

The MANtle of Leadership Beckons

My whole life, I have heard the expression “He carried the mantle of leadership well. Privately, I’ve always wondered, “What is a mantle exactly?”

Is it a masculine baton you receive, carry, and then hand off? Who gives this to a man? Or, is it a male candle? My wife says it’s that shelf over the fireplace.

A herd of praying mantises, maybe? A mantle. Lacking the true scoop, it’s not surprising to discover my idea of a mantle was both off and somewhat on. A mantle, I discovered, is nothing more than something that covers or surrounds something else. The fuzz covering the horns of a male deer, for example, is called its “mantle” because it completely encapsulates the actual horn until it wears off.

Key words: covers and surrounds. To be sure, a deer was not the first image of leadership that popped into my head but the idea driving it in my man-brain was spot on. So let’s complete this round trip: men carrying a mantle of leadership.

Functionally, when the word “mantle” is applied to a man it means that he has influence. Specifically, your character and conduct cover and surround the people you lead. It’s both the sum and substance of our responses and reactions in a relational context that constitute our leadership style or “mantle.”

Bringing the definition home (literally) our mantle as men—in the family context—covers or surrounds our wives and children for better or for worse. Get this: your mantle has cosmic implications. Cosmic? Really?

Another discovery I made while plumbing the depths of

masculine meaning and significance is that God himself is quite interested in our “mantle” and how we carry it—especially in our families. In fact, one of the main leadership bulletins in the Bible talks about how your influence in the home is the truest reflection of the quality of your leadership and the most important predictor of your leadership in other zones of influence.

If only all human resource directors were as thorough and insightful as God: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” (I Timothy 3:4-5)

One of the great fantasies men harbor is that a smokin’ professional life somehow makes up for the emotional and relational shortfall at home. For the past two decades, I have seen men self deceive and self-destruct unnecessarily in boyish attempts to be validated professionally versus relationally. It’s sad to watch and sadder for the men who fall asleep at night knowing that their outward success or image is haunted by the reality that they lack the inner meaning only strong relationships in the family can provide.

The wisest men and most spiritual men I know discipline themselves toward family relationships. They work hard to slay their inner dragons to win intimacy in the home. They know relational integrity and commitment are the stuff of real men. They value the respect of their wife and children as apex validation. They agree with God: first things first.

A man can’t run from his mantle just like a deer can’t prevent the fuzz from growing over his horns. The question is not: “Am I a man of influence?” The question is: “What kind of influence am I having and on whom?”

Intuitively, men realize that if they don’t do relationships right they are not doing life right. And while we sense and

feel this deeply, most of us are at a loss for what to do about it or where to turn. Many of feel like our flaws are fatal and final in the family zone.

Fortunately, there is a safety net for all of us who are falling short, need help, or need strong reminder to refocus. Ready? To provide a healthy mantle of leadership in our homes, we have to experience a healthy mantle of sonship first.

This means experiencing a strong model of love from a strong mentor in love in the form of another man. This shocks people when I say it but it explains most of the character defects behind all sorts of unhealthy mantles among men worldwide: a man will never be able to love others in a healthy way until he has received validating love, acceptance, and affirmation from another man in his life.

It's that simple and that powerful. Every man ever born needs to be covered and surrounded by the healthy love a father in order to give the same away. That is why I encourage all men to explore, encounter, and personally engage the love of God as a child of God through the Son of God. This is the indestructible foundation of a strong mantle—a father's love for a son.

In this sense, my own mantle in my home is not a mystery to me. Indeed, it is a reflection of a powerful love that covers and surrounds me so that I can cover and surround those he has given to me with healthy leadership. Jesus the mentor and Jesus the model is also the messenger of this truth: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

It's on me.