

## The Pursuit: Every Man's Call to Biblical Masculinity

Q&A session

Gilbert, AZ

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*Steve Shank:* Interview contexts provide fruitful times of interacting with C.J. to tap into his experience and wisdom. Informal questions allow him to ramble through his experiences, memories, things he has observed, seen, and learned. In fact, many of those who have attended our Pastors College would say one of their highlights of their year at the Pastors College is when they get to sit with C.J. and throw questions at him. These interviews open a wide range of rabbit trails of wisdom and insight and personal life.

I'm going to shoot some questions at C.J. geared towards the conference theme of *manhood*. This will allow him to share his life with us, his experience as a father, and as a leader. If things open up and we head down other trails we'll allow that to happen as well. But this is our attempt to create a context where informally we can benefit from C.J. on a more personal level.

Thank you for being willing to do this. I've got a couple questions to throw at you.

C.J. Mahaney: I'm honored to be asked, although my preference would be to interview you. Steve, you are on the short list of finest fathers and husbands I know.

SS: We've already acknowledged this segment of the conference early on, but we have a couple hundred young men here between the ages of 14-19. You know the culture that is after them, trying to persuade them, and squeeze them into its mold. Yet here they are hearing biblical truth about what it means to be a godly man. What would you say to that age group when they face peer pressure, being cool, and all the stuff out there? Speak to that young group. What does it mean to be a young man in-the-making?

CJ: The first thing I would say to each of those young men is how grateful I am that they are here. What a unique joy I derive from the transfer of the gospel to the next generation. If this family of churches was exclusively or primarily populated by those my age I would be very disappointed. I'm grateful for all those my age who do populate our churches and have endured over the years. But I derive a unique joy from the next generation. You bring this aging man joy. Thank you!

I think what I would say to a young man, is that there are categories he needs to familiarize himself with from Scripture. Two would be categories revealed particularly in Proverbs – the *wise* and the *foolish*. And I would want any young man (and this has broader application for all of us, but particularly for a young man) to familiarize himself with those two categories.

Those are the only two categories that exist. There are no other categories from God's perspective. One either identifies with the *wise* or the *foolish*. Proverbs is a wealth of wisdom given by God as a gift from God to that age group in particular -- to protect them from walking with fools, from being a fool, and from experiencing the consequences of being a fool.

Those who say that wisdom is the fruit of experience haven't read Proverbs. There is wisdom there that will protect us *from* the experience of being a fool or emulating the example of a fool. So I would want to impress those categories and familiarize themselves with the numerous and detailed descriptions of the wise son, the wise man, the foolish son, the foolish man.

And I would want those categories to inform that young man and to protect him from sin and to provoke that young man to want to identify with the wise. I would want that young man to be protected from being numbered among the fools.

Proverbs describes a fool as someone who doesn't acknowledge the relationship between character, conduct, and consequences. God says of that individual – you are a fool.

Often in Proverbs the father is informing the son, “in the end,” a little phrase that appears throughout Proverbs. He is trying to draw his son's attention to the consequences of sin. Sin in its initial stages appears attractive and can even be pleasurable to some degree. The wise father is drawing the attention of the son to what takes place as a fruit of sin and in the end trying to help establish that relationship between character, conduct and consequence. And then protect the son so the son instead pursues wisdom.

I would also say to that young man, when Proverbs says “the companion of fools will suffer harm,” you will not prove to be an exception to that (Proverbs 13:20). A wise son, a wise man, hangs out with wise men and therefore becomes wise. Proverbs warns us (as an expression of God's kindness), “the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Now that harm is not always immediately obvious to a fool because often that harm begins in the form of a conscience that goes from sensitive to seared. So that harm isn't always evident in consequences that are obvious to all. But be assured, the companion of fools will suffer harm.

And I would say to all of us fathers that we must understand that this category of “companion” is broader than just the individuals our children hang out with. Television is a companion. The Internet is a companion. The iPod is a companion. These are all means of transferring foolishness to one's heart and therefore we need to help equip our sons and daughters with these two categories to protect them from being numbered among the fools and experiencing the consequences of fools and to, instead, be numbered among those who are wise and to taste the sweet fruit of wisdom.

SS: Elaborate on that a little bit for the fathers. As they leave the conference they want to make sure that what has been instructed is imparted and worked out in their son's lives over the next couple of years. What encouragement would you give to the fathers? Where should they begin? How can they be sure their sons really get what the conference was all about, manhood in particular?

CJ: I would obtain Derek Kidner's book, *Proverbs: An introduction and commentary* (IVP: 1981). It is very short. He has a series of studies prior to the formal beginning of the commentary that are simply outstanding. There is a section on the “wise” and the “fool.” That's one study I would encourage every father to transfer to his child.

And mandatory reading should be Ed Welch's, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (P&R: 1997). You want your child to also have this category of "the fear of man." As I look back how I wish early in life my father had transferred that category in particular to my soul. For I was a slave to the fear of man. I lived for the acceptance and approval of others. I was governed daily by a craving for that acceptance and approval. And so that book should be mandatory reading.

And for fathers I would say (because I have studied this book with my son Chad) you will have no problem identifying with the content of that book. There is no sin my son is presently experiencing or being tempted by, that I cannot relate and identify. So as we have walked through parts of Ed Welch's book, my illustrations are different, but the essence of my sin is no different. I think when we identify our sin before our children and with our children, it creates a trust in their heart to receive teaching from someone who is humbling themselves rather than someone who is self-righteously seeking to impose or transfer teaching upon them.

Those would be two mandatory studies. I would also think every young man or woman should study what it means to honor their father and mother from Exodus as well as Ephesians. That would be another priority.

Obviously, most importantly, never lose sight of the Cross! In everything that is what I am trying to transfer to my three daughters and son. The Cross is preeminent.

SS: You have a teenage son now. You are training him, and doing a great job at training him. When you think of masculine traits the way God has ordained for him, or skills, or however you want to categorize them, what are you trying to build into him to be a godly masculine man?

CJ: What immediately comes to mind is that I'm trying to build into him an appreciation for, and cultivation of, humility and servanthood. I want that to define true masculinity for him. I believe this is true greatness in the eyes of God. This is not true greatness in the eyes of this world and therefore there is much discussion about what the world honors and celebrates, and what God honors and celebrates, and what I as a father honor and celebrate.

For example, Chad just finished soccer season. My emphasis with him in preparation *before* a game, my observation of Chad *during* a game, my evaluation of Chad *after* a game is (I hope) theologically informed. My accent is not on skill. I don't want anyone to misunderstand. I obviously believe there is a place for the development of skill. But my accent is upon character. Therefore the goals scored by my son are not the category that is preeminent in either my preparation, observation or evaluation. You will not find me assigning undue importance or celebrating goals scored and leaving the impression this is preeminent.

Actually, the highlight for me this year came in their semi-final game when I guess one of the referees did not show up and the particular young man who was assigned to mark [guard] Chad was twice his size! He did mark Chad. He actually mugged Chad! And because the referee was following the action he wasn't always able to perceive it. Chad ended up bloody

mouth, bloody nose, and a number of other things happened in the game. But Chad never retaliated. Actually we celebrated that on the way home. His blood was on his shirt. I said, "This is great, son! You bring your dad joy. There is a tear in your dad's eye. That's outstanding. Blood on your jersey! Blood in your mouth! Blood in your nose!" During the game I had a parent approach me about whether I was going to intervene at some point. Even other parents wanted to intervene.

I told Chad the way he demonstrated self-control is an evidence of God's grace in his life. And that brings your dad more joy than any victory or any goal.

As a forward, if Chad scores a goal, the celebration is not about *his* scoring a goal. It's about expressing appreciation for his *team*, those who play defense (who normally are not appreciated) and those who, through their passing, made it possible for him to be positioned. So we are going to do what I call a "divine reversal." In our culture it would be the *individual* who scored that attention would be directed. By God's grace I want to reverse that process and honor *those who made it possible for him to do that*. If Chad knocks someone down and picks them up, that he did not complain about any call by the referee, that's what I'll celebrate afterwards. After the game these are what I want to draw attention to and celebrate.

That kind of discernment we want to be imparting as we watch sports. Our kids are always studying us. If you are watching the football team of your choice, the world, culture, and announcers are not theologically informed and will not be drawing attention to these things.

For example, let's say a particular receiver for the Dallas Cowboys (to choose some random player) or a particular special team player makes a tackle. Whenever there is some expression of self-glorification (this would apply to the Redskins as well), we want to humbly criticize that and not identify with it. And whenever there is an expression of humility, we want to draw our child's attention to that. So many of these moments are teaching moments, and if we are not poised and prepared and theologically informed, countless teaching moments will pass that could have been seized to make a difference in the lives of our children.

SS: You've been married 33 years. You're now 54 years old. What are you still doing to make sure you are growing as a man?

CJ: I think growing as a man begins by cultivating conviction from Scripture about this call, my role and responsibilities. And one cannot assume that conviction, it must be cultivated in an ongoing way. This role and responsibility to lead, to protect, to provide – must be cultivated by immersing oneself with excellent supplemental materials. Because if one is not *in*-formed theologically, one will be *con*-formed to sin and the culture. This is a category I seek to maintain as part of my spiritual diet.

From conviction comes practice. So if you show me someone who is deficient in practice, I'm not going to try and serve them by drawing first attention to deficiencies in practice or ways in which they can grow in practice. I believe practice is important, but practice proceeds from conviction, and therefore I want to address conviction.

I think there are too many men who have not been sufficiently taught about their role and responsibility and it's all too easy to teach practice prior to establishing these convictions. So that's what I seek to do.

I seek to interrupt my week either Sunday afternoon or Monday morning with a simple practice to think about my role as a husband and father. That's the call of God on my life.

Lord willing, God is placing before me another week as a gift. I cannot assume that week, but I need to plan as if by God's grace that week will be given to me as a gift. I want to live each day receiving each day as a gift. I know at the end of my life I will be accountable for these roles and therefore I want to live today in light of my death and the day of my judgment. I want to work back from that day to this day, and I want to do all I can today and this week to make a difference in the lives of those I love the most -- hoping that in some small ways as I, by the grace of God as I serve and lead them, will make a difference in their lives both in the present and when I am no longer present.

So I seek to establish these roles at the outset of the week as priorities. If I don't, I know going into the week the urgent will overtake me. The legitimate demands of others will intrude. So if I'm not prepared through planning, I will conform to the urgent.

SS: What do you try to accomplish and think through as you look to the week ahead?

CJ: First and foremost, a relationship with, and romance of, my wife. I'm not commending this exact practice to you. You need to custom-design a practice for yourself. But you need some practice. If I don't interrupt my week, if I don't create some rhythm where I withdraw from other responsibilities to reflect upon my role and responsibility as a husband and father, I will be governed by the urgent and governed by circumstances. My practice, which is a half-hour and sometimes longer, helps me to reflect upon what is important as informed and defined by God's Word so I can avoid being a slave to the urgent this week.

And it begins with my relationship with Carolyn. I am convinced that my wife's task is more important and more difficult than mine. When I ask people to pray for me I ask people to pray for Carolyn more. She has the more challenging job. I'm going off to some place where I'm going to be the object of encouragement by all kinds of people and it can hardly be called 'work' (and certainly should never be called 'sacrifice').

Monday at some point in the morning I will be at a Starbucks. After having devotions and reading the sports pages, I will say "What can I do to serve Carolyn this week?" I will already know something of her schedule and responsibilities and therefore I want to build my week around certain ways I can serve her. And then I try to build into every week certain ways I can surprise her. And then that extends to Chad as well. How can I serve, lead, continue to develop my relationship, and teach him? And then how can I surprise him?

Those two categories would form plans and practices that then hopefully get transferred to the schedule. It's not enough to scribble on a piece of paper at Starbucks, if I don't transfer those to the schedule. It's the transfer that makes all the difference. This does not work flawlessly every week but it has served me big-time and made all the difference.

There are so many events during a week that if you, say, entered my life a particular moment I would say, "The origin of this moment was my time of planning." Certainly, I have spontaneous stuff that happens. But most of what happens to me has some point of origin in the past and because there has been planning that's informed by my roles as husband and father. It has made all the difference in the execution in my life.

SS: You make that point in your marriage material in different contexts. You've been a great example to a lot of people in that. I know for me personally, though I don't feel I'm as faithful or proficient as you are. It certainly does not seem possible to make a memory, to invest, to bless, to lead, to serve, to be connected to my wife's world, and to do that consistently *without* planning. So it doesn't have to be a huge chunk of time but something where you are actually proactive, intentional, and thinking along those lines. That is a way to exercise godly manhood -- initiative, leadership, responsibility, faithfulness, and really fulfilling your role as the head of your home and the head of your wife. C.J. you have supplied an exceptional example in that.

CJ: Can I add one thing to that? If we look at how we view our wives and children, they don't exist to serve us. We exist to serve and lead them. That will make all the difference in our attitude toward them and in our desire to plan. Steve, you are one of the finest examples of this I know. If I come home and I (all too many times) view my home as a refuge of my relaxation rather than a context to serve, then I will not fulfill my role and responsibility as a man. So all of these references are theologically informed and they precede practice and they make all the difference in practice.

I have one more recommendation. You must study your wife and children in order to effectively determine how you can serve your wife and children. So if I gave you illustrations of things I'm doing to serve and surprise Carolyn and serve and surprise Chad, it would not necessarily be transferable to everyone here because they are the fruit of studying Carolyn and studying Chad. And I would say when I'm not studying them in order to serve them it normally means I'm being selfish.

SS: Some people could have the idea that to serve your wife in the way you're describing is contradictory to headship. But actually it's an expression of your headship -- an expression of Christ-like laying down of your life like Christ loved the Church and manifesting that headship (Eph. 5:25). You're not abrogating leadership, abrogating authority, abrogating responsibility and you're still the head of your home. But it's expressed as a way that reflects Christ.

CJ: Apart from humility and servanthood it isn't biblical leadership. And my leadership will not be effective, my initiative will not be effective, my direction will not be effective, my decision-making will not be effective if there is not some level of the presence of humility and servanthood in my heart.

SS: Let me ask you about another category. This is totally different from what we've been talking so far. A lot of growth that we experience is from the brotherhood, from men in our lives, accountability, relationships and people that know us. What do you do to make sure

you have men in your life who know you, that you are benefiting from their wisdom, accountability, care, and insight? What counsel would you give us as we go back to our churches to make certain we have people who really know us and are helping us in our journey together in manhood.

CJ: Great question. I am presently in a care group for which I am indebted to these men. I'm grateful to God beyond words for these men. After my wife, it is this group of men that has responsibility to care for my soul, to identify evidences of grace in my life, and (where and when necessary) to provide correction.

SS: It's a care group for couples though?

CJ: Yes. But our pattern of meeting is to meet separately as men as well as together for couples in a given month. So there is a context where we are together just as men and another context where we are together just as couples and another context where the women are together just as the ladies.

This is an invaluable means of sanctification. Again this is practice is the fruit of being convinced theologically of the importance of relationships as a means of grace and growth. So if you haven't been convinced yet from Scripture then you won't eagerly pursue this, and you will not be inviting the observation of others.

Even to be casually familiar with the doctrine of sin, we should be convinced that we are deceived by our sin. To some degree everyone of us has been – even in this moment – effectively deceived by our sin. Sin blinds and the first person sin blinds is you. The first person my sin blinds is me. So I do go into each week knowing that there is sin in my life I don't perceive. And I need the eyes of others in order to perceive. And, if I don't have their eyes on my soul, beginning with my wife's, I won't perceive.

I've had countless experiences where my evaluation of myself was flattering. I fulfilled the Proverbs that my ways certainly did appear right and superior in my eyes. If I was left to my own eyes, evaluating my own soul, the evaluation would be flattering and inaccurate. I am very familiar with what it's like to be in a setting where I am describing what I thought, said, and did and thought to myself, "Good to Go!" And then others are invited to examine what I thought, said, and did and provide their perspective. Their questions, observations, interpretations -- if I am leaning forward and humbly listening -- can make all the difference.

I have had numerous dramatic experiences where I can say "once I was blind, now I see." And the means by which I see is the grace of God through others. My sin was obvious to them, but not to me. You only need a few of those to remain very close to people and aggressively pursue their questions, observations, and interpretations.

SS: How would you address men who believe this, desire this, want this -- but they are in a local church where they would describe relationships with other men as superficial and distant acquaintances. They haven't taken it to the level where they are really benefiting from truth, honesty, accountability, and encouragement on the level you've experienced? Where would you tell these men to start?

CJ: I would tell them to start with their own hearts. If they are convinced that they need the eyes of other on their soul and the help of others for their soul, it shouldn't be difficult for any man here to identify one, two, or three men they trust and respect to approach and to invite into their lives.

Here's what we need to assume -- others are reluctant to correct us. And this is for a number of reasons. Often it's humility. Sometimes it's a fear of man. Sometimes it's a combination. People are reluctant to correct, therefore we have to aggressively pursue people. We need to take the initiative, we need to weaken them or wear them out with our numerous requests.

If we are really convinced that we want to grow in grace and godliness and there are blind spots in our lives, we will welcome the discerning and caring eyes of others upon our lives. If you are convinced of that it won't be difficult in practice to find someone else to help you in that process.

And where that begins for every married man is with his wife. Presenting yourself to your wife and saying, "If you knew I wouldn't get angry..." Do this in relaxed context with plenty of time so you are not hurried and inform her ahead of time that you want to know from her three ways you can more effectively serve and lead her. Then three ways you can more effectively lead and serve the children. Then you set aside time to draw her out.

SS: It's helpful to do that at a cheap restaurant.

CJ: Absolutely! You do not want to be subsidizing that event in a fancy restaurant with a lot of money. You want to reserve those occasions and locations for romance. For this one, In-N-Out Burger will do just fine. Starbucks will do just fine. What you need is privacy and time.

Most important you must have humility. Your wife *has* observations. Every man here can assume that your wife has observations, and ones she has not shared with you. You can return home assuming that. You can also return assuming that her observations can make a dramatic difference in your life if you will humbly draw her out and respond to those. Then you just expand the number of individuals who are involved. You will be amazed at what people observe that you don't perceive. But by God's grace you will perceive what they observe if you humbly submit to their observations.

Now one final thing I should say. I'm not assigning infallibility to their observations. There is no one who is going to bring infallible observations. Often with these people who know you the best, the most and up close and personal, will have some degree of accuracy in what they observe. If you are humble, it can make all the difference in your life.

If you want to accelerate growth in godliness, present yourself to them and invite the observations of your wife and others in the context of a local church. Then be prepared to receive their observations. I know in the past I've said, "Hey, I'm really interested in any observations you have. I would like your evaluation." And then I'm stunned when they say, "We'll I do have a couple."

“Oh!?! Okay. Well let’s begin with evidences of grace.” [laughter]

SS: Today C.J. has referred to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway: 2006). If you haven’t got this, it is a must for your bookshelf and for you to read through. Also valuable for your sons as you use it to train them to understand what biblical manhood looks like.

CJ: Actually, I would encourage the men to start with John Ensor’s, *Doing Things Right in Matters of the Heart* (Crossway: 2007). As an introduction to this topic, John Ensor has served us all well. John is very humble. It’s a book intended for single adults to help prepare them for marriage. Once I read it, I thought, “No, it’s not. It’s written to all who are married.” It is the best preparatory work I’m aware of, but it’s also a book for all who are married, both male and female. He has several chapters where he contrasts the role of the man with the role of the woman. Each of these chapters includes a definition, description, and contrast. It will serve the men here and will also be a very helpful book for husbands and wives to go through.

Finally, the assignment in purchasing a book like *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* is not that you must read it cover-to-cover. No. If you will work through the table of contents there will be certain chapters that stand out to you that will be more immediately relevant to you and make a difference in your life.

SS: C.J., thank you for this time. Thank you for sharing your life with us!