of your mother's friends. It's probable that you have already seen godly character emulated from these women. Mark these qualities down, and make it a point to determine a pattern in the things you appreciate.

Consider too the godly qualities that you see in your sisters or your sisters' friends. Now we realize that there may be a few things about some of these girls that are downright turn-offs. Maybe one of your sisters leaves her hairbrush on the vanity counter every morning. Maybe her friend talks too much or voices disapproval when you get blood on your pocketknife. But we aren't talking about these things. Rather, we are talking about virtues. Learn how to recognize and appreciate virtues.

The importance of this matter deserves special attention, and so we will discuss it further now.

### *Above All Else—Virtue*

In short, make virtue the supreme target of your affections. More than money, appearance, fashion, or fame, be attracted to virtue. Is she kind? If so, good. If not, then remove her from consideration. Is she patient? If so, good. If not, avoid consideration of her. And so on.... Let the list of heaven's great virtues be your compass toward a godly wife. Remember, "If virtue accompany it... it is the heart's paradise."

There are those who may think your standards are too high by measuring a lady against godly virtue. But on what grounds should you lower your standards? On the contrary, we say *raise* your standards when in doubt, for we know you will not be able to raise them past the highest heavens, and the highest heavens are where the truly virtuous reside.

What do you say to "good looks"? Do you place a demand on this vain commodity? If so, we admonish you to consider otherwise, for the appearance of a lady, unlike her virtue, can be stolen by either time or travesty. And we have yet to meet a married man, who upon exercising true, sacrificial love, did not consider his bride as the supreme measure of all true beauty. Let the love of virtue guide your heart, and the concern of physical affairs will take care of itself.

### *Recognizing Virtue*

How will you know virtue? Virtue is almost impossible *not* to recognize. If you do not recognize it, it is either because it is not there or you fell asleep during your study of the matter.

Virtue comprises the *persona* of a lady, and so you will see it manifest, among other ways, upon her countenance. She will

have the kind of smile that is never forced, and her candor will be smooth and confident, like the Spirit who resides within her. As her friend, she will make you proud for knowing her. As your wife, she will empower you beyond measure.

Recognizing virtue sometimes involves having a “blind eye” to the things that might otherwise distract a fussy man. In this regard, consider how Christ views His bride. Does He see His bride (the Church) with faults, or does He see his bride as being holy, pure, and perfect because He has made her to be so? The answer, of course, is the latter.

Therefore, as Christ sees his bride as pure and perfect, so should you also see your bride. View her as Christ views her, and you will see virtue upon virtue. You may, in fact, see virtue where others don’t, but remember, reality is always from God’s perspective.

### ***Virtue and You***

So far we have stated quite a bit about the importance of virtue within your bride-to-be. But what about your own virtue? Should you expect this wonderful lady to want to marry a man who cannot demonstrate the same qualities that he expects from her? If she is virtuous, she is likely wise, and so you should expect her to have a standard that is as high as your own.

Do you consider yourself “a catch” for a lady someday? If not, are you on your way to becoming one? We trust you are. And know this—that it is okay for you to see yourself as a catch, for you must be confident that you have something good to offer your bride-to-be. Just don’t let your estimation of yourself get so big that it clouds reality or makes you haughty.

What kind of man will you be toward your bride-to-be? Will you guard her dignity, her character, and her purity? We trust you will. She is, after all, the daughter of the Most High, and so

treat her accordingly. Even though you may not have yet met her, think of her kindly with godly anticipation. So guard your own dignity, your character, and your purity. And do so in both thought and deed.

### *Where Is She?*

All this talk about high standards may have you thinking that the virtuous woman we have described doesn't exist. After all, "An excellent wife, who can find?" (Prov. 31:10). Rest assured, she does exist, and it will be your privilege to find her. The good news is that the search will be somewhat easier than you think, for in all likelihood she will want to be found.

But how will you recognize her? In our estimation, this is a question that has paralyzed too many Christian young men. There seems to be a teaching that suggests that there is only one woman whom God has predestined to be your wife. However, we find this teaching to be against sound, biblical reason. The Bible indicates clearly that "He *who finds a wife* finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22, emphasis added). God has equipped you with wisdom and insight in this regard, and He allows you the freedom to find and select a wife who is suitable for you.

Of course, talking about finding a wife assumes one thing, and that is that you are ready to find a wife. Some of you reading this lesson are far more interested in making tree forts and go-carts than you are in girls, and we do not ever wish to diminish the importance of these things. And we know that most of our readers in their later teens are likewise not quite ready to go wife-shopping. We are not discussing this matter to accelerate it; it's just that we know that time has a way of slipping by. It is inevitable that you will one day be attracted by God's greatest design, and so you must have certain convictions on the matter which will set you up for success.

## The Road to Marriage

We will state up-front that we do not believe the Bible has a dyed-in-the-wool formula for how a young man should meet a lady and eventually select her for a wife. But neither is the Bible silent on this matter. On the contrary, it offers universal truths that speak to us, truths rich in wisdom.

One of the most vital admonishments offered in Scripture is Proverbs 4:23: “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” This proverb acknowledges what we already know, that the heart is something vulnerable, subject to damage, and that we must protect it.

### *The Dangers of Dating*

The need to protect our hearts is why we are so very much opposed to the conventional dating system that is prevalent in our culture. Think about it—dating actually *purposes* to promote affection (often quite deeply), and while doing so offers no *defined end-in-mind*.

Ask any proponent of dating what the ultimate purpose is, and he or she will tell you words to the effect “to have a good time,” or “to learn how to act in the presence of the opposite gender,” or “to accumulate multiple experiences.” While all of these purposes have varying degrees of validity, they can all easily be accomplished in richer, safer, and more efficient ways, ways that do not require the need to expose or share one’s heart.

The typical dating process goes something like this: A young man or lady (sometimes barely teen-aged) is physically attracted to someone (who is equally young and naïve). Having hardly thought the matter out, they exchange some sort of mutual affection. “I like you more than anybody else,” “You are always on my mind,” or “I love you” are just some of the many things

that might be said, written, or otherwise implied. And once an expression is received in the heart of another, there is left a looming, unanswered question: “*For how long will you like me more than anybody else?*”, “*For how long will I always be on your mind?*”, “*For how long will you love me?*”

Thus, there is always an ongoing uncertainty which is never really satisfied. And of course, there *is* an answer to the question “for how long,” which is inevitably revealed. This answer, unfortunately, is something similar to, “*I will demonstrate fondness, think about, or otherwise love you until I become tired of you or determine that you are no longer worthy of my affection, at which point I will attempt to return your heart, if in fact I am still able to present it in one piece.*”

The irony of the dating system is that it *practices breaking up!* By the time some men and women think they are ready to get married, they will have already been in dozens of relationships with varying degrees of intimacy, each of which resulted in a break-up. Sadly, a pattern emerges in which a person *expects* a relationship to go sour. It is human nature to think thus. Really, it is no wonder so many marriages end in divorce. In reality, dating has contributed to divorce by conditioning our culture to think that breaking up is a normal thing.

So, are we against the idea of you or other young men spending time with certain ladies? By no means! We would not deprive you of experiencing the presence of God’s crowning achievement. But we do know that your journey to marriage presents the opportunity for you to embrace certain convictions that will set you and your bride-to-be up for success.

### ***Courtship***

Much has been written about the subject of courtship, and we do not claim to have the final word on the matter. Nor do we claim that there is any one-set-way of engaging in the courtship

process. The Bible does not claim to present one, and so neither do we. So what we offer here are some simple, straightforward principles that can guide any man (and his bride-to-be) toward the beginnings of a successful marriage:

### ***Know How to Recognize Her***

First and foremost: Know what you are looking for in a future wife. We have already discussed the importance of virtue, so confidently assess what is important to you. Discuss these matters with your parents or close friends. While it's not vital, it may be useful to write these qualities down.

Proponents of dating argue that there is no way of really knowing a lady unless you date her. Respectfully, we disagree. We see little to be gained and lots to be lost with this approach. What adherents to the dating view fail to realize is that the best way to *really* know a lady is by observing her in *real life situations*. If a man is formally dating a lady, there is always the temptation to perform in certain ways to gain approval.

A far better way is to observe and study how a lady behaves toward her parents, her siblings, her friends, strangers, and of course, you. And the best places to make these observations are in natural ones, ones that are not contrived and where there is no need to wonder about ulterior motives. In making your observations, consider a lady's convictions on important matters and how they are naturally manifested in her life. Meanwhile, enjoy her company!

### ***Seeking Godly Wisdom***

The book of James tells us that "...if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (1:5). Without the seeking of Godly wisdom in all matters (especially this one), you are like a traveler going out in a stormy forest at night without a

compass. Seek God's input on whom you are to marry, and you will be richly rewarded.

### ***Parental Input***

We strongly suggest having a conversation with your parents in regard to when you might be ready to formally pursue marriage. There are several variables to consider, like your age, how much money you might want to have saved up, or how far along you might be in your schooling or career. The Bible offers no rules or formulas to these things, and so we will not imply any.

Of course, never feel pressured to get married. There is nothing implied in this lesson that suggests you should start your search now. That being said, we will offer some guidelines in regard to the timing aspect of this whole thing.

When you become fond of a particular lady, let your parents know. Get their wisdom and insight on the matter. But it is important that your feelings *not* be shared with the lady, at least not quite yet. In fact, we implore you to keep your thoughts only to yourself, your parents, or an appropriate mentor. While there is wisdom in the counsel of many, there is also foolishness in prematurely broadcasting something.

If, in due time, you feel you are ready to pursue this lady with the intent to marry, then approach your parents and make your case! Don't worry—they won't be shocked, not if you have kept them informed. Besides, in many ways they know you better than you know yourself. They know this day is coming.

Regardless of your parents' reaction, honor it, especially if you are under their roof. Once you are grown and on your own, you will have the right and obligation to do whatever God has laid on your heart. But while under your parents' domain, their word should be revered and respected. If there are concerns or

objections voiced by your parents, listen intently. It may be that they see something clearly where you do not. If you want to make an appeal, do so in a spirit that promotes mutual respect.

Remember, your parents love you and want what is best for you. If this was true for baths and bedtimes when you were younger, how much more will they want your marriage to be a success! And keep in mind that they are not losing a son so much as they are gaining a daughter-in-law. You will do well to hear their entire heart on the matter.

### *The Next Step*

Let's assume your parents wholeheartedly applaud your intentions. Now what? We suggest that you don't order your tuxedo quite yet. We advise you next to discuss the matter with the lady's father. Don't worry, if he has any wits about him, he won't be caught off-guard. Approaching him will be a gesture that he will surely appreciate. Remember, just as your parents will be gaining a daughter-in-law, so will your bride's father be gaining a son-in-law. So you should be treating this man as though he were your own father.

By now you have probably gotten the picture that this is serious stuff. Of course it is! But this whole process can be one of the most blessed experiences of your life. Approach this opportunity accordingly.

Keep in mind that you are not at this time asking permission to propose. You are asking permission to court the lady, to formalize and define the relationship as something that intends to go toward marriage.

How do you approach your potential father-in-law? We encourage you to do so confidently. While there is to be expected a certain degree of nervousness, you should not act as though you were a stray dog about to get yelled at for walking onto

the lawn. If you are really nervous, it may be that you have good reason to be. Do you anticipate objections? If so, are the objections legitimate ones? You should be ready to address any and all concerns that might arise. Have the same heart that Jacob had when he first addressed Rachel's father, and you will be just fine (Gen. 29).

But what exactly should you say? We're not at liberty to tell you what to say anymore than we would tell the President what to say in his Inaugural Address. But if you really need a starting point, you can try something like, "Mr. Dowry (or whatever his name really is), I want to talk to you about Princess Flowerpetal (or whatever her name really is). I want to hear your thoughts about my desire to get to know her better. I'm really impressed with her and would like to tell her how I feel. My parents approve of my desire, and I thought it would be important to talk with you next."

Something along the lines of our suggestion would be appropriate, but we acknowledge that you could probably offer something much better. Just be yourself, and the rest will take care of itself. The whole heart of the matter is to let the lady's father know that you value him and have his best interests in mind.

### ***What Says She?***

It may be that the lady's father or mother will want to talk to their daughter about this matter before anything goes further, or it may be that her father wants you to talk to her directly. Regardless (and it should go without saying), the lady will have a say in the matter.

It should not be surprising that your feelings toward this lady are mutual and that she is honored by your desire to get to know her more intimately. If this be the case, then we are excited for you. But what does this step mean, and how should you go

about the relationship from here?

### ***The Relationship from This Point On***

Perhaps the best way of progressing further is for you and the lady to identify some core convictions and guidelines. In doing so, we encourage you to keep them simple and reasonable, but above all they should be founded in wisdom.

We really want to stress the importance of creating for yourselves guidelines that are simple and reasonable. The Lord's ways are not meant to be burdensome, and so there is no need to create unnecessary perimeters that will only strain your relationship.

You may want to ask yourselves various questions and create your guidelines accordingly. For example, will you both agree to work out any differences that arise in your relationship, rather than quickly conclude that you are not meant for one another? Do you both agree to refrain completely from physical intimacy as the Scriptures promote until that day you are finally wed (1 Cor. 7:1-2)? These and other important questions should be considered before your relationship progresses.

### ***The Proposal***

At some point, you will both likely experience some sort of mutual confirmation that you want to marry one another. There is no way for us to tell you how you will come to know this, for the ways of love and commitment are the subject of countless songs, ballads, novels, and dramas, each describing a unique manner in which boy meets girl. But when you do know, we ask that you make certain to write and tell us the story of how you and your bride came to be.

And while we are being bold with our requests, might we ask that you send a couple of wedding invitations if you do take

our previous advice about that pig roast? We would be honored to attend...!

# Made for Fatherhood

During our last lesson, called “Made for Marriage,” we discussed how the institution of marriage first came to be, and we identified several important qualities of a godly marriage, all with the intent to solidify a foundation regarding this important topic. In doing so, we placed a special emphasis on the relationship that you will one day have with your bride-to-be. But your marriage will not affect just the relationship you have with your bride. In fact, the union of your spirits will possibly be the *very cause* of additional relationships, for together you will quite likely bring forth into this world children of your own!

We can already imagine some of the different reactions that you might have upon initially reading this lesson. Perhaps you have instantly broken into a cold sweat, for you fear you are not even ready to do tomorrow’s chores, let alone raise a family. Or maybe you consider the matter unimportant, for you figure that fatherhood is something that probably won’t happen until you’re really old. Or perhaps you are properly sober about the whole matter, knowing that in due time the privilege of being a father will present itself, but in the meantime you still have your go-cart to fix.

Whether you have never given the matter any thought, or if you have been wanting children all your life, your reactions

are probably within the realm of normalcy. But as with any important topic of life, we want you to be *complete in Christ*, and that involves having a godly understanding of what God thinks about things. And most assuredly, God is not silent about the topic of fatherhood.

### ***God Ordained***

Like the institution of marriage, parenthood is ordained by God. Make no mistake about it—God created the earth with the intention that it be filled with people. The Genesis narrative makes this clear:

*And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over...every living thing that moves on the earth.”* Genesis 1:27-28

“Be fruitful and multiply,” God has said. And His word is still the same today. There is nothing to indicate that God’s views on this matter have changed. He has a vested interest in people. He loves and places tremendous value on them, so much so that He has made provision for their every need.

You should know that there are plenty of people who are clueless about the ordination of parenthood. And there are others, who, knowing better, simply disregard God’s say on the matter. As you might suspect, such people have embraced a faulty worldview, and thus are blind to the truth. One false view in this regard is not at all uncommon, and you should know something about it:

### ***The Earth as Mother***

It is likely you have heard the phrase “Mother Nature” many

times. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this phrase, you should know that many people take the wording quite literally. They believe that the earth originally brought forth all of the life on it, and hence the phrase and others like it. This worldview is not a new one, and has likely been around for thousands of years. But it is a ridiculous and ungodly worldview.

Science itself recognizes that life must come from life, but many scientists make an exception to this law when it comes to the origin of living things. In doing so, they conveniently disregard common sense, and ultimately, God. They believe that long ago, lifeless molecules, coupled with energy and lots of time, spontaneously gave birth to crude, microscopic forms of life that eventually evolved into everything else that is living. They believe that the earth is their parent, rather than acknowledging God as their creator.

At the heart of this worldview is the notion that mankind is here because of the earth, rather than the earth being here for the benefit of mankind. However, God commissioned mankind to “be fruitful and multiply” and to “fill the earth and subdue it.” But this false worldview does not see things this way, and in fact often makes mankind out to be the enemy of the earth. Proponents of this worldview often argue that mankind has filled the earth and subdued it so much so that he has now overpopulated and begun to destroy it.

### ***Plenty of Room***

The notion that mankind has overpopulated the earth is a myth, and it has neither a scientific nor sensible basis. The people who believe this false view have probably never travelled more than three city blocks, or they are just plain blind to the vastness of the earth. Indeed, the earth is vast, and you can be sure that if God made it to be the home of His children, He would also make provision in regard to room.

Here's an interesting fact to help clarify this point: Did you know that you could line up all the people in the entire world side-by-side, chest-to-back, and fit them *all* within the city limits of Jacksonville, Florida? In fact, there would be plenty of wiggle room, and much of the city would still be vacant! Feel free to do a little fact-finding and make the calculations yourself if you should need convincing.

Of course, it would not be any fun to live in such a small space all the time. After an hour or so, everybody would want to go home and take a good shower. However, a point can be made, and that is there is *lots* of room on this wonderful planet of ours. And you can be sure that God designed the earth to be able to sustain us with plenty of food and other resources. In fact, the state of Iowa alone can produce enough food to feed our entire country (although you may tire of corn and soybeans every day). When you hear that certain areas of the world do not have enough resources, poor economic conditions due to inefficient governments are often to blame.

As Christians, we must never forget that God loves people. And because He loves mankind, you can be sure that He made the earth with ample room and other provisions to take care of all our needs.

### ***A Blessing from the Lord***

We lament that there are certain people who do not place a high value on humanity. "There are already enough people in the world; we do not need any more," they say. Others, recognizing this view to be extreme, temper their attitudes somewhat by saying, "It's hard to provide for so many children, so it's best not to have very many."

But what does God's Word say? Without exception, every biblical passage involving children refers to them as intended blessings! Consider this verse: "Then the Lord your God

will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body. He will also bless the fruit of your womb” (Deut. 30:9). Or how about this one?: “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them!” (Psalm 127:4-5).

Here’s yet another verse (one of our favorites), which comes right from the mouth of Jesus: “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

Children are indeed an intended blessing! And yet, there are those that do not recognize this wonderful truth. Some, while recognizing part of the truth, attempt to keep God’s blessings at bay by suggesting that less is better than more. One wise man offered a thought provoking question in this regard. He asked, “If children are a blessing from the Lord, why do some couples tell the Lord that they want a limit on their blessing?”

One day, you may have children of your own. And when you do, we hope you keep them coming! Embrace the idea of having as many children as the Lord will provide, so that “your quiver will be full.”

### ***What About Provision?***

We have already assured you that there is plenty of room and food in the world. But make no mistake about it, a house will not be made for you, nor will food magically appear on your plate without you having to work for it. It is likely that you are already keenly aware of this fact, both from your own experiences as well as the lessons you have previously learned in this book.

Some couples are reluctant to want children because they are fearful of either their own abilities to provide or of God’s ability

to do His part. So we will offer here a word of encouragement on this matter. But we will not be flowery or long-winded in doing so.

Simply stated, you have nothing to worry about in regard to providing for your family some day. In fact, you won't even need an extra edge; all you will need to see your family through is a solid work ethic and an ability to see needs and fulfill them. Can you do this? Of course you can! We have no doubt about it, and neither should you.

But what about God's ability to do His part? In short, God can be trusted to take care of you and your future family, every time, all the time. We have never met one individual who could honestly tell us otherwise after placing his trust in God. God would not indicate that children are a blessing from Him, and then not provide appropriate shelter, clothing, and food for them. The idea is just silly. If God blesses you with one child, He will provide accordingly. And if He blesses you with two, three, ten or even thirty children, He will still provide accordingly!

Even a young girl will feed and care for her Shirley Temple doll. Why, we have even seen some boys feed their GI Joes pretend K-rations. If it is human nature to provide for those under our care, how much more will our perfect, heavenly Father take care of us!

You will do well to always remember that part of the Sermon on the Mount which we studied earlier. Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear, for if we seek first after the kingdom, then "...all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

You are quite likely going to be a dad someday. We encourage you to not let the concern of provision be a stumbling block to you. It is a non-issue. God is looking forward to working alongside you, helping to lead your family. Remember too, that

your children are His children; He will not let them go without provision any more than He would let you go without.

### ***When Should You Have Children?***

There are some married couples who try hard to plan when they will have children and how many they will finally settle on. While we are not going to dissuade you from one day giving these matters thought, neither will we emphasize their importance.

If you keep on the forefront of your mind that children are an intended blessing from the Lord and that God is a wonderful provider, then ninety percent or more of your concerns about family planning will be instantly taken care of.

So, should you have children soon after you are married, or should you wait? Our counsel to you is to let God be truly in control in all matters related to this issue. Neither attempt to accelerate nor slow the matter, and let the wonder of it all unfold naturally.

### **How to Keep a Blessing a Blessing**

We have unabashedly declared what the Bible says about children—that they are an intended blessing from the Lord. That being said, we know that some people doubt that children are a blessing because they have seen so much selfishness and other bad manners coming from various children. So is the Bible true? How can we honestly state that children are a blessing when so many of them demonstrate otherwise?

The Bible says that children are *meant* to be blessings; but it does not imply that all children are, in fact, blessings as far as their behaviors are concerned. Cain was most assuredly not a blessing when he killed his brother Abel. The great judge Samuel could not keep his sons in line. And King David's son Absalom certainly gave him grief.

Why do some children turn out to be the opposite of a blessing? As we have stated in a previous lesson, God has gifted each person with a free will, which means that all of us are ultimately responsible for the decisions that we make in life. The power and responsibility associated with a free will cannot be overstated. Nobody forced Cain to kill Abel, and likewise nobody is forced to choose evil over good. But it is clear that many children grow up and choose to live dishonorable lives. The Bible is rich in content about this very topic, and it offers valuable insight in regard to raising children so that they will not choose to live the wrong way. Let's review some of what the Bible has to say:

### **A Wonderful Proverb—To Train Up a Child**

One of the most oft quoted verses pertaining to raising children is Proverbs 22:16, which states, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Notice that the first word in this passage says “train.” It does not say “provide for,” “teach,” or even “raise.” It says, pointedly enough, that your children will need to be *trained*. Too many parents miss this foundational point. Indeed, the world is full of parents who think that clothing their children and sending them off to bed is enough. It is not enough!

If you want your dog to come, sit, roll over, or do any kind of trick or obey any kind of command, you must train it. Rover is simply not going to fetch or do anything other than eat, sleep, or scratch himself unless he is trained by someone to do otherwise. If this is true for a lowly dog, how much more so is it for humans who are infinitely more complex!

You should know that there is a popular worldview that competes with the biblical one we are presenting here. This false worldview says that because humans are complex and have a

free will, they should not be trained. Rather, they should be free to do whatever they want, even throughout childhood. If Little Johnny wants scrambled eggs for breakfast after he requested Cheerios and was granted them, then Mommy or Daddy should instantly comply. If Sister Susie wants her eyebrow pierced for her first day of kindergarten, then her wish should be granted. In some places, this false worldview has been embraced so much that it has become the cultural norm. As you might suspect, this approach to childrearing tends to raise children who have respect neither for God, themselves, nor for others.

### ***In The Way He Should Go***

The proverb tells us to train a child “in the way he should go.” Some parents find this part of the passage mysterious and even intimidating, for they aren’t sure what the phrase means. But really this part of the verse is not mysterious at all.

“In the way he should go” does not refer to a north or south type of direction. Neither does it refer to guiding a child toward a particular vocation in life. While it may involve some of these aspects, the verse primarily intends to admonish its readers to lead their children in the *path of righteousness*.

Jesus told us that the road to heaven is a narrow one, and that few find its path (Matt. 7:14). One day, when you are a father, you will need to identify this path for your children, and after identifying it, you will need to use wisdom to train them how to walk accordingly.

### ***When He Is Old....***

If you train your sons and daughters to walk in the way of righteousness, they will have a huge advantage all throughout their lives, and this includes their old age. So then, we will offer, in the way of tips and commentary, some insight from the Bible and from experiences gathered from those who have walked

successfully before us.

### **Some Tips for Success:**

Before we begin offering you a few tips in the way of parenting, you should know that space and time do not permit us to present all you will need to know. So we will not be discussing the finer points of changing diapers or the drawbacks of bottled formula in this lesson. You and your wife will figure these things out and more in due time. Actually, most parenting skills aren't all that hard to master, and we are confident that you and your wife will both be experts sooner than you think.

However, there are certain things we deem important enough to pass on. Most of what you are about to read is wisdom passed on from ages past; we have invented nothing. Some of it is universally accepted, and other parts are downright resisted due to conflicting worldviews. But all of it is presented so that you can keep the hearts of your children in the path of righteousness.

#### ***Dad and Mom in Agreement***

Before you and your bride-to-be have children, you must both understand and mutually embrace the importance of being in agreement as to how you will raise them. Indeed, the more you can agree on this matter, the better. In fact, total agreement is best. The power of unity in this regard cannot be overemphasized. Parental harmony fosters emotional security, safeguards against domestic divisiveness, and validates all things taught.

#### ***The Dad as Leader***

How do you promote an environment of unity between you and your wife with respect to childrearing? The best way is to choose a wife who embraces all the Bible has to say about this subject, and one who will let you lead in this regard. We already

discussed the importance of this in our last lesson, “Made for Marriage,” but it is worth repeating here.

How your children will be schooled, how they will be disciplined, and who they will hang out with are just a few of the many questions you and your wife will need to answer. But make no mistake about it; you will need to be in charge. Ephesians 5:23 says, “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”

You may have seen some families whereby neither the father nor the mother was in charge. Rather, it was the children who were directing the course of daily living. May this never be in your home! Children should never be allowed to tell Dad or Mom what is right for the moment. You must make sure your children are not raised to do so.

We are not saying that it is wrong to ask your toddler if he wants ice cream along with his birthday cake; you may in fact want to ask him questions like this from time to time. But he should never *tell* you what he wants. Before long, he will be telling you he wants the car keys, and he may even chide you for not filling the gas tank.

### ***Teach Them Your Way***

Asking children questions in the way of preferences should not be the norm, especially if the children are very young. Parents who routinely ask their toddlers what they would like to wear or what they prefer for lunch are only asking for problems down the road. If you adopt this type of parenting style, you will likely raise a child to be self-centered. You shouldn't be surprised if you are routinely challenged by such a child.

Perhaps a short example can be useful here. We know of one family who went on a vacation in a beautiful, mountainous

region of our country. There were a few historical sites along the way that both the father and mother really wanted to see, but in the end they never ended up visiting them. The reason? The parents made the mistake of asking their young children if they wanted to visit the sites. Both the young son and his slightly older sister instantly voiced objections to their parents. “We don’t want to do what you guys want. We would rather have extra time for swimming and watching television at a hotel.”

The father complied with his children’s wishes rather than his own or his wife’s, and both parents felt like they were being sacrificial servants to their children. But the truth of the matter is these children were already in a routine of being moody and steering their parents accordingly, and both Mom and Dad were blind to it.

These children and their parents missed out on some really terrific experiences that they may never be able to recapture. Could these parents have directed their family in a better way? We think so, and that is by not letting their children dictate family policy.

Truth be told, children do not have a clue what they really want, let alone what is best for them. It is usually not until they are in their early teens that they are able to reasonably analyze what they want based on prior experiences. Even then, they are often governed by the extremes of what-is-familiar and what-is-new. While this is normal for most people, children are not usually equipped to make wise decisions in this regard, especially when consideration is made for the good of the entire family.

When your children get older, it will be natural for them to voice their requests and offer insight into family affairs, and it should be just as natural for you to want to hear and consider them. A request from your twelve year old son to visit a sporting goods store so he can check out a new fishing lure that he has saved up for is a reasonable request that you may want to consider.

However, a request from a six year old to stop at McDonald's for his fifth Happy Meal in the same week is probably more noise than anything else. In many successful families, such requests are not even allowed.

There is a philosophy on the loose that suggests that parents are somehow being mean if they direct their children confidently and with consistent certainty. This philosophy is wishy-washy, and you will do well to reject it before you even have children. If you and your wife want to see Custer's Last Stand during a family vacation and you think your children would benefit from it, then your way should be the sole voice of direction. Your word should not be the last word; it should be the first and only word. This should hold true for all matters regarding childrearing.

### ***Godly Expression***

Do you want to be the kind of father someday that is a really good leader, the kind where his words are like golden music whether they be in the form of a directive or an announcement of things to come? If so, then you will do well to incorporate a healthy and bountiful dose of godly expression in both your *demeanor* and *candor*.

Your demeanor is the way in which you behave and conduct yourself. Essentially, it is the expression of your personality. Your candor is part of your demeanor because it demonstrates the sincerity of your expression. In other words, a person's candor indicates whether or not he is genuine. In regard to both of these expressions, your desire should be that your children may see God through you. As God is certain, so should you be. As God is love, so should you be. And as God is gracious, so should you be.

In an upcoming lesson, we will be discussing the various fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is comprised of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control (Gal. 5:22). You will be a godly father indeed if your demeanor and candor reflect these wonderful things.

### ***Being Joyful***

We view joy as one of the most effective expressions in raising godly children. We have already indicated that as a father, you must be in charge, and that your word should be the first and only. If we had said only that, one might likely conclude that childrearing was a lifeless contest of the wills. But as we have stated, children are an intended blessing, and you will certainly find joy upon joy while raising your children.

If you want to stack the deck in your favor in regard to gaining honor and respect from your children, then you will do well to let your children *know* that they bring you joy. You can do this in many ways, not the least of which is to simply smile at them. And let your smiles turn to laughter from time to time, even often.

Do you know how to tickle your son or daughter's funny bone? Then do so, both literally and figuratively. Tell them jokes, be at ease with them, and allow yourself to be the brunt of humor from time to time.

Have you seen your son make a fantastic tackle or your daughter make a graceful expression? Then tell them so in a way that clearly demonstrates the joy within you.

Can a parent do all of this too much? Actually, we think so. You do not want to be the type of father that is clowning around so much so that he is difficult to take seriously. In fact, your children should not ever have to search for the serious side of you, so don't mask it by giving them the idea that fun and laughter is your number one aim. That being said, be lavish with your praise and admiration of your children's accomplishments.

### *Spending Time*

We will not offer advice in the way of exactly how much time you should spend with your children. Suffice it to say that the gray-haired veterans who have parented before us are right; time goes by very quickly, and before one realizes it, his children are grown. So you will want to keep this in mind, and make the most of your time with your children while you have it.

That being said, we should let you know that some parents get into a trap whereby the entire routine of the family revolves around keeping the schedule of their children's various commitments. We encourage you to guard against having everything centered around your children such that you are always taking them to or from some sort of practice or event. To be sure, there will be times when this is best for them, but do not think this needs to be a lifelong habit.

While we are on this topic, we want to encourage you to spend plenty of time alone with your wife after you have children. And don't be afraid of going overboard on this matter. Your children will need to see that their mother comes before them, and it will do them good if they are told this directly and for them to see this in practice.

How we wish that we did not have to warn you against the sin of becoming obsessed with work, but alas! Many men have fallen prey to the slave-master of labor. While we encourage you to be a hard and steady worker, we will also warn you against doing so to the detriment of your family. We would rather see you serve bread without butter and have time for your family than to see you serve steak and shrimp without having time for them.

### *Start Them Young*

When should you formally start childrearing? We say right

away! A practice that we have seen employed successfully many times is to give a newborn immediate and consistent attention for each and every need during the first several months of his life. Coddle him, pamper him, and feed him until he is satisfied once again. By doing so, you will be well on your way to raising a child who knows for certain that his world is a safe one.

### ***When They Start to Test You***

Up to about seven months of age, give or take, the only noises a baby knows how to make are soft cooing sounds along with intermittent crying. One thing you must know is that babies do not whine at this age, for all they know how to do is cry. Crying is completely natural, for it is a baby's God-given way of letting his parent know that something is wrong. However, whining is another matter.

Whining begins when a baby starts to be more cognizant of his world. This usually happens at about seven months of age, and during this time an observant parent will notice that his or her baby will sometimes "cry" for no legitimate reason. It is at this time that a baby will experiment with whining.

An unobservant parent will mistake whining for crying and will inadvertently encourage the baby to whine even more by giving him attention. We implore you to heed this advice: do not ever pamper a whining baby! This is a pivotal time in the development of your child and much is at stake, not the least of which is your future ability to see your child as a consistent blessing. Simply stated, you must have the courage and insight to discern the difference between a cry and a whine, and then to respond appropriately.

Why do we say it takes "courage" to discern a cry from a whine? We say "courage" because too many parents are fearful of facing the truth that left to their own devices and without godly direction, babies will eventually grow into self-centered

toddlers who will eventually grow into misdirected children who will eventually grow into egocentric teenagers who will...you get the picture.

All humans, at one point or another in their lives, will try to test their boundaries to see what is acceptable and safe and what is not. It should not surprise anyone, then, that this testing begins at a very early age, earlier than most parents are willing to realize.

This testing begins by whining. For example, a baby will sometimes whine, rather than cry, because it wants to be picked up after being put to bed. Pick the baby up after whining, and what have you done? You have just taught him that it is all right to whine to get picked up. After a few more times of this, it becomes clear who trained whom. The baby will have successfully trained the parent to succumb to his manipulative whining.

So what is a parent to do? We encourage parents of newborns to calmly and confidently declare war on all forms of whining in their household. And to be sure—whining takes many forms. Sometimes it will be more of a squawk than a whine; other times it may be more like a screech. The older a baby gets, the more varied the forms. Perhaps you have heard some of the various forms of whining coming from a teenager. If so, you know how utterly awful it can sound by this advanced stage. But chances are good that a whining teenager was once a whining baby who was never successfully restrained.

Parents do not need to get upset when whining happens; rather, they simply need to respond consistently in love. A baby who whines should be completely ignored if at all possible. If eye contact must be made, the parent should convey a look of disapproval. A firm yet confident “no” should somehow also be conveyed. Babies that are still whining after being placed in bed should be gently but firmly held in the prone position and

not allowed to move. A gentle lullaby might be sung by the parent, not as a reward for whining but rather as a supplement to being firmly held. In a very short time the baby will be having heavenly dreams of your lullabies.

A very young baby who is whining during waking hours should be held gently yet firmly against his parent's chest, and not allowed to squirm, not even a little. A gentle but confident "no" should be whispered into the baby's ear. If the squirming or whining increases, the firm hold upon baby should actually increase. At all costs, you must win. Do not give into the baby's demand.

In short order, any baby, even strong-willed ones, will tire and comply. After all, they want to know their boundaries, and once they are convinced that you are in complete control, they will not want to waste energy on a battle that they know that they will only lose.

Why are we spending so much time discussing something as seemingly trivial as whining? Isn't a lesson on how to stop thumb sucking more important? No, it is not. Whining is the precursor to murmuring and complaining, two of the most destructive attitudes that a person could demonstrate. You will do well to eliminate it in your children at a very young age. Once you do, the rest becomes easier, and you will see them as constant blessings.

### *Arguing*

Can you imagine somebody attempting to argue with God? The idea is as much grotesque as it is silly. It is dishonoring, to say the least, and a complete exercise in futility. It is also grotesque and silly to see a child attempt an argument with his or her parents, and you will do well to not let your children even attempt such folly.

Arguing is actually an evil cousin to whining. There are all kinds of ways to prevent it from taking root, but space does not permit us to discuss them here. Suffice it to say that wisdom and discretion will see you through. There are also some decent books on the matter for the looking, and there are plenty of parents who will gladly share with you their tricks for success. At any rate, we thought we should mention this topic in case you think that arguing with parents is normal. It's not. But we will at least leave you with a word of encouragement: if you can manage to take care of whining during the infant years, you more than likely will not ever have to deal with its evil cousin.

### *Discipline*

Discipline is any training that corrects, molds, or perfects one's moral character. The Bible has much to say regarding discipline, including the fact that God disciplines his own children:

*It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Heb. 12:7-11*

Discipline is indeed a good thing. Proverbs 12:1 tells us, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." So how are children best disciplined? There are several ways to do so, and you will need to study this matter

out as part of good fathering.

In our culture, “time outs” and “responsible thinking times” have taken the place of customary corporal chastisement (spankings), which were at one time embraced by most of our culture. Most kinds of discipline techniques can find some sort of biblical justification, but we will caution you to refrain from the cultural tendency to refrain from spanking. The Bible has much to say about this.

Consider these biblical verses on the subject of chastisement: “He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24); “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Prov. 22:15); and “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).

While these proverbs demonstrate the importance and usefulness of corporal punishment, they also indicate several principles that go against cultural acceptance. We see that from God’s perspective, spanking is an act of love, but refraining from spanking is not (13:24). We see that it is normal for a child to sometimes act foolishly and that it is a good thing to remove foolishness from him (22:15). And we see that a selfish child is an embarrassment to his parent, but correction can produce wisdom (29:15). When you are a father some day, hold these principles dear to you, and you will have a solid foundation on which to build.

### ***Wisdom and Discretion***

You will not be able to be an effective father if you do not employ wisdom. What exactly is wisdom? Wisdom has many facets, not the least of which are common sense and sound judgment. How does one obtain wisdom? Thank the Lord that obtaining wisdom is relatively easy! Proverbs 20:21-22 says,

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings....” And James 1:5 says, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

So we can see that wisdom is not something that is hard to find, nor something revealed to us in mysterious whispers. Wisdom wants to be heard and in fact will “shout loudly” to anyone who has ears to hear.

But common sense and sound judgment are not enough. These will provide the insight that you need for a given matter, but you will need *prudence* and *discretion* as well. Prudence is the ability to anticipate the probable results of one’s actions. And you will need to top this off with *discretion*, which is the ability to properly respond to your judgment of a matter. This might sound complicated, but really it isn’t. Much of it involves studying human behavior, and so you will need to be a student of your own children. In a short time, you will be able to discern the motivation of almost anything that they do, and you will be able to predict with fair certainty the best way to respond to them. Thank God for wisdom!

### ***Being a Role Model***

This section of our lesson should stand apart as being the most important. As a man, you are to be God’s light to the world. As a husband, you are to demonstrate the sacrificial love of Jesus. And as a father, you are to be all these things and more, for you are to demonstrate the very nature of God. In doing so, you will point to Jesus, for He is the perfect way. But make no mistake about it; your children’s ability to understand God as their Father is largely dependent on your ability to make Him known to them.

As a father to your children, you must be willing and able to say to them, as Paul said to the church at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We trust that you will be willing and able to do so, for your children will need to hear this challenge and for you to show them the way.

In the meantime, identify for yourself the positive role models in your own life. Consider your own father, your friends’ fathers, or other men whom you may know. Do you see leadership skills within certain men that make you proud and hopeful that you can be like them someday? If so, good! Not one of these men would fault you for copying him. On the contrary, they would be honored.

### ***Teach Them Diligently***

Here is an oft-quoted passage in regard to childrearing. No study on this subject would be complete without it:

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

*Deuteronomy 6:5-9*

We view this passage as one of the most informative and liberating ones in all of Scripture regarding childrearing. It tells us, simply, to have God’s words “on our heart” and to teach His words to our children at all times. Does this mean that you are supposed to lead your family in a round-the-clock family devotion? Heavens, no! It means that you are to teach

your children the precepts of God as a natural expression of who you are.

From time to time, even often, take opportunities to make important points come alive to your children. Do so at all kinds of various times, whether you are working, playing, dining, or traveling together. While study guides and Sunday morning sermons are useful tools for teaching children, there really is no substitute for hearing their father's unique take on a matter.

At the heart of this matter is your children's education. We implore you to seek and obtain the very best education that you possibly can for them. If homeschooling is the best option, then by all means do so! If certain people are better able to teach specific subject matters, then solicit and obtain their expertise. But in doing so, never compromise on what you know to be best for your children. This is true for many facets of their upbringing, but especially so in regard to education.

### ***You—A Future Dad!***

So, what do you think of all this? Can you see yourself as a father some day? If you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, then we can see you as one, and a great one at that.

Someday, you will likely be the proud father of someone who looks and maybe even acts quite a bit like you. He or she will be made in your image, and it is just fine for you to allow yourself to imagine what this time will be like. We hope you look forward to it, for the world needs more people like you.

We realize that this lesson is a bit different than most of the others. For one, you are not called or even ready to implement the knowledge you have learned at this time. Nevertheless, you are getting old enough and wise enough to know that time passes quickly by. In due time, fatherhood will be upon you. In the meantime, we realize you may have more pressing needs, like

fixing your go-cart. But you will do us proud if every once in a while between now and then, that you think of these things with wonderful anticipation!

# The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

If you have been a keen reader of your *Made for Manhood* lessons, you will have noticed that we have referred to the *fruit of the Holy Spirit* from time to time. We did so in “Treating Ladies Properly” when pointing out that true beauty involves bearing the Spirit’s fruit. We discussed peace as part of the Spirit’s fruit in “A Lesson on Peace.” In our study entitled “Being a Good Steward,” we expressed the importance of responsibly bearing fruit. And in “Made for Fatherhood,” we discussed how vital it is for a father to demonstrate good fruit if he hopes to raise his children well. In each of these lessons, we indicated that we would discuss the fruit of the Holy Spirit in greater depth in a future lesson. We are now delivering on our word....

## ***What is “The Fruit”?***

As you may recall, the term “fruit of the Holy Spirit” comes from a passage in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Commonly, the passage is quoted in part as such: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (5:22).

If you are the kind of fellow who gets easily befuddled when common language is used figuratively, you may be wondering why words like “love” and “joy” are described as fruit. After all, love and joy are not usually for sale in the fruit and produce

section of your grocery store. And you may have picked apples or cherries directly from a tree, but you haven't likely heard of a peace or patience tree.

However, the fruit of the Spirit is not something that you can literally taste, see, or otherwise perceive with your senses. Rather, it is comprised of various virtues. A virtue, as you may recall, is an admirable trait associated with one's character. And like apples or oranges, the Spirit's fruit grows, beginning with something relatively small which blooms and ending with something beautiful and ripe to be used by others.

Did you know that the various types of fruit that can be literally eaten, like grapes or strawberries, first had their beginnings as flowers? And the flowers, in order to thrive, first had to be part of a branch. Of course, the various branches of the plant had to first grow from a central branch. This is true for all kinds of fruit-bearing plants. Well, the same is true for *spiritual fruit*.

Jesus explained all of this in an easy-to-understand passage in the gospel of John. In doing so, He referred to a type of fruit that grows on vines. Most likely He referred to grapes, which can be eaten whole, made into jellies, or pressed to make juice or fine wines. The passage says,

*“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.... “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.... “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”*

*John 15:1, 2, 4-8*

So you can see that the fruit we are talking about in this lesson is spiritual fruit. It manifests itself in the form of various virtues, like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We will refer back to this particular passage a little later in our lesson, but first we need to clarify an important detail...

### ***Fruit or Fruits?***

If you are the kind of fellow who naturally counts things, you may have noticed that there are nine types of fruit listed in Galatians 5:22. Does this mean that there are only nine kinds of fruit that come from the Spirit? What about wit, humor, contentment, discretion, bravery, and the host of other virtues that, by all accounts, come from God? Are these not also kinds of fruits that the Spirit bears? You bet they are!

So why, then, are there only nine listed? Are the nine listed the most important ones? What about the others? Actually, this line of questioning might cause us to end up missing the whole point of the matter. Truth be told, the writer of Galatians describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit as being *singular*. Read it again if you missed this important detail in your first analysis: "...the *fruit* of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

So then, there is one kind of fruit that the Spirit produces, and that is the cumulation of the various virtues that are manifested in a Christian's personality. Does this seem abstract? If so, think of several different kinds of literal fruits, perfectly blended together so that a singular fruit is produced, such that this singular fruit is yummier and more satisfying than any one of the fruits from which it was comprised. This is the Spirit's wonderful way—He is able to take all of your virtues and produce from it your personality, which is the glorious expression of who you are!

### *A Primer on the Spirit*

It's quite likely that you already have a pretty good handle on who the Holy Spirit is and what He is all about. But just to be sure, it's probably a good idea to provide a short primer:

Suffice it to say, the Spirit is far more important than the fruit that He bears. After all, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

The Spirit is the very essence of God and of His Son, Jesus. He is the "Spirit of Life" (Rom. 8:2) and the one who "gives life" (2 Cor. 3:2). He is "holy" as only God is holy (Eph. 1:13, Isaiah 57:15). The Holy Spirit can speak (Acts 28:25-27), and be grieved and lied to (Eph. 4:30, Acts 5:3-4). Moreover, He literally *lives in* those who believe in Jesus' holy name (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21,22).

So you can see that the Holy Spirit is not merely some kind of impersonal, "active force" as the foolish cult members who go door-to-door might claim. On the contrary, the Spirit is very personal, for He has the very personality of God.

It should not surprise you, then, that the Holy Spirit has a *divine role* in all Christians' lives. Before Jesus died, He told His disciples that it was actually to their benefit that He would be leaving them, for in doing so He would also send to them the Holy Spirit:

*"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged....But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...." John 16:7-9, 13*

After Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven, He sent the “Helper” as He promised, and the church was in fact baptized into the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-4). Prior to this time, only kings and priests were able to go into the tabernacle to encounter God, but now God’s Holy Spirit resides with power in anyone for the simple asking and receiving of the same by faith!

There is much more that can be taught about the person of the Holy Spirit, and in fact entire books are written on the matter. Some of these books are terrific at enlightening the truth of the gospel. Others are not fit for the fire, for the devil’s grease does not burn well. But if you can embrace what we have presented here, you will be nine tenths or more of the way to a mature understanding of the Holy Spirit.

## **Virtue Described**

As we observed, there are nine manifestations of the Spirit’s fruit listed in the passage of Galatians that we initially read. And as we discussed, these are only some of the many which are grown by the Spirit. In truth, there are scores of them. That being said, it is useful to discuss the ones that are cited in the passage. We will list them again here, just for good measure: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”

### ***Love***

We suppose that most of our readers are the quick witted types who catch on fairly easily. After all, such is the hope of a Teleo Scout and for that matter, all mature Christians. However, we realize that not everyone fits this description, and so we offer clarification for the dull of mind:

When we talk about love in terms of the Spirit’s fruit, we are not talking about the love that one may have for *things*. The

Spirit does not bless a Christian with a supernatural ability to love his baseball card collection, his canoe, or even his paintball gun. No man needs the Spirit's help to love such things. In fact, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, a man is actually more likely to magnify his love for things. Egad that one should ever need to receive this correction!

On the contrary, the Spirit blesses a Christian with a measure of love *for people*. This measure of love, voluntarily submitted to God for nurturing and cultivation, grows into virtue. Virtue then becomes a nourishing fruit that God can use to bring liberation and joy into the lives of others. Make love for people your life's aim, and you will be a blessed man indeed.

If you are the type of boy who loves ice cream cones more than he does his own siblings, or the kind of boy who prefers the company of plastic army men over his parents or friends, then we fear for you. But we will not dwell too much on presenting a rebuke here. Most likely this does not describe you, and so we will move on...

Suffice it to say, love is the royal expression of all virtues. We stated previously that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is kind of like blending several different kinds of literal fruits together to produce a singular fruit which is superior in the sum of its parts. Well, love is the quintessential fruit in such a blend. Without love, the rest of the concoction would instantly spoil.

You may think we are overstating the importance of love when we say that the fruit of the Holy Spirit would go bad without it. But we are not overstating the matter. In fact, without love, everything spoils in such a way that it fumigates its immediate area with a toxic gas fit only for the devil to breathe.

The toxic gas produced in the absence of love is odorless and colorless to most people; it takes a discerning nose and eye to sense it for what it really is. Normally, this gas does not kill

instantly. Rather, it puts its victims into a subtle state of stupor whereby they are numb to the reality of their condition. At best, a victim may survive but will never thrive. At worst, he will be so full of himself that he will become worthless for even worldly good. Without intervention, all victims will die in their stupefied states. The only antidote to cure a victim from irreversible harm is a healthy dose of...you guessed it...heavenly love.

You were indeed made to be a lover of people. Do you recall in a previous lesson when we told you that you “wield a great and wonderful strength”? We hope that you did not think we were referring to the elasticity of your trouser straps. “Young men...you are strong,” says the great apostle John! And in case you need reminding, this strength comes from the love manifest in you by Jesus Christ, if you indeed equate yourself with His calling.

We emphasize that the qualities of love do not include emotional feelings so much as they include commitment and resolve. We stated such in “Made for Marriage,” and we do so again here. Oh, young man, that you would remember this truth above else!

Perhaps these Scriptures will help solidify in you a proper frame of mind:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you...*                      *John 13:34*

*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*    *John 15:13*

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*    *John 3:16*

“Love bears all things, believes all things, upholds all

things...” says the great thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The world’s largest crane or excavator cannot uphold all things, but love can! We implore you to be a lover of your fellow man. If you have never done so, pray this simple prayer with sincerity: “Dear Lord, help me to love my fellow man with all that I have. I offer myself to You for this very cause....”

### *Patience*

Have you ever wondered where the phrase “patience is a virtue” comes from? Patience is indeed a virtue, and we hope to help explain why it is so, along with a few of the benefits from having it.

For one, patience is the kind of thing that will reduce the stress load that one might otherwise carry. Who wants to walk around stressed most of the time? Not me! And neither should you.

Now we are not talking about the feeling that might be generated when you and a friend are attempting to mow several large lawns in one day. It’s natural and useful for you to feel a certain amount of anxiety when you are cutting turf in this fashion. But how might you act when things don’t go according to your timetable?

Suppose you run out of gas and your partner has to bike a half mile to fetch more fuel. Might you get stressed and irritable, wishing your friend could fly? We hope not, but this is how an impatient man may behave.

Or suppose you are waiting at a fast food counter, having already ordered and paid for your meal. What might you do if you were to see that others who were behind you have already been served and are now seated, while you are still waiting? Might you pitch a fit? We hope not, but more than one man has unraveled a counter girl’s pigtails simply because

he was impatient.

In the grand scheme of things, an impatient temperament does not help to get anything done faster or better. No act of road rage ever made a wider lane. No tapping of a foot ever made paint dry faster. And no amount of pacing ever made the sun set sooner. More importantly, no amount of impatience ever procured an answered prayer before its intended time.

An impatient man will think himself the victim, for the earth spins at never the right speed. How futile and silly such a man appears, one moment braced against a mountain's wall to slow the great, blue marble's roll, the next running frantically across the plains like a gerbil in an exercise wheel, affecting no other spin but his own.

Patience is universally useful. For one thing, a patient man can be trusted by others. Why should an impatient man expect others to have faith in him, knowing that his exposed nerves might short circuit the moment something touched him off? However, a patient man communicates to others that he is safe, and they will be more prone to trust and believe in him.

Consider the farmer, who, not knowing if it shall rain or shine, puts his hand to the plow, fertilizes the soil, plants his seed, and patiently waits for the results. Is he not many times more commendable than the man who shouts at the sky, demanding rain one day, sun the next?

Consider also the great Farmer, the Vinedresser, the Husbandman of the vineyard. Is He not supremely patient with us, His branches? Of course He is. Let us be patient then likewise, so that we may bear much fruit for His glory!

### ***Kindness***

Of all the manifestations of the Spirit, kindness must be

ranked as one of the easiest to employ. How difficult is it, really, to provide a kind word, or to perform an act of charitable service? It is easy indeed, and so kindness should flow from us as easily as water flows down a mountain stream.

A word of kindness is like a seed, which dropped by chance, produces in time a wildflower worthy of its place in heaven's bouquet. A kind word is not only a precursor to life, it is life itself, for the Scriptures are clear that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Prov. 18:21).

Listen intently to those who speak, so that when it is time to respond you might let them know that *they have been heard*, and thus they will be enabled to properly engage throughout the course of further conversation. How might you do this? For one thing, you might study those who do this naturally. We promise you that no one will fault you for copying him. You will find, in your study of such people, that they commonly repeat what was spoken, or that they ask questions to get clarification. Talking with people in this manner is a true act of kindness.

Of course, kindness also involves giving compliments. Be lavish in your praise for others. It is doubtful that you will need to back off from doing this too much. It has been said that one of the driving motivations within humans is the need to feel appreciated. If this is so, how awful it is to withhold appreciation from someone when it is due, especially when it costs nothing to give it. When someone does something worthy of your appreciation, then let your kindness flow! At the bare minimum, offer your thanks, but it may be more appropriate to put into words what you are thankful for.

However, avoid flattery, which is giving someone a compliment that is either undeserved or not heartfelt. If you start sounding sappy and insincere, we hope that a good friend will let you know it! The Bible does not have anything kind to

say about flattery.

You should know that words of kindness must not always include complimentary language. Suppose you were caught unawares with your zipper down or your shoes untied. Would it not be a kind gesture if someone told you of your shortcoming in a discreet manner? Of course it would. But too many people are afraid of offending others when telling them the truth for their own good. However, kindness should never be used as a license to be tongue-tied when someone is in a serious predicament.

Kindness is not confined to the realm of words. Offering your seat to another, paying someone else's expense, or cleaning a hunting buddy's quota of game birds are just a few of the many acts of charity you can offer your fellow man. A caution regarding acts of charity, however: don't reserve your good deeds for only those who might somehow repay you. On the contrary, include your acts of kindness toward those who may never repay you, and even for the undeserving. Such is the way of our Lord.

### ***Goodness***

We might say that God is everything the devil is not, but in doing so we fall far short of fully describing God. The same is true for goodness. Goodness is everything badness is not, but a simple contrast in this regard might leave goodness shortchanged.

To do good means to have a good heart. Do you want to do well? If so, you are more than halfway to meeting your end, for as a vinedresser plans to cultivate his yard, so do good intentions precede benevolence. Beware, however, for as the saying goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." A man of goodness follows through with his intentions, but to him following through is not an afterthought. Rather, intentions and doing are one in the same.

Goodness and godliness go hand-in-hand. In fact, doing good is what Jesus is all about. While on earth, He spoke good news, made the lame to walk, and the blind to see. You, too, can carry on His good work. There are many good men already doing so, and you are slated to join them!

A man with a good heart is easy to recognize. Such a man professes Christ in both word and deed. He is rarely in a hurry. He smiles often, and his listening ear precedes his good word. He is the kind of man that might be taken advantage of, if his good heart were not guarded well. Pity the fool who attempts such advantage, for heaven will pay him appropriate recompense. The Lord watches over a good heart with special interest, like a winemaker who guards a special variety of grapes of great worth.

A man with a good heart is well spoken of, more so than others but not by all, for a good man knows the futility of attempting universal approval. When spoken of unfavorably, a goodhearted man may be pained, but only momentarily, for there is a self-comforting quality in goodness, although a good man may be too humble to recognize it in these terms.

A goodhearted man, advanced in age, is the pinnacle object of admiration of every boy who longs for a godly grandfather. Ah, to sit on the lap of such a man, to hear tales of war and peace, to learn at his side in the woodshop and afield, to be inspired, and to do great things as this man did.... Do you have a grandfather that emulates godliness? If so, we implore you to make it your life's aim to one day be like him. If not, we encourage you to become such a man for the sake of your progeny and for the many other lives you will touch along the way.

Goodness, a supreme virtue, nonetheless cannot stand alone. Acts of charity and benevolence, apart from God, are useful only in temporal terms. For as the Scripture states, many do-gooders will cite their good works before Christ at Judgment, at which

time He will state to certain men, “I never knew you....”

### *Faithfulness*

Essentially, faithfulness is remaining committed to a cause. For example, a farmer must persevere throughout the entire sowing and reaping process; he can't give up simply because he gets tired or is worried about the seasonal forecast. Even if his plough ox is rustled or his wagon breaks an axle, he will need to remain faithful to his cause, especially if he has already begun his endeavor.

Likewise, a vinedresser must be faithful throughout the entire course of overseeing his vineyard. He must be constantly aware of the condition of his soil and his vines. If foxes or raccoons are frequenting his vineyard, he must set traps or hire bounty hunters to rid of them. He must plan his harvest carefully, for the amount of sugar found in his clusters is contingent upon careful timing. The pressed juices must be stored just-so in order to achieve his desired effect. In short, he must be a faithful student and administrator of his craft.

In these examples, the stewards were committed to a cause that they had already begun. Failure on their part to carry out some or all of their duties would seriously affect the outcome of their efforts. But does this mean that you must always be faithful, even in “lost causes”? This is a very good question, for which there is no universal answer. You may, in fact, endeavor upon a cause and find that you wish you hadn't. In this scenario, you must be faithful in the grand scheme of things. It may be that bailing out is the best thing to do for the overall good. A good rule of thumb is to determine if you would be putting anyone out by your actions. Remember the Golden Rule, and do your best to abide by it.

A discussion on faithfulness would not be complete without pointing out the importance of keeping your word. A person's

word is usually the first thing heard and processed by others before any action is carried out. So if you say you are going to do something, then be good on your word.

Do you hope to have much responsibility some day? Regardless of whether or not you want to become an ice cream truck driver, a dog catcher, an astronaut, or a brain surgeon, you will need to start practicing responsibility now. You should know that Jesus taught, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). So you can do your part of helping the Spirit’s fruit to grow by being faithful with small things. This means you should be consistently putting your bike away before you ask for your dad’s car keys, and gladly eating what was provided at lunch before requesting New York strip sirloin for dinner.

Faithfulness as it pertains to the Spirit’s fruit goes far beyond being a good steward of things. In terms of commitment toward a cause, the Spirit’s fruit demonstrates your willingness and ability to *keep the faith*. The Scriptures indicate that this is not something to take for granted, nor something you should consider lightly. The apostle Paul proudly stated near the end of his life, “...the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:6-7).

When you are old and gray, will you be able to say, as Paul did, that you kept the faith? We trust that you will. But understand this: your faith *must be your own*! Perhaps it already is, and if so, we join in heaven’s applause. Yet many a young man’s faith was started by the imparting of his parents’ faith upon him, and so each boy must eventually wean himself from his parents’ faith so that he can realize his own as a man. He must, in essence, transform from flower to fruit.

Can you honestly say that your faith is your own and not your parents’ or somebody else’s? God forbid, but what if your

parents should die? Such a question should not frighten you, though it may give you pause. Would you, could you, carry on? We're not merely asking if you could survive; we're confident enough that you could round up enough scraps to see yourself through. Rather, we're asking this: could you, with conviction and effectiveness, fight the good fight, and run the good race, and keep the good faith, *on your own...without turning back?*

### ***Gentleness***

We would not be surprised if the idea of being gentle does not instantly appeal to you. After all, the idea of being gentle often conjures up images of being dainty, soft spoken, or overly careful. For many people, gentleness seems reserved for sissies and the effeminate. But rest assured, the kind of gentleness that the Scriptures refer to is very much in line with being a man.

Perhaps it is best to start off by describing what gentleness is not. Gentleness is not the opposite of being assertive. We know this to be true because Jesus was very much assertive and was in fact so most of the time. Do you have the ability and willingness to take the lead when no one better than you can, or the ability to instantly follow when the opportunity calls for it? If so, then you are being assertive, and that is a good thing. You do not have to be dainty about leading or following. We hope this helps bring clarification.

So what, then, is gentleness? You already know that being a Christian means that you wield a great and wonderful strength. Among other things, gentleness means exercising your strength with sincere humility so that others might be served. For example, if you are a big brother, you should not order your younger siblings around just because you think yourself privileged.

A gentle man knows that boasting will usually bruise the Spirit's fruit, rather than keep it ripe and fresh. Can you bench

press more than your own body weight or jump five garbage cans with your bike? If so, good for you, but you better be careful showing off to others who can't. In all regards, keep your pride in check. Such is the way of a gentle man.

Are we saying that gentleness involves holding back your muscles? In some cases it might, but we are not saying that you should hold back in all cases. Let's discuss a hypothetical situation to help clarify: Suppose you were an accomplished wrestler, having won several dual meets with very few losses, and you now have an opportunity to show a friend a few moves. Are you going to immediately put him in fireman's carry, followed by a painful cross-face cradle, just because you can? We hope not! You will not have taught him anything other than how to show off and that he should avoid any future instruction from you.

But what if you are in direct competition with others near your equal? Should you hold back then? Not on your life! Show your stuff, or you will be shown up!

Suppose you are in a fully uniformed football game, playing middle linebacker. Being gentle in spirit does not mean you should tiptoe toward the ball carrier and first ask his permission to tackle him. On the contrary, hit him, man, full speed! Make him think twice about running your way again.

But what if, after hitting him, *you* are the man down, and he is on his way to further yardage? Are you going to cower in deference, all in the name of "gentleness"? We hope not! Next time, meet him harder, faster, and altogether better, so that it is he who goes down rather than you.

Competition provides an opportunity for kindness, for it is kind to help hone the skills of another by offering him your best effort. At the end of a game, however, a gentle man will be a good sport. If you win, don't gloat. If you lose, don't pout. That

pretty much sums up what being a good sport is all about.

A discussion on this topic would be incomplete if we did not point out that a gentle man knows how and when to be a gentleman. A gentleman is polite when the occasion calls for it, which is often. If you have mastered “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome,” you are over halfway to being a gentleman. But there is more to being a gentleman than offering verbal courtesies. We encourage you to review our lesson entitled “Social Skills” if the finer points of manners and etiquette elude you.

Perhaps the best measure of one’s ability to exercise gentleness can be found in his speech. The Bible has a lot to say about how we should exercise language. Here are just some of the many passages associated with this topic:

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*  
Prov. 15:1

*...Speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.... Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*  
Eph. 4:25, 29

*This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.*  
James 1:19

*...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*  
Matt. 12:34

### ***Self-Control***

It is a true statement that a man is not really able to control

anybody other than himself. Certainly, we are able to *influence* others, but we cannot truly control them. There are too many variables which prevent it, the chief one being the fact that God created men with a free will.

Everybody has a free will. What does this mean? It means that we are able to exercise many options in our lives, both small and large. You and I are free to put our left sock on before our right one as a matter of routine, if we so want. If we want to change this habit and put our right one on first, we may do so. Likewise, we are able to make choices in more important matters of life, like what kind of gun we might save up for, or whether or not we will go to college.

To be sure, there are certain things about ourselves that we cannot control at all, and others we can control, but only to a degree. For example, we have no control over the rate at which our hair grows, nor can we swallow and breathe at exactly the same time. And once our noses decide to sneeze, we can only hold off doing so for so long. Likewise, we may be able to refrain from blinking for a few minutes, but sooner or later our eyelids will dominate our wills.

You may have noticed in your Bible reading that the Scriptures don't really have much to say about what sock you put on first or what kind of gun you might save up for or how long you can go without blinking. This is so because God is far more concerned with your character than He is about anything else. He knows that you have a free will, and that you can use your free will to make good choices or evil choices. So of course God wants you to exercise self-control in this regard.

As a young man growing toward Christian maturity, it is vital to know that you have complete control over choosing evil. Here are a couple of passages to help solidify this important point:

*No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.* *1 Cor. 10:13*

*...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin....Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* *Rom. 6:7, 11*

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin...* *1 John 2:1*

Indeed, the Bible has a lot to say about the subject of sin. It's sad to say, but there are some well meaning (and some not so well meaning) teachers of the Bible who really cloud this matter. Some of these teachers falsely purport that Christians will always live a defeated life of sin, not being able to do otherwise. This teaching is rooted in the false worldview that mankind does not really have a free will. But how could the Bible state that self-control is part of the Holy Spirit's fruit if it were not possible to control oneself? The idea is just ridiculous. We would encourage you to avoid teachings that imply that a victorious life is not normal, and to respectfully correct such a teaching after recognizing it.

We have previously discussed the importance of being faithful in small things before being faithful in large. This principle applies to all matters in life, self-control not withstanding. So we encourage you to purposefully make it your life's aim to exercise self-control with small things; doing so will help you when real temptation comes your way.

What do we mean by exercising self-control in small things? We really have no set prescription, but we do recommend a concerted effort to *live a disciplined life*. This might mean simply controlling the urge to laugh out loud in a public library, or refraining from buying a new bike just because your old one has a few loose spokes. A disciplined life might include not sleeping in, or developing an efficient routine of carrying out chores and study. Sooner or later, rest assured, you will face even weightier matters, and being a disciplined man will equip you to meet with success.

### ***How More Fruit is Made***

As a young man, you should naturally aspire to bear fruit for Christ's kingdom. So you should know a bit about how God grows His fruit.

Earlier in our lesson, we cited the biblical passage in which Jesus describes our Father as the owner of the vineyard, Himself as the vine, and His followers as branches. To this effect He stated, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit..." (John 15:2).

One of the key ways that God produces fruit is to remove fruitless branches from the vine. While this may be startling in its implications, it really should not be that surprising. Any good gardener or horticulturist knows that a branch that is not producing fruit is nevertheless using certain nutrients at the expense of the branches that are fruitful. So the best thing a caretaker can do for the overall good of the plant is to completely get rid of branches that are not producing any fruit. Such branches are good for nothing other than firewood.

However, many branches bear fruit as intended. This is where the skill of a good caretaker really comes in. A person with such skill knows that certain parts of the branches sometimes need

to be removed so that the plant can grow the way the caretaker wants. For example, a vinedresser may want to improve the health of certain grapes, so he may choose to cut off specific leaves so that more sunshine can reach previously concealed areas. Or the vinedresser may cut off parts of a branch that are diseased so that the surrounding areas will not be adversely affected.

In like fashion, God “prunes” us, in that He removes certain things in our lives so that we can grow the way He wants us to. How will He do this in your life? Ah, that is a question we are not equipped to answer, at least not fully. Maybe it will involve removing something that causes you grief so that you can be healthy, or it may be that He will allow a trial or a tribulation to occur in your life so that you can be tested and thus be bettered (James 1:3).

Regardless of how God works to cause you to grow, know that you are in good hands. He is the supreme Vinedresser, the Husbandman, the Master Gardener. He knows exactly what you need to make you bear fruit for His glory. Therefore, be ever aware that no matter what happens in your life, God can cause it to work for the good to cause you to become more like Jesus!

