



THE  
MAN  
CODE

12 PRIORITIES  
EVERY MAN NEEDS  
TO KNOW

MARK HENRY

# THE MAN CODE

MARK HENRY



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*This book is dedicated to the glory and pleasure of God.*

*May He use it as He sees fit in the lives of our grandsons  
Zeke, Ben, Eli, Jo, Zach, and Gabe, as well as others  
of their generation and those who follow.*

*May they live like real men.*

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# HOW GOD MADE MEN

**T**he *Man Code* has been a personal journey. In one way, it started when I became a follower of Jesus and began to devote myself to His Word. But in another sense, the journey goes back to something that happened when I was five years old: My father committed suicide.

At that age, I couldn't possibly understand what he had done. Decades later, I still don't understand. But now I have an adult Christian perspective; that makes all the difference how I respond to his action.

Beginning with such pain, you might expect *The Man Code* journey to be a sad one. Instead, it has been a voyage of joyful discovery and fulfillment. The terrible beginning pushed me to seek out God's perspective on the role of the human male in His creation. What I found is both inspiring and rewarding.

In this book, I often use the term *real men* because it carries a powerful connotation in our culture. Two boys look at a ditch. One jumps across it. The other looks at the width of the ditch with trepidation. The first boy says, "Come on! Jump it. Be a man!" We all know what he means. "Be brave. Be strong. Have some backbone." Interestingly, the apostle Paul gave a similar admonishment in 1 Corinthians

16:13-14: “Act like men, be strong.” Though Paul was writing to both male and female believers, he made a connection here between manhood and being strong.

Beyond having one X and one Y chromosome and being strong, the most important aspect of being a real man is being a man of God. As creator, God designed men a certain way, and any man who follows that design is a real man. He hears God’s call, embraces Jesus as Lord, lives for God’s purpose, stays focused, acts with duty and responsibility, practices godly character, uses his strength to protect others, works with diligence, respects authority, cheers and cultivates his family, and advances the work of God. This is the man God has created and called you to be.

God also created women with strength, courage, and backbone, just as He did men. There are similarities between the sexes as well as differences. Nevertheless, the differences are real. They are many, and they are wonderful, and God has purposes behind them. It’s unfortunate that society is obsessed with erasing those differences. In doing so, it is going against God’s design.

The fact there are differences doesn’t mean God values one or the other more highly. God loves all women and men the same. In His eyes, they have equal value. They are equally important. But to understand God’s callings in our lives, we must recognize the differences He has created in men and women.

Today’s culture takes great pride in telling people, “Be yourself”—but not when it comes to the distinctives God created in men and women. Society tells girls that they should act like boys. And it tells boys they should act like girls. And the result is a lot of confusion that is detrimental—sometimes to the point of mental illness.

Men and women are different. We should not discourage those differences. We should celebrate them. In contrast, society celebrates diversity in almost every area but this. It denies male-female diversity.

Common sense confirms it, but the thought police tell us it is sexist even to mention such differences. This denial of basic truth concerning the sexes does terrible things to both men and women, and even worse things to boys and girls.

There is nothing wrong with being a man. There is nothing wrong with being a woman. We should embrace and enjoy how God made us. This was His plan from the beginning.

This book addresses God's call on men specifically. That's not meant as a slight to women, but as a help to everyone.

*Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be,  
for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.*

PSALM 12:1

*I'm not sure we have the men to defend  
America from foreign threats any longer.*

ARMY SERGEANT

*I cannot find a good man to marry.*

28-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

*I interviewed ten men today for the job, but  
I don't think any of them know how to work.*

BUSINESS OWNER

*Is there a good man who could mentor my son?*

SINGLE MOM

*I cannot find a good man to lead  
a Bible study or serve as an elder.*

LOCAL PASTOR



# 1

## WE HAVE A CRISIS

Popular media portrays men in many negative ways. Sitcoms, TV commercials, and even comic books depict men as weak, inept, bumbling, unreliable, greedy, irate, selfish, dangerous, unfit for authority, and stupid. In general, they show masculinity as toxic, even deadly.

Belittling men is popular, modern, and trendy. Tell a joke about men's incompetence or laziness, and you are sure to get a laugh. Tell a similar joke about women, and society will label you as politically incorrect and a hater.

At most major universities, the field of gender studies is more about bashing males than about the objective study of the complexities related to maleness and femaleness. Students are taught to see men and boys as entitled and oppressive.

But, in fact, they are in crisis.

### DIMENSIONS OF THE CRISIS

You may have heard that in school, girls do better in courses that require verbal skills, and boys do better in math and science. That used to be true. But now, girls do better than boys in every academic

discipline.<sup>1</sup> It's not that girls have improved, but that boys have declined. That decline raises the huge question of why. And we had better find the answers because nothing less than the future of human civilization is at stake.

National Public Radio (NPR) reports, "A new study shows that when it comes to the classroom, girls rule. They outperform boys in math, science, and reading in 70 percent of the 70-plus countries and regions surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Girls do better even in countries that rank low on the UN's [United Nation's] gender equality index."<sup>2</sup>

According to the US Department of Education, 134 women graduate from college for every 100 male graduates.<sup>3</sup> And it's not just bachelor's degrees. Bloomberg reports, "As of 2017, women between ages 18 and 24 earned more than two-thirds of all master's degrees, meaning there were 167 women with master's degrees for every 100 men."<sup>4</sup>

It's great that women are getting degrees in large numbers. But the growing imbalance between males and females raises an obvious question: What's going on with men and boys? Closer examination shows that the problem goes far deeper than education. In general, boys are in trouble. So are their adult counterparts.

Dr. Warren Farrell, a prominent author and educator, says that a major part of the problem is what he calls "dad-deprived boys." At a Marin County TEDx event in 2016, he said, "Prisons are basically centers for dad-deprived boys. In California since 1980, we've built 18 new prisons... There has been a 700 percent increase in the prison population of the United States since 1972. That's a 93 percent male population, mostly a dad-deprived boy population."<sup>5</sup>

There have been 389 school shootings since the Columbine incident in 1999. During that time, "more than 357,000 students have experienced gun violence," according to *The Washington Post*.<sup>6</sup>

Males perpetrated almost all of them. Some people see gun control

as the solution. But at best, that would be a Band-Aid. It does not address the deeper issue. Guns are not new, but pervasive numbers of school shootings are new. What changed? Specifically, what changed for boys?

## EPIDEMIC OF DESPAIR

Many blame school shootings on mental illness. But that begs another question: Why is there a mental health crisis in the United States and in other first world countries? According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in 2020, 22.8 percent of American adults had been diagnosed with some form of mental illness.<sup>7</sup> That's one in five!

Don't forget how far society has lowered the bar in this area. There are people who now consider it healthy and normal for a boy to think he is a girl, and vice versa.

Society answers by addressing the symptoms, or by lowering the standards of what is considered normal. To use Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's memorable phrase, society is "defining deviancy down."<sup>8</sup> Shouldn't we be asking if society took some wrong turns somewhere along the way?

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States was spending almost 18 percent of its entire gross domestic product on healthcare. For decades, we spent wildly to cure diseases, make better medicines, build a better healthcare infrastructure, and create better health technology. You would expect this massive amount of money and this many medical advances to pay off in longer and healthier lives. But in 2015, life expectancy for Americans began decreasing.<sup>9</sup> As of this writing, it continues to fall.

Why did life expectancy for Americans start decreasing five years *before* the COVID-19 pandemic? The answer can be described as an epidemic of despair.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) blames the decline on the rise in drug overdoses, an ever-growing number of suicides, and increased liver disease (this last one is attributed to increased alcohol consumption). People are using drugs and alcohol in an attempt to self-medicate against despair. Suicide is despair on steroids.

Americans—especially men and boys—are dying younger because hopelessness and despair are killing them.

Before age nine, girls and boys commit suicide at about the same low rate. But between the ages of 10 and 14, nearly four times as many boys as girls commit suicide.<sup>10</sup> Between the ages of 15 and 19, boys kill themselves 3.31 times more than girls.<sup>11</sup> For young adults, that number jumps to more than four times!<sup>12</sup>

## SEEKING MALE ROLE MODELS

Almost everyone agrees that one major problem is the lack of male role models in boys' lives. That makes the problem self-perpetuating. Absent men in one generation create more absent men in the next—and so on. We can stop the cycle, but only if we address it.

Even when fathers are in the picture, they are not always present for their sons. Among boys who have dads in their lives, the boys talk to their fathers an average of 30 *minutes* a week.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, boys spend an average of 44 *hours* a week on their phones, watching television, on computers, and with other kinds of electronic screens.<sup>14</sup>

Boys will find role models. If dad doesn't do the job, someone else will. In other words, if you don't want the latest celebrity to serve as your child's mentor, don't hand him the job.

Because boys are prone to imitate the latest sports or media stars, it's important to think about what they learn from them. Negative values, attitudes, and behaviors are likely to be copied unless a parent steps in and teaches boys what is right versus what is wrong.

## WHAT WE SOW IN BOYS, WE REAP IN MEN

Educators, clergymen, sociologists, and psychologists have been talking about a crisis among boys for decades. By now, the boy-crisis has become a man-crisis. Large numbers of men haven't grown up. In some cases, it's because they never learned responsibility. In other cases, they've never been taught how to make good or right decisions. They have significant problems with pornography<sup>15</sup> and video game addictions.<sup>16</sup> Some either still live with mom and dad or are too dependent on them.

Dr. Farrell, political scientist and author, describes boys and young men as being in "present hedonistic"<sup>17</sup> mode. Dictionary.com defines a *hedonist* as "a person whose life is devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification." If someone's time perspective is "present hedonist," that person is all about the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification *right now*. In that mode, they seek immediate pleasure and avoid sacrifice or difficulty. They rarely plan for a future beyond the next few hours, and they do not prepare for contingencies. They have no long-term plans. They are rudderless.

Boys and men are in a terrible downward spiral. The crisis is self-perpetuating and multiplying.

## ANSWERS

Thankfully, with God's help, we can stop the downward spiral and the cycle of absent dads and broken boys. But we need to face the problem squarely. To one degree or another, it affects the lives of many others. We cannot sustain our present level of civilization without a major turnaround. In biblical terms, *turnaround* means "repentance."

We need a return to the biblical definition of manhood, and we need it now!

*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith,  
act like men, be strong.*

1 CORINTHIANS 16:13

*A man's got to have a code,  
a creed to live by, no matter his job.<sup>1</sup>*

JOHN WAYNE

*A Cadet will not lie, cheat, steal,  
or tolerate those who do.<sup>2</sup>*

WEST POINT CADET HONOR CODE

*Duty, Honor, Country.<sup>3</sup>*

GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR