

THE

BECOMING A MAN

NEW

AFTER GOD'S HEART

MAN

DAN DORIANI

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THE NEW MAN

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AFTER GOD'S HEART

DAN DORIANI


P U B L I S H I N G
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Preface

This book is a proposal and a protest. It protests all the books that reduce the Christian life to a string of techniques and how-to lists. It proposes instead that the course of the Christian is the course of his God. It protests all the lists of four steps for building lasting friendships, five techniques for raising obedient children, and seven methods of loving your wife. To avoid man-made lists, we will spend more time exploring Bible texts than typical men's books do. We will also focus on character over technique and law. God is remaking his children in his image. Therefore, it is our heritage and destiny to become more like the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We are most true to ourselves when most like Christ.

That conviction shapes this book. Instead of starting with rules and guidelines for godly living, we will consider the nature of God first. For example:

- Godly husbands follow the pattern of sacrificial love set by Jesus. His love for his bride, the church, shows husbands how to love their wives.
- Good fathers are like God, our Father. His love, justice, faithfulness, and loving discipline set the pattern for godly fathers.
- Godly friends imitate God's friendship with Abraham and Moses, the friendship of Jesus and his disciples. Self-disclosure and helpful presence are the marks of his friendship with us, and ours with each other.
- Godly workers love to create because God the Creator made us in his image. We like to finish tasks because we resemble Jesus who exulted, "It is finished."

- Even in our play, we imitate the playfulness of God that we see in his world. His pattern of work and rest liberates us to rest and play.

There is more to godly masculinity than this, but nothing is more foundational. God created us in his image, and by his grace he restores us to that image day by day. For that reason, this book accents character over technique, being over doing.

This approach follows Jesus, who says, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matt. 7:17–18). Jesus also says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Talk of inability offends men who have a high estimate of their strength. So be it. Progress cannot begin until we know ourselves, weaknesses included. We must know that love, sacrifice, and service are alien to our lazy and self-seeking souls. Left to ourselves, we have little desire to sacrifice. But Jesus renews people.

In the language of Scripture, Jesus gives us a new heart. We gain spiritual sensitivity and new interests. A Christian man still cares about his honor, and he cares about God’s honor too. He loves his family, and loves the family of God as well. We each become, in the language of Scripture, a man after God’s heart.

The phrase *a man after God’s heart* captures the way a changed life radiates out from a renewed spirit. First Samuel 13:14 uses it to describe David before he became king, and it suits him well. He longed for nothing more than God’s presence (Ps. 27:4–8). Zeal for God’s house consumed him (Ps. 69:9). These passions transformed David. When a Philistine giant taunted God’s people, David could not bear the insult to God’s honor, and fought the giant in the Lord’s strength (1 Sam. 17). When David became king, his first act was to bring the ark of God, the sign of God’s presence, into his capital city (2 Sam. 6). As king he showed mercy and protected the weak, because he knew that *God* “has regard

for the weak [and] delivers him in times of trouble” (Ps. 41:1–2; see also 2 Sam. 9). In the course of his affair with beautiful, reckless Bathsheba, David learned that he was weak too, a man who needed to *receive* mercy and deliverance, not just give it. But as a man after God’s heart, he eventually confessed his sin. Making no excuses, he threw himself on God’s mercy, and received it (2 Sam. 11–12).

Although David certainly knew and loved God’s law, David was not essentially a law-driven man. He loved his God, and that directed his actions. Anyone who takes his sins and sinfulness seriously knows lists of duties will never be the prime guides for a believer.

Why then do we act as if we can hand out rules and methods and expect any Joe to follow them? Why do certain Christians sound as if we can solve every problem by spooning out the right techniques? Do they think proper instruction is the key to life? If it is, why are there so many self-help books? Wouldn’t three or four be enough to cover our topics? Our cultures shape us more than we realize. I wonder: Do Christian leaders focus on techniques because science, technology, and business dominate our culture? Has our fascination with technological solutions to problems seeped into our theological bones? Have management models led us to think we can govern our relationships by following easy steps?

Jesus appears often enough in books for Christian men. Sadly, some use him as teacher more than our Savior. His actions are made to illustrate the principles of the book—the “how-to” of whatever a chapter requires. Meanwhile, if the grace of Jesus is mentioned, it is the grace that forgives, rather than the grace that transforms and sustains sinners.

Of course, a book on marriage, fatherhood, money, work, friendship, and play will make suggestions. I will not ground all of them in the character of God. Some explore the life of faith. Some address Christian discernment—the ability to see things God’s way and act on it day by day. But the interest in God’s

character will remain. We become like that which we behold. Law neither motivates nor transforms, but grace does. When that grace changes us, it changes all.

A Word to the Wives

Women like to read men's books. This is a man's book, but women read more than men, who sometimes need their beloved to nudge them. I hope husbands and wives will jointly read the chapters on marriage and parenting. Since I wrote those chapters for mouth and ear, a couple might read them to each other, making this a read-aloud book.

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Debbie, for helping celebrate all our undeserved blessings and for your patience and mercy in my painfully slow movement toward maturity. It is a joy to have my daughter Sarah illustrate the chapter on play. Her sketches arise from happy memories. I dedicate this book to the godly men with whom I have explored these issues and lived together as we sought godly manhood over the last twelve years: Clay, Robbie, Lance, Eric 1 and 2, Tim, Jay Thomas, Marc, Mark, Randy, Norman, Frank, Allen, Todd, Josh, Bob 1 and 2, Gerry, Bill, Jimmy, Joe, Ted, and David.

A Man After God's Heart

Finding the Right Path

Some years ago, I tried downhill skiing for the first time. Each night I instructed a group of men and women in the Christian faith, and each day they instructed me on the slopes of a peak in the Austrian Alps. I fell down too many times to count, yet the men stuck by me. One gave formal lessons in the morning. Others skied gentler slopes at slower speeds in the afternoon, patiently teaching me their art. On the last run of the fourth afternoon, my companion, an athletic Dutchman, took me to the top of the mountain. "I think you'll like this trail," he said, as we hopped off the lift. We skied a short distance and stopped to peer down what seemed more like a cliff than a trail.

"That looks a little steep," I said, trying to sound calm.

"Well, yes," my friend replied. "This is where the downhill race starts when the World Cup comes to town."

"How fast do they go?" I wondered.

"About 140 kilometers per hour."

I stared downhill and calculated, "That's over 85 miles an hour."

My friend understood. "It's OK," he assured me. "They go straight down. We'll ski from side to side, across the mountain. Look, I'll go first. Follow in my tracks and you will be fine." I trusted him (and I had no choice), so when he launched, I followed, skiing in his tracks. I crashed on the first turn and slid down the first, steepest slope. After that, I found that his tracks

were good, because they allowed me to ski slowly enough to stay upright (usually) as my skis followed his. Farther down, we found milder paths and skied side by side as we enjoyed the mountain's magnificent vistas.

The Christian life is like my journey down the mountain. We have to follow the trail, but we're not good enough. Left to our own devices, we fall down over and over. Indeed, left to ourselves, we die. But we are not on our own. Someone is willing to help us find the right path. Ultimately, that Someone is God. At another level, our fellow Christians help us. They know the way down, they negotiated the path with skill, skied before us, and made a track we could follow.

The Bible describes the Christian life as a way or a path. Moses summoned the people of God to "walk in all his ways" (Deut. 11:22). Psalm 1 says, "The LORD watches over the way of the righteous" (Ps. 1:6, see also 18:36; 119:32–35). And Paul says Christians should "walk in the footsteps of the faith [of] our father Abraham" (Rom. 4:12). So the life of faith is active—a walk or journey in the right path. Indeed Scripture often compares the believer to a runner, even a racer (Ps. 119:32; Isa. 40:31; 1 Cor. 9:24–26; Heb. 12:1). Yet we must understand the journey correctly. We don't simply achieve success by our striving. We must beware of Christianity as simply as performance, or what we can call "Nike Christianity."

Following the Path of Performance; or Nike Christianity

Performance Christianity, or Nike Christianity, is a "just do it" approach to the Christian life.¹ Nike Christianity is a form of legalism. Since the term *legalism* is tossed around carelessly in some circles, we should distinguish four classes of legalist.

A class one legalist believes that he can *do* something to obtain salvation, to *earn* God's favor. The rich young man who

1. The motto has been in continuous use since 1988 as I write. Clearly it resonates with something in the Western psyche.

asked Jesus what he could do to inherit eternal life was a class one legalist (Matt. 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23). Class two legalists require believers to submit to man-made commandments as if they were the law of God. Think of the Pharisees who attacked Jesus when he didn't follow their rules (Matt. 15:1–2). Class three legalists obey God and do good in order to gain or retain God's favor. Here we should think of the prosperity gospel, as well as all believers who think God's daily favor depends on their daily performance.

Class four legalists—Nike Christians—avoid the worst errors, but so accentuate obedience to God's law that other ideas shrivel up. They think of Christian living as little more than obedience to God's law. They reason, "God says we should tithe, so tithe. The Bible says we must pray, so pray. It says submit to leaders, witness, read Scripture, so we should submit, witness, and read. Just do it." Some Christian leaders unintentionally support Nike Christianity. One said, "The moral keynote of Christianity must be obedience." The Christian life is "submission to demands," so that "God calls and man obeys." They reason, "God has redeemed us at the cost of his Son's life. Now he demands our service in return. This is our duty." Class four legalists so dwell on God's law that they neglect the other aspects of the Christian life—the love of others, the nurture of character, the pursuit of noble but entirely optional projects, and more.

A great deal of Christian literature for men smacks of Nike Christianity. Books stress the need to repent and live better, according to the advice the book will dispense shortly. Nike Christian literature loves "how-to" lists. It offers five ways to form edifying friendship, six pointers for handling conflict, seven ways to exercise loving leadership, and eight techniques for more effective parenting.

Nike speakers set up their advice by reciting litanies of woes afflicting our culture. Next, they ask how we can break the downward spiral. Their answer goes roughly like this: We

break the cycle by getting men to assume their responsibilities. If anyone has failed, he needs to confess his sins to God. Then, O man, "Recommit yourself to your spiritual priorities. Get back on your feet, dust yourself off, and 'go and sin no more.'" In essence, their counsel goes like this:

- Some of you are doing bad things. You should stop! God wants you to do good things instead of bad things.
- Some of you are doing good things. Keep it up!
- Here is how to keep it up. You must plan to endure, taking these steps: Make a decision. Pray every morning. Commit yourself to God, 100 percent. Avoid temptation. Guard your mind, heart, and eyes. Seek a partner in accountability. Then you will stay on the right path.

The Problem with Nike Christianity

In one way, no one could object to this advice; those who dispense it certainly mean well. But the relentless stress on what men should *do* misses the most basic issue, the heart issue. Men fail to take the steps to "keep it up" because they don't *want* to keep it up. Prayer? Some men have no desire to be alone with God in prayer. They are bored or fearful. Commit 100 percent? We are double-minded, resisting God's authority one hour and embracing it the next. Accountability? Men *avoid* accountability because they prefer to answer to themselves alone. They don't want to guard the mind and/or the eye too closely. They *want* to indulge the eye's lusts for women and the mind's fantasies of dominance or wealth.

Most popular Christian books for men and women, most books about marriage and family, have a strong whiff of Nike Christianity. They are full of advice, but nearly devoid of grace. They speak often of what we should do for God, but little of what God has done for us. They often invoke the example of Jesus, but rarely discuss the *prior* love of Jesus that draws us to love him.

One day I was reading such a book in our family room as my wife sat nearby. The author was telling women how to act so their husbands would love them and long for their company: They must never nag. They must never greet their beleaguered heroes at the door with a litany of the day's problems. Rather they must always be welcoming, gentle, thankful, complimentary. Never criticize, complain, or get angry, the author said. Then your husband will love your very presence.

"Not a bad book," I thought. But as the obligations heaped up, I began to wonder what a real woman would say to this. So, selecting the lead sentences in fifteen or twenty sections, I read the gist of it to my wife. After five minutes or so, I paused, "What do you think?"

"It's good advice," she said thoughtfully, "But I felt overwhelmed and defeated after the first five ideas—and there were a dozen more." Exactly. What else can we say of books that say, in the final analysis, "Your husband [or your wife] will love you more if you never make a mistake"? They motivate with nothing but duty and guilt.

Please understand: it is good to submit to God's law and follow Jesus' example. The Savior is also our Sovereign and Lord (Jude 4). The Creator and Redeemer has all authority in heaven and on earth. Our sins grieve God, and he delights in our obedience, an obedience we owe him. But obedience is one element of the Christian life, not the whole. Indeed, the emphasis on obedience places the will ahead of the heart. It places our resolve (or self-discipline) ahead of our loves, even though the Bible places supreme emphasis on the heart and love—the heart is the "wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23; see also Matt. 22:34–40). In short, obedience is neither the root nor the highest fruit of Christian living.

From beginning to end, God's love and grace go before his demands. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). The love of Christ, who died for us, compels us to live not for ourselves but for God (2 Cor. 5:14–15). It is "the *grace* of God," not the *law*

of God, that “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions” (Titus 2:11–12). Commands don’t change people, love does. Unless God first loves a man and reconciles that man to himself, he cannot obey God’s commands.

If we tell an atheist, “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” he cannot, for the command is nonsense to him. If he believes there is no god in heaven, why should he plan for it?

If we tell a teenager who despises her mother, “You must respect your mother,” she cannot do so. She cannot *show* respect if she does not *have* respect. She may *obey* her mother, but she will do it grudgingly, with rolling eyes and slouching shoulders. She needs a changed relationship with her mother—a change of heart.

Similarly, while it makes sense to call a godless man to repent, it is a bit strange to tell him to stop sinning. We might as well command a drowning man to swim. It is true that the drowning man needs to swim, but the problem, precisely, is that he cannot. Likewise, a man who has enthroned his career or his appetites as his gods will not and *cannot* obey a command to put God first. As Paul says, “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom. 8:7).

The law has very important roles. It labels sin and shows people their sinfulness. It promotes civil order and reins in our wilder impulses. It states what we owe to others. Because every law reflects God’s character, it shows us how to grow in conformity to him. But law, by itself, cannot change the heart.

The Root of a Godly Life

I recently spoke to a Christian businessman with a passion for discipleship. Frustrated by the slow progress of certain men, he asked me, “Dan, tell me, how do you get people to *change*? Where do they get *ability* to change? How can I get them”—he was punctuating every word—“to *do . . . what’s . . . RIGHT?*” Because my friend had broken with Nike Christianity, he was ready for my reply: “Commands can change the behavior of children or

employees, if you have the ability to punish disobedience. But law, by itself, never renews the heart. The love and grace of God change us. The truth changes people if the Spirit has renewed them and given them 'ears to hear.' But teachers don't have the power to change hearts. We cannot 'make' people do what is right."

Who can? Jeremiah said Israel would change when God gave his people a soft heart to replace their heart of stone (Jer. 31). Paul said the preaching of the gospel of Christ is foolishness—unless God's Spirit grants the ability to understand truths that are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 1:21–2:14). In short, the *root* of obedience is God's prior grace and the *fruit* of obedience is conformity to his person and his plans. Jerry Bridges says:

We do have a duty and obligation to God. He is the Sovereign Ruler of this world, and in that capacity, He has "laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed" (Psalm 119:4). But He motivates us to obedience, not on the basis of His sovereign rule, but on the basis of His mercy to us in Jesus Christ. . . . I am committed to seek to act in love toward everyone. But I am committed in these areas out of a grateful response to God's grace, not to try to earn God's blessings.²

That is the gospel principle. We don't produce good works in order to *acquire* God's love but because we have his love. Everything hangs on the conjunctions. We obey, not *in order to* obtain God's salvation, but *because* God has saved us. Scripture motivates obedience by describing God's prior love. At Sinai, before declaring the law, God reminded Israel of his covenant-making love:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex. 19:4–6)

2. Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 78, 75.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. (Ex. 20:2-3)

So God's grace enables and impels us to live for him. Yet there are ways to think about obedience that partially detach it from the principles of covenant and grace. Like so many others, I experienced this very detachment for years.

The Motives for a Godly Life

When I was a new Christian, my teachers clearly taught that I owed the Lord my obedience in all of life. Yet I was a bit muddled as to why I obeyed. If asked to explain, I answered three ways, which we can call the way of wisdom, the way of trust, and the way of gratitude.

The way of wisdom says, "It is only reasonable to obey God's law. After all, he created all things, so he knows how they work. Therefore, we expect his commands to be effective, to bring us good." As Moses said, God gave Israel his commands "for your own good" (Deut. 10:13).

The way of trust says, "God loves us and would never mislead us." We should behave as he directs and trust him to make it work. If we do what is right for him, he will do right for us.

The way of gratitude judges that it is fitting for us to obey God without reserve because God first gave himself without reserve to us when he redeemed us. Because he has done so much for us, we should be willing to do much for him.

These perspectives contain profound truth. They are certainly superior to the *way of merit*, where people obey God to earn or retain his favor. And they surpass the *way of fear*, where people obey God to avert punishment. It is always good to obey God's law, yet he cannot be pleased with anyone who obeys him strictly to merit rewards or avoid penalties. Such obedience is selfish, even manipulative.

Yet, if we pause, we see that the ways of wisdom, trust, and gratitude *partially* obey for God's sake and partially for selfish

reasons. There is trust and gratitude toward the Lord, but there is also a desire to gain benefits and to relieve debts. Thus they fall short of the noblest motive for obedience, the desire to obey God for his sake, out of love for him.

Bernard of Clairvaux, perhaps the greatest theologian of the twelfth century, said we cajole the *unwilling* with promises and rewards, not the willing. Who offers men rewards for doing what they want to do? Do we pay hungry men to eat? Do we pay thirsty men to drink? So, Bernard says, if we demand a reward to obey God, we love the reward rather than God.³ In his words, "The soul that loves God seeks no other reward than that God whom it loves. Were the soul to demand anything else, then it would certainly love that other thing and not God."⁴

Suppose that three men go running five days each week. Suppose, further, that we ask each one why he dedicates himself to running.

- The first answers, "I run because my father died of a heart attack at fifty-four and I want to live long enough to retire and to see my grandchildren grow up."
- The second replies, "I run because I can eat anything I want when I run and I still don't gain weight. Running also makes me nice and tired, so I sleep soundly at night."
- The third says, "When I run, my legs soar over the ground; the wind brushes my face; my heart beats like slow, heavy thunder in my chest; and I feel *alive*."

The first man runs out of fear; he is worried about the consequences if he stops. The second runs for its benefits; he eats and sleeps better when he runs. But for the third man, running is its own reward. The first and second men love health, food,

3. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Brothers, 1973, 1995), 7.17.

4. *Ibid.*

and sleep. Running is an *instrument* they use to gain what they desire. Only the third man loves running as an end in itself.

The obedience of many Christians resembles the first two runners. We obey to avoid what we fear or to get what we want. How many serve God and seek no reward other than God himself? Ideally, the man after God's heart loves the Lord for *his* sake. Yet we love God as he reveals himself in history and in the Bible. We love God for his grace and his gospel. The idea of loving God for his own sake is daunting. But he does not leave us to "work up" love for him. Rather, he draws us to himself.

Knowing Grace

Sadly, it is harder to appreciate God's grace today than it was a few decades ago, because no one seems to be guilty of anything anymore. People have guilt feelings, but no guilt. Everyone is a victim, but no one seems to be a victimizer. Rarely does anyone do anything that they admit to be *wrong*.

As a student radical, Katherine Powers committed several crimes in 1969 in an attempt to start a revolution. She helped rob a bank in which one of her confederates killed a policeman who had nine children. Investigators found a large store of weapons and ammunition in her apartment, but Powers eluded the FBI for years. She moved to Oregon, changed names, and created a new life. Then, in 1992, she became depressed and decided she had to reclaim her identity and become Katherine Powers again. To do that she had to turn herself in to the authorities. When she surrendered, she said, "I never intended to hurt anybody." And she explained that she turned herself in "to live with full authenticity in the present." Her husband added, "She did not return out of guilt. . . . She wanted her life back. She wanted her truth back. She wanted to be whole." So Powers returned to society for therapeutic reasons. In this atmosphere pastors sometimes feel like buggy whip salesmen, offering a product nobody wants.

Many believe that the concept of real guilt—as opposed to guilt feelings—needs to be abolished. Guilt-deniers reject the

idea that they do anything wrong. Or if they did, it was long ago and unintentional, when they were a different person. Paul saw himself differently. Thirty years after his conversion, after decades of ceaseless labor and suffering for Christ, Paul still said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15 NKJV). He did not say, "I *was* chief," but "I *am* chief." He neither distanced himself from nor denied his past, when he blasphemed Christ and persecuted the church. He admitted his sin and advertised it as proof that no one is beyond the pale of God's grace (1 Tim. 1:15–16).

David's worst hour proves that this grace even covers sins committed after we come to faith. David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). He became Israel's great shepherd and king, strong yet merciful (2 Sam. 9). His zeal for God proved itself when he faced Goliath in single combat. His heart for God showed again, when, in his first act after he took the crown, he brought the ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). Yet, in one outburst of sin, with Bathsheba, Israel's best king broke all ten commands (2 Sam. 11). We can work backward through the Decalogue:

- #10: His sin began when he coveted Bathsheba, another man's wife.
- #9: He deceived that man, Uriah, in his attempt to cover up her pregnancy.
- #7, 8: He stole Uriah's wife and committed adultery with her.
- #6: When his cover-up failed, he ordered Uriah's death by exposing him and his men to murderous enemy fire in battle.
- #5: Surely David's sin dishonored his parents.
- #4: David even desecrated the Sabbath, by remaining impenitent for a year. His worship was hypocrisy, as he hid his sin and refused God's remedy.
- #1–3: In all this, David followed another god, making his desires into his idol and serving them, so that the name of the Lord was put to shame.

All this David did deliberately, callously, from a public position. By the law, David deserved to die for his sins. Yet God showed mercy. He sent Nathan to rebuke through an irresistible parable (2 Sam. 12:1–6), ending with the accusation to David, “You are the man!” (v. 7).

When charged, David responded simply, “I have sinned against the LORD” (v. 13). He offered no extenuating circumstances (“You can’t imagine how my wives had been acting”), no excuses (“All the other kings do it”), no blame shifting (“She was bathing in plain sight”). He does not say, “I have sinned, *but . . .*” He simply admitted his sin, with a mere three words in the original. He didn’t even beg for mercy. He simply admitted his guilt: “I have sinned against the LORD.”⁵

Nathan’s reply was just as terse, “The LORD has taken away your sin” (v. 13). David would bear consequences for his sin (his son will die), but God’s mercy carries no contingencies. Nathan did not say, “You will be forgiven if you prove you are sorry” or “You will have to do something to make up for this.” David’s sins deserved death, but he repented and God forgave. No sin stands outside the perimeter of grace. David says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). In Romans, David is the paradigm of the long reach of God’s grace: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Rom. 4:7–8).

The man after God’s heart is a sinner, and he dwells in societies of sinners. At work, he puts down his rivals and shades the truth to gain a slight advantage. At home, he rebukes his children a little too harshly, for sins *he* modeled for his children. With a friend, he puts up an argument, even when he knows he is wrong, because he would rather *be* wrong than *appear* to be

5. The encounter is all brevity and simplicity. “You are the man!” translates two Hebrew words. David’s reply, “I have sinned against the LORD,” translates three, and Nathan uses just three more.

wrong. In athletic contests and in checkout lines, he chooses not to correct errors made in his favor. He would weep over it all, if he were not so cold.

"I know it, at least I know it," we think. We cling to the gospel, but even our clinging is tainted, because we are too much glad that our sin is covered, and not enough sorry that we did it. We even need to repent of our repentance. Even our faith is faulty, mixed with doubt and selfish hopes of God's blessing. Yet there is hope, because salvation rests not on the *quality* of our faith but on the *object* of the faith—Jesus. So God saves us even from the defects in our faith. Because we know this we return again and again to the gospel.

Loving the Gospel

It is so easy to forget the gospel. Even ministers of the gospel can do it; even the apostles did it, as Peter showed. In Acts 10, God welcomed a Roman centurion named Cornelius into the family of faith, without works, without giving up his Gentile heritage. God chose Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, but Peter had a hard time accepting the charge.⁶ God gave him a vision of a sheet lowered from heaven, holding all kinds of clean and unclean animals. Three times God said, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Three times Peter refused to eat the unclean food. Three times a voice from heaven said, "Do not call anything impure [or unclean] that God has made clean" (vv. 11–16). While Peter wondered what this meant, Cornelius's servants arrived at his house. Peter had no idea who they were, but the Spirit told Peter, "Go with them" (vv. 17–22). Surely Peter was stunned to learn that the men were Gentiles, but he obeyed and went. When Peter arrived at Cornelius's house, a crowd of Gentiles awaited him. Peter greeted them, then asked, "May I ask why you sent for me?" (vv. 24–29).

6. *God-fearing* denotes Gentiles who believe in God and accept the Decalogue but not laws of food, circumcision, and sacrifice. Laws prohibiting close contact with Gentiles would force a centurion to forfeit his post.

When I read this, I want to laugh: "Peter, you are an apostle and herald of the gospel! Surely you know why God sent you there!" But no one laughed. Instead Cornelius urged Peter to speak: "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (v. 33).

Peter began, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (vv. 34–35). Again, I want to laugh at Peter: "How can you say, 'Now I realize'? Surely you know, Peter. You saw Jesus heal Gentiles, talk to Samaritans, and all the rest. How can you say, 'Now I realize God accepts people from every nation?' You already know that!"

We laugh, yet we are so much like Peter. We know the gospel, but we forget it. We need to grasp it more deeply, more truly. We all have moments when we say, "*Now I realize*; *now I understand* the gospel."

My father belongs to the generation of stoics who became men in the Depression and World War II. My father loved me, but he never *said*, "I love you, son." He was proud of me, but he couldn't say so. Men raised by such fathers, often have two contrary traits. On one hand, we are confident and self-sufficient; we despise flattery. On the other hand, we yearn for praise from a father—or father figure. We want to be so good or do something so great that they will *have* to say, "I love you. I am so proud of you." But our fathers may be unable to say that. Our fathers may be dead. Then what happens to the desperate longing for the words, "I am proud of you"?

Our cure is in the gospel, for the gospel proclaims a Father who loved us when we ignored him, cursed him, and ran from him. He loves all his children, all whose parents never said, "I love you." His love is free, unconditional. There is nothing we can do to make him love us more than he does. When we alienated ourselves from him, he loved us, pursued us, and reconciled us to himself. He adopted us as his children, welcomed us into his family, where Jesus is our older brother (Heb. 2:11–13).

Sadly, Christians get tired of the gospel, especially if we carelessly repeat its briefest form—"Jesus died for our sins." But, if we breathe in the gospel, we realize that it meets our deepest needs. So for everyone who seeks a father's praise, the gospel says, "Stop striving. God loves you without a performance, without conditions." The gospel liberates us in more ways:

- Justification cures the problem of guilt and condemnation. God, the judge, has justified us by faith, so we lose our right to condemn ourselves.
- Reconciliation removes alienation and loneliness. We need not wonder if we belong, or if anyone loves us.
- Redemption liberates us from the power of sin. Jesus delivered us from captivity to sin, death, and the devil. However we may feel, we are no longer trapped by sin.
- Jesus' propitiation put aside God's just wrath toward our sins. His love for us and our love for him casts out fear.⁷
- Jesus' bodily resurrection gives us reason to affirm this life, and his victory over death gives us reason to hope for life eternal.

At each point, the gospel meets heartfelt needs. At each point, people should say with Peter, "Now I realize! Now I understand the gospel!"

Living as a Man After God's Heart

The Christian subculture is full of "how-to" books. They stress rules, techniques, and methods to success, and they forget the gospel. They roll out lists of things men should do to please their wives, control their tempers, nurture their children, and find inner peace, all guaranteed by successful Christian leaders and athletes. If Jesus appears, he probably functions as an example, not as the Savior. Too often, the apostles are case studies more than fellow heirs of salvation.

7. A proper fear of God remains, due to his grandeur and holiness.

To live as men after God's heart, we need more than good advice. We need deliverance and a changed character. We don't need skiing tips, we need the ability to ski. Spiritually, this happens when God remakes us in his image. We are sinners created in his image and recreated in the image of Christ. Because Christian living begins and ends with God, techniques and advice can never be primary. Because we are sinners, Christ's redemption goes first. Because our goal is conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), it also goes last. That is the focus of this book. But first, we need to understand our culture's images of masculinity, since they can blind us to the image of godly masculinity.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does legalism appeal to almost every Christian at some time? To what extent are you a "just do it" Christian? What is the cure for legalism?
2. How do people change? How have you answered that question in the past? How do you answer it now?
3. List all the motives people *can* have for obeying God. What are your main motives for living as a disciple? How might you move to the higher motives?
4. How do you handle your sin? Are you a guilt denier? Why is it hard to confess your sins? What makes it easier to confess them? Do you need to confess any sins to God or others?
5. Do you forget the gospel? Why? Do you believe the cure for many fundamental problems is found in the gospel? List some "heart problems" people have. How does the gospel cure them?

Dan Doriani understands that men don't need more lists to excel as husbands, fathers, or leaders. The new man in Christ is shaped by knowing God through his Word, because the way of a godly man is the way of his God.

With a focus on honing character rather than following techniques, Doriani helps you to reflect God's character in marriage, friendships, wealth, work, fitness, play, and more. You won't find checklists for self-improvement (or three ways to grill a steak), but you *will* find clarity, honesty, encouragement—and freedom in the Man who is not just our example but ultimately our Savior.

“An accessible, biblical, and inspiring vision for manhood. I recommend it to Christian men everywhere.”

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“Dan is a proven thinker and leader. . . . He has somewhat miraculously managed to peel away the popular, overly-sensitive-to-public-opinion reinterpretation of what it means to be a man, while at the same time remained sensitive to the cultural moment in which believers must actually live out their faith. No small feat!”

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—**SHAWN BROWER**, Author of *We Became Men* and *The Huddle*

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