

Real Men F.L.I.P. For the Gospel

I met a young man who had a remarkable story. After briefly attending college, he joined the military and served for five years. Now he is out and has landed his first civilian job.

Yet, it was obvious in talking to him that he has had very few—if any—male role models who could show him what it meant to be a real man. His dad was not really involved in his life and his mom, while well-meaning, had trouble providing emotionally, economically, and spiritually.

So here he sits, in his mid-twenties, wondering what a man really is and how to become one.

You might be thinking, *What's so remarkable about that?* The remarkable thing is that his story is not remarkable at all.

We've created a culture where what should have been the exception—young men drifting through life without mentors, training, or direction—has instead become the norm. There are literally millions of men in America just like my new friend. And as a country, we are reaping the devastation that follows.

Consider how confusing our culture is for young men today. They see various caricatures of manhood paraded before them. And each one is subtly held up as a standard to live by.

Do you recognize any of these male archetypes?

Success Man — This image promises that the key to happiness is getting your act together and doing well in every area of your life. Get a great job, drive a nice car, marry a beautiful woman—then you will be a real man.

Macho Man — In some versions of manhood, men have to be able to handle anything and everything. Nothing is too difficult

for a real man—just grit your teeth and bear it. And don't let anyone disrespect you. Real men are willing to do anything to preserve their reputation.

Outdoors Man – This perspective says that men today are too tame and timid. Real men hunt things and then eat their bloody hearts. The more you can be in the woods or on the water, and the more dangerous the activity, then the more that you will become a true man.

Sensitive Man – This image tells men that they need to connect with people emotionally (especially women) and talk about their feelings. Tears are good; tears over a good book with some wine and cheese are even better.

Bumbling Man – It doesn't take seeing many commercials or sitcoms to realize that men are incompetent and incapable. They can't shop, cook, take care of the kids, or remember birthdays and anniversaries. But it's okay because they are kind of cute and everything works out in the end.

Family Man – This idea emphasizes that real men are committed to their wife and kids. They don't have time for themselves; they're too busy carting their children across town from one activity to the next. Whatever their kids want need, they get.

Religious Man – Men need to be committed to their churches and do what their pastors tell them to do. Playing by the rules is the most important thing in life. Being a man of integrity who is respected by others is the definition of success.

Sports Man – Real manhood is derived from watching and occasionally playing sports. Being a loyal fan—even when your team stinks year after year—is a badge of honor. Real men spend a lot of time arguing over and cheering for other guys that are actually doing something.

I'm sure some of those seem familiar to you, and you could probably add a few more. No wonder men are so confused.

True Manhood

The Bible clearly demonstrates that real manhood is grounded not in cultural expectations and norms, but rather in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without the gospel, all of us are broken shells of what we should be. No matter what we pursue to satisfy our hearts, outside of the gospel it will never be enough.

But through the gospel, Jesus changes everything. When a man finds himself forgiven and healed in Christ, he is then free to pursue manhood—not from need or duty or obligation, but rather as an overflow of who God has made him to be.

I recently had a chance to take my 15-year-old son on a special trip. We went to ride roller coasters at Cedar Point. As part of our experience, I wanted to emphasize for him some aspects of biblical manhood. I thought it was fitting to use the acronym .

Faith – “Holding on to the One who will never let you go.” I shared with my son how the Bible says that all of our life should be ordered around loving and worshipping God. We don’t have faith in our own effort, or even in our own faith and belief; we have faith in Christ who is majestic and strong. He is the one who can do in us what we could never do for ourselves.

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22a).

Leadership – “Following His vision, serving others, and loving people well.” We talked about how the gospel compels us to want to make a difference in the lives of other people. There will always be contrary voices trying to distract you and other men; God calls us to follow His trail and bring along as many others as we can.

“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

Integrity – “Making the way you live match what you believe.” In a world of temptation, the gospel gives us the power to obey. It’s not our self-effort that allows us to avoid sinful behaviors, but rather a heart that worships and desires to honor Jesus Christ. When the glory of Christ is more important than my short-term desires, integrity is assured.

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands” (Psalm 119:9-10).

Perseverance – “Allowing the hope that God gives to help you push through hard times.” We will all face difficulty and suffering. The gospel gives us the key to making it through. Jesus says there is something greater and more lasting than this life. Because we have a sure hope before us tomorrow, we can endure the hard times we face today.

“I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD (Lamentations 3:24-26).

It was a wonderful experience. We rode some great roller coasters, and more importantly, had some great discussions about what it means to be a man. We had blue wristbands made for the conclusion of the trip—one for him, one for me, and the others for him to distribute in the months ahead. Each wristband is embossed with the letters **F. L. I. P.** as a reminder of how the gospel teaches us to be real men.

Do you know young men who are confused about true manhood? Tell them to forget the nonsense of modern American

caricatures and to **F. L. I. P.** out instead.