Bob: Being a man involves taking some risks: stepping up, being courageous, leading, initiating. Here is Dennis Rainey:

Dennis: What if I failed every time I’ve initiated? Well, the easiest thing to do is nothing and to stop initiating. The reason we fail to initiate is we may have trained our wives to just jump in and do it for us because we haven’t stepped up and taken responsibility for our finances, for the spiritual well-being of our family, for the direction we’re headed as a couple. All of these demand initiative from a man who knows where he’s going.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, March 10th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to begin today to unpack some of the essentials that make up biblical manhood.

Welcome to FamilyLife Today; thanks for joining us on the Thursday edition. Do you think men know what it is they’re looking for, they’re aiming for? I mean, do you think they understand what manhood looks like?

Dennis: No. I don’t. In fact, I think there is so much taking place in our culture today it is like real manhood, as God designed a man to be, is an elusive goal at best. For most, they have no—they haven’t even got the foggiest idea what that looks like.

Bob: Well, I remember—this will date me a little bit, but I remember trying to figure it out myself and thinking, “So, as a real man the tough John Wayne, Rambo, you don’t share your feelings; you just go out and get it done.” Is that a real man?

Dennis: Don’t eat quiche.

Bob: Yes. Or is a real man a sensitive, caring, kind of person who is tender and who is kind and who pays attention and listens to the heart of his wife? Is that a real man? We get such mixed messages in the culture that I think that a lot of guys are looking around going, “I want to be a man. I’m just not exactly sure what that means.”

Dennis: Well, I don’t often quote from advertisers, especially advertisers that advertise jeans, as an authority; but I ran across an advertisement for Dockers jeans where I just felt like they nailed it. In fact—

Bob: Now hang on. I’m wearing Dockers right now.
Dennis: Are you?

Bob: Okay. Yes.

Dennis: Well, this is a good ad for Dockers jeans, but I want you to listen to this because this appeared in an advertisement for their jeans. You tell me if you don't feel like they nailed it.

Once upon a time, men wore the pants and wore them well. Women rarely had to open doors, and little old ladies never had to cross the street alone. Men took charge because that is what they did, but somewhere along the way the world decided it no longer needed men.

Disco by disco, latte by foamy non-fat latte, men were stripped of their khakis and left stranded on the road between boyhood and androgyny; but today, there are questions are genderless society has no answers for.

Now, I’m going to finish this, Bob, but can you believe this is for jeans? Now I know Dockers makes other things too—

Bob: Right.

Dennis: But this is advertising their jeans. They continue:

The world sets idly by as cities crumble, children misbehave, and those little old ladies remain on one side of the street. For the first time since bad guys, we need heroes. We need grown-ups. We need men to put down the plastic forks, step away from the salad bar, and untie the world from the tracks of complacency. It is time for you to get your hands dirty. It is time to answer the call of manhood. It is time to wear the pants.

Talk about politically incorrect.

Bob: They've been reading your book haven’t they?

<laughter>

Dennis: Here’s what they are saying, and again, an advertisement is not my authority. I’m about to go to Scripture, but they are picking up on the theme of Scripture that there is a lot about manhood that is all about a man taking initiative. Manhood is about initiative.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 talks about standing firm in the faith, acting like men. Be a man, it says. 1 Kings 2 David is about to die. He charges his son, Solomon. He says, “Show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God walking in His ways, keeping
“His statutes, His commandments, His rules, His testimonies.” I mean, he’s calling his son up: be a man; step up, son; don’t fritter away your manhood on lesser callings.

Yet, this culture is sending messages to boys that make the waters incredibly murky. If there is someone that needs to be clarifying what it means to be a real man today, it ought to be followers of Jesus Christ who are tethered to the Scripture.

Bob: So, you would say that the Scriptures give us a clear picture of what mature manhood is?

Dennis: Right.

Bob: Okay. So, unpack it for us.

Dennis: Well, first of all, let me tell you what it isn’t: it’s not passivity. It has been suggested in the Garden in Genesis chapter 3, that when the serpent came to Eve that Adam was standing there. Adam was present, but he did nothing. It has been suggested that perhaps the first sin of man was passivity.

If you think about it, if initiative is the essence of manhood, could it be that the sin of arrogance and pride of doing nothing and just standing back watching may be the opposite?

I think there are three reasons—actually I’m going to give you a bonus reason. Four reasons why men are passive today, they don’t take the initiative.

First of all, taking the initiative is hard work, and I’m tired. It is the end of the day. I don’t feel like leading my family in a devotion at the dinner table. I don’t feel like putting the kids to bed and serving my wife by helping the kids be tucked in and praying with them. The easiest thing for me to do is to sit in my easy chair and become a giant amoeba and just do nothing.

It is hard work to lead. Being a man calls us out of our passivity, out of doing nothing into engagement, into serving, into helping others and shouldering the burden with them.

Bob: It is not just the end of the day when it is hard work. I mean the beginning of the day, just heading off to work. There are a lot of guys who are checked out of manhood at the very beginning of the day because, frankly, as you’ve said it is taking initiative. That means you’ve got to step up, you’ve got to take some responsibility, you’ve got to go to work—

Dennis: Right.

Bob: A lot of guys are going, “Who wants to do that?”
Dennis: If you want to be a man, it is going to include pain because I promise you, to deny yourself and to abandon yourself to serve others will involve self denial and that does involve pain. No, I don't like pain. My flesh doesn't like not getting its own way, but that is a part of being a man.

Remember Mark 10:35-45, the disciples came to Jesus and asked how to be great. He basically said, “The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” I think that’s the essence of manhood: serving others, giving up your life for another.

Another way men fail to take the initiative is they say, “I don't know how. I don't know what it means to initiate. I didn’t have a father who did.” The slate is blank, and so, they use that as an excuse. I would say to a man who didn’t have a father, either present or who didn't have a father who demonstrated this, “Find a man who does.”

Go and find a man who’ll practically illustrate and coach you in what that looks like, like interviewing your daughter's dates. You’ve never perhaps thought about interviewing your daughter's dates. Well, you know what? There are men who can train you in how to do that. There are books that are written in how to do that to show you how to be a man and how to initiate and how to step into a fearful place and be the man.

A third reason why men don't take the initiative is it means I might fail. What if I failed ever time I've initiated or my wife has made me feel like a failure every time I've initiated? The easiest thing to do is nothing and stop initiating.

That really leads me to the fourth one: our wives can do it for us. The reason we fail to initiate is we may have trained our wives to just jump in and do it for us because we haven’t stepped up and taken responsibility for our finances, for the spiritual well-being of our family, for the direction we’re heading as a couple. All of these demand initiative from a man who knows where he’s going.

Bob: We back off. We don’t assume responsibility. A wife who looks around and says, “The job’s not getting done,” and starts to feel fear, she'll step in and do it. That’s what you’re saying?

Dennis: That’s right. So, the opposite is also true, Bob. Instead of being passive, we initiate. What is one of the things we can initiate as a real man? Well, we've taken surveys of more than a hundred thousand people in local churches around the country, and one of the top issues women are looking to their husbands to provide is spiritual leadership of their marriages and their families.

One of the ways a man can assume responsibility and take initiative for leading his wife spiritually is to begin to pray with her every day. We’ve talked about this on FamilyLife Today numerous times. I feel like it's one of my life messages.
Barbara and I prayed together last night. It was a short pray. We were both exhausted because of travel. In our case, we have seventeen grandchildren now. We just had the birth of a new little one, Alice Pearl. So, Barbara and I prayed for her last night as we went to bed.

This morning I read in John 4 about Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the well. He made a phenomenal claim. He said I want to give you water, that’s living water. If you take a drink from me, out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water—

**Bob:** You’ll never thirst again.

**Dennis:** Never thirst again. The woman was astounded by this man who told her about her past and seemed to love her and speak genuinely kind to her. At one point, she talked about the Messiah; and he said, “I, who speak to you, am He.” Well, you know what? Praying together is all about coming to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, coming to Him over and over and over again to get a drink of the living water.

If you drink from Jesus Christ, out of your life will flow rivers, it says, of living water. If you picture a husband leading his wife spiritually, that means that stream can be rich and deep and crystal clear and pure. It means a man can truly love his wife in a whole new level.

Bob, I think a lot of men don’t love and lead their wives spiritually because they don’t know how. They’ve never had anyone challenge them to do it, and it is as if right now I’m on these steps of manhood and I’m reaching down to a guy who may be straddling manhood and adolescents.

**Bob:** At least in the area of this kind of spiritual leadership you’re talking about.

**Dennis:** Right. May not be taking the initiative. I’m reaching down and saying, “Come on. Turn your back on adolescents. Turn your life away from excuses. Step up and become the man God made you to be: loving and leading your wife spiritually.”

**Bob:** Don’t you think, though, that there are men who are intimidated in this area because they know their own spiritual nature. I mean they think if you’re going to lead somebody spiritually you have to be—well, you’ve got to be ahead of them.

A lot of guys look at their wives, and they go, “You know what? Spiritually, she’s ahead of me. I mean she’s got time to go to Bible study fellowship or precept classes. She’s doing more quiet time. I mean, how do I lead her when she’s the one who is farther down the path than I am?”

**Dennis:** Well, if you are not involved—I’m speaking now to this man not to you, Bob. If you’re this guy that Bob is talking about, you’ve got to find a Bible study with a group of men that are absolutely being ruthlessly honest about their own lives and digging into
the Scriptures to find out how to really become all that God created you to be. There’s a lot of guys today who are not engaged in any kind of a Bible study.

I was with a man here recently, and I looked him in the eye. I said, “Tell me what’s going on in your life spiritually.” And it was a blank look. Every area of his life is full with business, family, other issues with his life, recreation. Spiritually speaking, there is no food.

**Bob:** There’s just no margin for that. He says if I’m going to keep the business going and the family demands, I just—I mean I hear you saying get in a Bible study with other guys. I’ve been in a couple of those, and it kind of you know—it didn’t feel great. I just don’t have the margin for it.

**Dennis:** Well, you’ve got to create the margin for it because if you don’t—this is the margin you create to live. It is back to the illustration of Jesus being the one who claimed to be the living waters. If you don’t have time to study about Him and His claims about life and how you as a man ought to live, then how are you going to know how to live as a man? How are you going to know what God expects of you?

It is instructive to me that as David as dying when he turns to his son Solomon, it is primarily focused upon the Scripture. He is charging Solomon: follow the law, obey the Scriptures, do all that God has commanded you to do today. Why? Because he said you are going to find life. He didn’t say you’ll find the living water, but it might as well be written there. That’s what he’s talking about.

So, the question for men today is “Where you going to find out about life?” If you’re just punching the clock and doing your forty, fifty, sixty hours a week of work and not taking time to grow spiritually, there are some warnings in the Bible about the man who is not into the meat of the Word.

He’s not digging into the Scriptures and finding out how it applies to where he is today, to the choices he’s making, and to his responsibilities as a man, husband, father. Maybe a single guy needs to find out what does God expect from me today.

By the way, Bob, there is nothing magical, mystical, or spiritual that is going to automatically make you a man of God when you get married to all of the sudden start leading your wife spiritually. In other words, now is the day to begin tracking with other men and growing spiritually with them as a single young man.

If you want to know how to love, lead, care for, provide, and nurture your wife and cherish her and provide protection for your family, you need to get busy today as a single man practicing those spiritual disciplines of getting in a Bible study of daily prayer, of growing spiritually as a young man. Marriage will not make you—

**Bob:** Right.
**Bob:** Okay. So, the guy who says, “Alright, I’m in a Bible study. I am growing. I’m reading my Bible. I’m having a quiet time, but I still feel intimidated with the thought of coming to my wife and saying, ‘Let’s read this together’ or ‘Let’s pray.’ I think part of the intimidation is she knows the real me. She has seen my feet of clay. For me to come and say, ‘Well, let’s pray together.’ She’s going to think, ‘Oh, how come you’re all of the sudden so spiritual. You, who I just saw being carnal thirty minutes ago?”’

**Dennis:** Yelling at our kids.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** Okay. So, we fail. Who doesn’t fail? We’re not all living out this perfect, cookie-cutter lifestyle of being these perfect, little Christians. If we’re speaking to a wife here who tends to be focused on what her husband does wrong, why don’t you try catching him doing what’s right? Why don’t you, the next time he does something to attempt to lead your family spiritually, say, “Sweetheart, that was fantastic.” It may have only been prayer at the dinner table, but you know what? He stepped up and stepped out and provided some spiritual leadership of his family. So, rather than doing it for him as a wife, instead catch him doing it right and cheer him on and don’t always be focusing on where he has failed.

**Bob:** You think this issue of a man providing spiritual leadership is central to being fully on that manhood step to really embracing what God’s called us to be as men?

**Dennis:** I do, Bob. The reason is as men who are standing on this manhood step looking down to our sons who are at various stages of growth, stepping up themselves. They’re locked onto our lives like little radar units: picking up what we’re about, what our values are, what our priorities are. Who we are as men, what we’re attempting to be, and how we’re attempting to lead is caught by our sons.

One of my favorite poems that was shared here on *FamilyLife Today* a number of years ago by Coach John Wooden, was actually a poem that was given to Coach Wooden. It just reminds us of how powerful a man’s model can be to his family.

**Coach Wooden [recorded message]:** Well, the poem you’re thinking of was given to me when my son was born in 1936. I finished a project for Harcourt, Brace, and Company. They sent me a picture with a man walking along the seashore and his little son is trying to step in his foot stamps just behind him before the wind brushes them away. There were some lines along the side that said:

A careful man I must always be,
A little fellow follows me.
I know I dare not go astray,
For fear he'll go the self same way.

I cannot once escape his eyes.
What err he sees me do, he tries.
Like me, he says he's going to be,
This little chap who follows me.

He thinks that I am good and fine.
Believes in every word of mine.
The base in me he must not see,
This little chap who follows me.

I must be careful as I go
Through summer's sun and winter's snow
Because I am building for the years to be
This little chap who follows me.

**Dennis:** Bob, as men, it is better for us to fail in an attempt of leading our wives spiritually than doing nothing. Perhaps the greatest and most courageous thing a man who is listening to this broadcast will ever do, will be to take his wife's hand and say, “I want to lead you in prayer” or “I want us to pray together as a couple.” These are not minor deals.

When a couple bows before Almighty God, their souls can be knit together by the One who made them. It is worth it, just like David's charge to Solomon: be the man, show yourself strong, obey God.

**Bob:** Yes. I think a lot of guys miss the fact that our walk with God and our spiritual leadership is central to stepping up. You know they look at kind of the machismo of the culture, and they say, “Well, okay, being a man is all about physical strength. It's all about daring, courage, or heroism.” We would agree with a lot of those things; but at the core, you've got to be God's man.

**Dennis:** Right.

**Bob:** You’ve got to be a man who is in pursuit of a right relationship with God in Christ and who is leading others in that direction. Otherwise, it is all about self.

I am hopeful that many of our listeners are going to call us this week or go online at FamilyLifeToday.com to get a copy of your new book. It is called *Stepping Up—A Call to Courageous Manhood*. You can request a copy this week if you help with a donation to support *FamilyLife Today*. We are listener supported. Those donations are what keep us on this station and on our network of stations all across the country.

So, this week if you make a donation, we want you to feel free to request a copy of the new book, *Stepping Up*, by Dennis Rainey. The book is not currently available in stores
or on Amazon. So, if you are interested in a copy, you’ll need to contact us. If you’re interested in multiple copies for a men’s study or a group’s study, you can contact us; and we can let you know how you can purchase additional copies.

If you make a donation this week online at FamilyLifeToday.com, just type the word “STEPUP” into the online key code box. When we see that, we’ll know to send you a copy of Dennis’ new book. Or call 1-800-FL-Today, 1-800-358-6329. It’s 1-800- F as in “family”, L as in “life”, then the word “TODAY”. When you make a donation, just ask for a copy of Dennis’ new book, Stepping Up; and we’ll send it out to you.

Now, tomorrow, when we come back, we’re going to talk more about the characteristics of authentic, biblical masculinity. That is coming up tomorrow. I hope you can be here.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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