

# INTRODUCTION

“I SURE WISH someone had told me these things when I was in high school.”

These words from a colleague gripped and chilled me. Questions filled my mind. What if other men were thinking similar thoughts and struggling in the same way? What role could I take in this situation? What responsibility did I have to help them?

The questions demanded action. I knew what I needed to do.

It began on September 13, 2010, when I spoke at our school’s annual three-day senior retreat. We had taken more than a hundred seniors to a camp in East Tennessee, ferrying them across a lake on pontoon boats to a remote site in the Cherokee National Forest. As we arrived at the secluded campsite, the breathtaking beauty and serenity of this special haven invited us into unfamiliar territory. The natural surroundings allowed teachers and students alike to hear and listen in ways life’s rhythm and pace doesn’t often allow.

After a great first evening, we awoke to a crisp fifty-degree fall day. Students had been invited to an optional pre-breakfast time of devotions on the boat dock. As I walked down to the dock, the fog slowly lifted off the water, giving way to the sun that peered over the tops of the mountains. Nothing disturbed the water’s glassy surface but an occasional fish jumping to secure its morning breakfast.

## INTRODUCTION

Over half the senior class chose to attend our time of reflection on God's word, and I came away encouraged and uplifted by the students' responsiveness. Yet that memorable beginning was not the defining moment of that day.

After a series of meetings and activities, we entered a late morning, gender-separated session where adult leaders had the opportunity to speak into the lives of the seniors. Since I had led the guys' session for the previous five years, the senior class sponsor had asked me to lead it once again. I had readily agreed, because little in life gives me as much satisfaction and delight as investing in the lives of young men.

At this particular retreat, I spoke on true biblical masculinity and our God-given design as men. I started by asking those robust, highly energized, and testosterone-filled seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, "How many of you consider yourselves a man?"

Their response, or lack thereof, was telling but not startling. Out of fifty guys, only four raised their hands.

I followed up by asking those four students how they knew they were men. When no response came, I asked a less personal question: "What does it take to be a man?" There was a smattering of answers from the group. Overall, however, confusion and lack of clarity marked those few moments.

After a well-received presentation and an even better discussion with the fifty seniors, comments from two of my peers struck me in a way that propelled me to write this book. As I finished the session, a teacher in his early thirties rose to speak. He had been listening intently to my message, and I was curious to hear what he would say.

"Guys, this is powerful stuff that I personally have never heard before," he said. "Already I'm thinking of how I can apply this to my life today. I sure wish someone had told me these things when I was in high school."

## INTRODUCTION

After the retreat, I happened to speak to one of the other leaders, also in his early thirties. He exclaimed, “As a teenager, I’d have practically given my right leg to have heard what you shared with our senior guys!”

On hearing these words, I knew what I needed to do. The students’ lack of understanding of their true masculinity, coupled with the words of those highly respected teachers, fueled my passion to specifically speak into the lives of young men. I want to show them the path toward their true masculine design: a journey that brings meaning and purpose to life.

That night, with deep conviction and a clear mission, I set out on that journey with pen in hand.

Young men, I invite you to embark on a journey of hope, direction, and freedom. Let’s begin together!



**PART 1**



**BASE CAMP**

“Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”

—*Matthew 14:29*



## STAY HOME?

### GUIDEPOSTS

- \* Discovering your masculine design requires stepping away from false safety and security.
- \* Journeys filled with adventure and risk lead to personal discovery and revelation.

OCTOBER 24, 1997, is a day forever etched in my memory. On that day, a match between two high-school varsity teams determined which would be the #1 seed going into the state soccer tournament. At the time, I was coaching a team ranked #2 in the state of Florida. We were on a collision course with St. Stephens, the #1 ranked team. To top it off, we would be playing the match on our home field. We always played well at home, so we liked the opportunity before us.

The buildup to that match had the feel of a post-season play-off game. I was interviewed by the newspaper and local news station. We trained hard and prepared well, seeing this as an opportunity to make our mark as we headed into post-season play, set to begin just one week afterward.

## STAY HOME?

Friday morning, the guys had a hard time focusing on school; they just wanted to push through the day and get to the big match. When the moment finally arrived, they played valiantly. However, St. Stephens capitalized early in the match, putting our boys down 0-1. Soon after, St. Stephens struck again, set on proving it really was the top team.

Although they found themselves in a deep hole, our boys refused to lie down and quit. Showing great character and resolve, our team evened the score 2-2 with only ten minutes to play.

With both teams pressing hard, and minutes left on the game clock, St. Stephens struck that decisive goal and held on for the victory.

The night held an even greater test for the guys, however. As evening approached, the entire team, including many parents, came to see me in the hospital. You see, I never attended the game I just described. On that day, my wife gave birth to my firstborn son.

You might imagine the emotions that swirled about in the hospital room. The guys walked in with long faces and began to stammer out apologies. “Coach, we are so sorry we didn’t win this game. We wanted to win it for you on this special day.”

I interrupted them. “Hey, I don’t want to hear another word of it! I have a *son!* Let’s celebrate!”

Some of you might be thinking it’s too bad I wasn’t able to coach that game. First, however, I am convinced the team could not have played any harder had I been present. Second, I humbly confess that earlier in the week I had tried to work this problem out. Pay attention here, because this is something you might read in a book called *Marriage for Dummies*. It could be on the top-ten list of boneheaded mistakes husbands make when their wives are pregnant.



## STAY HOME?

That Thursday morning, I got a call from my wife who was at the doctor's office, getting a checkup to see how the baby was doing.

When I answered the phone, she told me, "The doctor is concerned because the baby is ten to twelve pounds." (If you don't know, that is a big baby.) "He thinks we should have the baby this weekend."

"Wow, that is big . . . but great! So, are we scheduled for this on Saturday?"

"No, more like tomorrow."

Without hesitating, and obviously without thinking a single rational thought, I said, "But we play St. Stephens tomorrow, so just ask the doc if he can do it on Saturday." In my mind, I was thinking, "What is one day when it's been in there for nine months?"

For the next ten seconds, some muffled discussions took place on the other end of the line. Finally, my wife said, "Shawn, the doctor would like to speak with you."

I had never been in trouble with a doctor before, but it felt like being called to the principal's office. While I don't know exactly what the doctor and my wife said in that brief exchange, I remember the only peace I felt was that this was a telephone conversation and not a face-to-face meeting with the two of them. Realizing I was rapidly getting myself into a serious mess, I backtracked and agreed that Friday was a great day—in fact, the best day—to have that big healthy baby!

That Friday ended up being one of the best days of my life. When my wonderful and gracious wife gave birth to our son Joshua Samuel, October 24, 1997, became a day of great remembrance for me.

From that day forward, Joshua has been part of every team I have coached. As a baby, he and my wife would ride on the team bus. As soon as he could walk, he sat on the bench at every

game. By the time he was five, he knew every player's jersey number and the position he played. He considered himself one of the guys in every way.

During the summer of 2002, I took my high school soccer team to the mountains of North Carolina for a weeklong, high-country adventure. It had become our custom to spend intentional time together, away from the bright lights and fast pace of Orlando. Our goal was to learn more about each other and ourselves as we collectively experienced adventure in the mountains, rivers, and trails. We wanted to become a true band of brothers with much more in common than just playing soccer together.

When five-year-old Josh heard I was taking a weeklong trip to the mountains of North Carolina with the soccer players and he was going to have to stay at home, he began to posture and position himself in such a way that I soon considered taking him along with us. Although my wife was initially rather reticent to let him accompany us on the journey, we both agreed it would be a good experience for him.

For Josh, this was much more than a trip with Dad: it was as though he were going on a journey with twenty of his older brothers! How could this possibility end with the decision "not this time, son"? How could he stay home without Dad and his twenty "brothers"?

Needless to say, Josh made the trip roster.

## THE FIRST STEPS

Eight years later, I asked Josh what he remembered about the trip. I was absolutely amazed when he recounted it like it had happened yesterday. He listed detail after detail: how we got out of bed very early, how one of the players was injured and had to go to the hospital and then use crutches, how we pulled over to the side of the road to jump into a rushing

mountain river, and how he was third of all the guys to reach the top of our mountain climb. He even remembered the bagels we ate for breakfast.

As I listened to him retell this trip in such detail, I was struck by how much those experiences had meant to him at such a young age and how they had shaped him into the man he was becoming. He didn't merely recall small details—I heard in his voice the excitement and passion to find his way back into the wild.

What if I had told him he couldn't go? As his dad, I am sure I could have given him good reasons for staying at home. I even agree that the age of five is rather young for such an adventure. However, I took a worthwhile risk, knowing there would be many times during the trip when Josh would see his dad and the players pursuing their masculine design. I wanted him to watch and learn and someday follow in our footsteps.

That experience afforded Josh the gift of watching young men pursue worthy endeavors that required discipline, hard work, commitment, dedication, and perseverance. More importantly, he saw what it meant to be a young man pursuing the heart of God. He remembered how much he had wanted a copy of the notebook and devotional outlines I had prepared for each of the players so they could journal throughout the week. With a smile on his face, Josh recalled his excitement when I pulled out the notebook that would be his own. As the players wrote in their journals, Josh wrote too, creating his own words and deciphering them for me because he did not yet know how to spell. In every way, he wanted to be like those guys.

Maybe most important of all, Josh was not just told or shown the worthy steps he should take. Instead, he was given permission to take his own risks with his dad nearby, to measure himself against the big boys, to hear words of encouragement

## STAY HOME?

as he successfully completed a five-mile hike, to hear God's word declared and discussed, and to know what good hard work felt like by the time his head hit the pillow at the end of the day.

Although my son could never have verbalized it at the age of five, he was taking mighty steps in his journey toward manhood. No, to stay home was not an option! Nor has it been an option for him since. Josh has been on well over a dozen expeditions and is begging for more at the age of fourteen! Every trip taken, every adventure pursued, every risk embraced, and every lesson learned has revealed more and more about his heart and his masculine design.

### FALSE SAFETY AND SECURITY

For some readers, the idea of going on an outdoor expedition is the last thing on your mind. You have not been invited on such a journey, and you hope the invitation never arrives. You may well find yourself in the safety and security of your home. You have your music, your TV, your Facebook account, your soft warm bed, and the comforts and familiarity of your own room.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with any of those comforts, I ask you, "How are these things preparing you for what is to come?"

Maybe this story will help you to get off the couch.

In Matthew 14, after Jesus had been preaching to the crowds, he sent his disciples ahead of him to the other side of the lake. As they sailed across the lake, a storm began to brew. For the next nine hours, they battled the winds and waves. Exhausted, enveloped in darkness, and having traveled only three miles, they got a break they were not expecting. Looking across the waves, they saw a figure moving toward them—Jesus walking across the water.

## STAY HOME?

When Peter asked the Lord's permission to step out of the boat into the rough waters, Jesus granted him the wish of a lifetime. Peter did what no sinful man had done before or has done since: he walked on water!

The thrill factor of Peter walking on water is not the crux of the story, even though that is a story in itself. My first major observation is *how* Peter found himself walking on the water. He made a deliberate decision to leave the safety of the boat he and the other disciples had depended on for the last nine hours. He entered the complete unknown, where trust and utter reliance on Jesus were an absolute must for any hope of survival!

Jesus knew how important it was for Peter to leave what appeared to be a sure thing: a boat in the middle of a stormy lake. He knew Peter needed to enter a far greater story by stepping into the unknown, fixing his eyes on Jesus, and failing the test—as he did when his doubts caused him to panic and sink into the water. Far greater challenges awaited him. In the middle of that storm, the King of creation rescued Peter from his false security, saving him not just from a watery grave but also from his self-reliance. Peter needed to learn these early lessons in order to enter the greater journey to which Jesus had called him.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS?

Unfortunately, the majority of young men have never been invited to step away from their place of security. Many young men have no sense of urgency to grow up, let alone engage in an adventure that will stretch them in places where they are ill equipped. For some, this journey may include elements that are physically challenging and even dangerous. However, every young man can pursue the heart of the journey regardless of his athletic prowess, because this journey requires more from within than from without.

## STAY HOME?

Can you imagine the intestinal fortitude Peter must have had to step out of the boat? Yes, the Lord was calling to him, and, yes, his actions required a lot of faith—but it also took great guts for Peter to step wildly out of his comfort zone!

You must battle within yourself to release your white-knuckled grip on what is most comfortable. If we were honest with ourselves, most of us would agree that the unfamiliar might be even better than the familiar—yet we would rather hold onto the familiar with deathlike fervor because going into the unknown is just too alarming. If you are willing to let go and venture away from the places where you have often run for safety, you just might discover that the more comfortable you get with being uncomfortable, the faster you will grow as you journey into manhood.

In their book *Do Hard Things*, twin brothers Alex and Brett Harris make a similar point when they note that the teen years are viewed as some sort of a vacation, not a time of risk-taking. “Society does not expect much of anything from young people during their teen years except trouble. And it certainly does not expect competence, maturity or productivity. The saddest part of that, as the culture around has come to expect less and less, young people have dropped to meet those lower expectations.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1927, President Bernard Iddings Bell of Saint Stephen’s College was troubled by the same issue:

We are sending forth graduates with diffused minds, scarcely fit to take command of their own lives or to cooperate in the development of a social state; drifters into conformity and essential human futility, easy victims to specious crowd psychologies: followers of what seem easy ways out. They do the things that will make one comfortable or popular. Out of our most able youth, capable of

## STAY HOME?

high adventure, we are manufacturing mental and ethical jellyfish.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, part of the problem may have resulted from the lack of a system today that clearly outlines steps toward true masculinity or manhood. As a result, many young men are left to figure out what it means to be a man and to decide for themselves when they have arrived. Inconsistency, lack of good examples, and unanswered questions rule the day, leaving young men to guess if manhood is when they get their driver's license, achieve the legal drinking age, have sex for the first time, head to college, graduate from college, get their first job, get married, or have children. When is it? They want to know, and their lingering questions mean they enter society not knowing who they are and what they are supposed to do.

This isn't a how-to book. I'm not going to give you eight steps or a checklist to complete before you declare yourself a man. Oh, if only it were that simple! Instead, as we begin our journey together, let's make sure we are asking the right questions.

I contend that manhood is not marked by any specific one-time event, but is rather a deliberate process marked by endurance, discipline, humility, repentance, service, integrity, responsibility, loyalty, commitment, and the pursuit of godliness in all things. Instead of asking yourself, *Am I a man?*, ask yourself, *Am I on the right path in my journey toward becoming a man?* This simple clarification will make all the difference.

### IT'S NOT TOO LATE!

Here is your first challenge. You stand at the crossroads at this very moment. You know what is familiar and comfortable. As you continue reading, you may be unsettled as

## STAY HOME?

you ask yourself whether you are on the right path toward true biblical manhood. However, if you stop now, you may be haunted by the wrong question, the thought, “Am I a man?” swirling about your mind for years, unresolved and unanswered.

You might be skeptical at this point. After all, I haven’t told you what your journey will entail, what it will require of you, what challenges and obstacles you must overcome, and what changes it might work in you from the inside out.

However, before we set out together, allow me to share some stories that might provide a clearing in the thicket. From there, we will see a fuller picture of the path we must follow to discover our true masculine design in our journey!



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is your life best described by the words *safety and security* or *adventure and risk*? Explain and give examples.
2. Have you ever been invited on a journey or an adventure, yet were unsure of how it would go or how it would end? Share.
3. If you have not been invited on such a journey, how would you respond to such an invitation? Would you embrace or decline the offer? Why?
4. What did it take for Peter to step out of his place of safety and security?
5. Unlike Peter, the rest of the disciples stayed in the boat. What would it take for you to leave your place of safety and embark on a journey of adventure, discovery, risk, and revelation?



STAY HOME?



Fears can freeze us in our tracks, unable to take the first step. Peter had been battling the wind and waves all night long, yet he stepped out in faith.

What are the winds and waves that make the first step of your own journey most unsettling? Could these fears be areas of insecurity, past mistakes, what you have been told or made to believe, overconfidence, or even the arrogant belief that you do not need to change?

- Write down your “winds and waves” on paper.
- Pray that God will give you victory over those fears.
- Share those fears with another guy.

If you do these three things, you are well on your way.