

# MAN UP KNEEL DOWN



Shepherding Your Wife  
Toward Greater Joy In Jesus

*J. Aaron White*



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Man Up Kneel Down

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To my wife—May God give me grace to love you as  
Christ has selflessly loved me

To my daughter—May God give you grace to  
love an imperfect husband who serves a perfectly  
loving Savior

To my sons—May God give you grace to lead and love  
out of your joy in Jesus Christ



## ENDORSEMENTS

J. Aaron White has served his fellow pastors and the church of Christ well by providing a book that is both convicting and comforting as well as insightful and instructive. As I read through *Man Up Kneel Down*, I felt like I was sitting across the table from a loving and skilled pastor who cares enough to challenge me in ways *he* knows I need to hear. For the glory of Christ and the flourishing of my wife, may God grant me the grace to follow the instruction of this excellent book. In addition to the Word of God, there are only a handful of books I hope every pastor reads—this is one.

**Dr. Jason Wredberg:**

Senior Pastor of Redeemer Bible Church,  
Minnetonka, MN, and board member of  
the Pillar Network

*Man Up, Kneel Down* encouraged me as a husband and gave me practical suggestions for how I can grow in my love and care for my wife. You can't ask for more out of a book. Good marriage books are like vitamins, you gotta keep taking them to benefit. So, get a copy of *Man Up, Kneel Down* and get the spiritual nutrition you need to keep your marriage growing and healthy.

**Marty Machowski:**

Pastor and Author of *The Ology*, *Parenting First Aid: Hope for the discouraged*, and other Gospel-rich books and curriculum for church and home

Pastor White has written an excellent resource for Christian marriage! It's grounded in the truth and beauty of the gospel, full of biblical wisdom, and winsome yet serious in its personal application. Wives will be truly blessed as their husbands embrace this sacred calling to love as Christ loves his church.

**Jill Nelson:**

Writer for Truth78 and author of *God's Gospel: Making Him Known*

## FOREWORD

**B**usy men don't relish unnecessarily wordy books or prologues. They especially don't appreciate wordiness from people who fall so far short of practicing what they preach. So, I will aim to be concise, and transparently confess I too frequently disappoint my wife. Since 1982 I have written a daily note to my wife, Vicki, through such notes always striving to be a better husband, yet often the note of the day asks her forgiveness for having failed once again. Each time, I need a fresh start, to take a fresh run at husbanding. This book offers that fresh start.

White offers husbands like me an accessible handbook, a field manual on the care and nurture of a beloved helpmate. You will find it helpfully casual, and not eruditely academic. He has obviously done a lot of good reading and has distilled it for us, so we don't have to do all that reading. (However, if your interest is piqued, he provides a list of suggested reading.)

While being street level and upbeat in tone, he does not avoid hard things—cancer, miscarriage, depression,

anxiety, loss of a parent, a wayward child, preparation for death—consistently pointing to the preeminence of Christ Jesus.

Roll up your sleeves and prepare to be a better husband in the strength God supplies.

**Sam Crabtree**

Pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis.

Author of *Practicing Affirmation: God-Centered*

*Praise of Those Who Are Not God,*

and grateful husband to Vicki



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## INTRODUCTION

Many godly men and women have put pen to paper and produced wonderfully God-exalting books about marriage. It is with great humility (and some frayed nerves) that I offer this simple work to you, my brother, for your joy and the glory of God. In one sense, the sacred institution of marriage has always suffered violence at the hands of our spiritual enemy and man's own inherent depravity. However, our day is one in which the Christ-magnifying institution of marriage is enduring not merely bullets and hand grenades, but atomic bombs.

The aim of this book is simple yet multifaceted. I want to lovingly charge Christian men to embrace the well-known yet seldom-lived call of Ephesians chapter five: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, I want to offer practical nuts-and-bolts advice for men to prayerfully and joyfully enact in their homes and marriages.

This is not a book of mere principles and steps to a better marriage; it will require faith, sacrifice, and dogged trust in the promises of the gospel. Although imperfect, I can gladly say that God has blessed my marriage to Tanya, and I have found more joy in Christ through the experience of marital union than nearly anywhere else. It is from my overflow of joy in God's good design that I write this book. I sincerely hope that you will be encouraged, challenged, refreshed, inspired, convicted, and strengthened by the pages ahead.

Thankful,

J. Aaron White

## PROLOGUE

**W**e need better men. No, we don't need perfect men, but we do need better men. Even though Christ is the only perfect man and the sole head of the church, the body of Christ needs men of integrity and grit. Although this book is written with love and goodwill, it is a direct call to war. It is a call for Christian men to make war against the things that belittle the glory of God, wound their wives and children, and disqualify them from fruitful ministry. At the outset, I want to lay down a gauntlet by urging you to examine yourself. Has the gospel of Jesus Christ come to you in power? By God's grace, have you come to grips with the evil of sin in light of God's law? Have you fled to Christ for refuge, pardon, and forgiveness? If not, please skip ahead to chapter 6 ("Love Her").

Fellow sinners, I want you to know that I need the grace of Christ just as much as you do. This book is for my own soul as much as it is for other men. Before we dive in, let me give you a snapshot of my wife, Tanya. We have known each other since the eighth grade. She was always a beautiful, friendly, bubbly girl who

was not only athletic but also humble. This wonderful balance of grace and grit was her trademark all through high school. She worked hard and pushed herself to the limit in volleyball, then would walk down the hallway with someone who was not considered part of the proverbial in crowd. Although she did not gain biblical assurance of salvation until her twenties, the grace of God in hindsight was nonetheless evident in her life.

Then there's me. I moved to Minnesota from north Florida at the start of eighth grade; my first winter in the Midwest was a shock to my fragile, sweet-tea-fueled system. I found solace in playing guitar and writing pathetically shallow grunge tunes (it was the 90s, so don't judge me). I watched Tanya from a distance until finally it happened—she had back surgery during our senior year and needed someone to push her to class in a wheelchair. Like a narrow-eyed hawk, I swooped in and seized the opportunity. We formed a friendship and, by God's exceedingly abundant grace, were married the summer after we graduated from college. Five kids and three minivans later, I am still very much in love with that tall, bubbly girl from Minnesota. These days, however, she is busy raising our children, tending our home, caring for friends, keeping me alive and sane, and carrying out a million other thankless duties. She loves Jesus and relishes good books that point her to him, but time is often at a premium.

I don't share these details because I think my life is any big deal. I share this with you to help you understand that everything that is to follow in this book is written by a fellow sinner, saved by grace, who has experienced the life-changing power of the gospel. I face the same temptations that you do: laziness, anger, lust, pride, and so on. I live in the same sex-crazed culture that you do. I am painfully aware of the availability of pornography and the danger it poses to my marriage. Nevertheless, I have consistently found strength and hope to fight sin and love my wife by the power of the promises of God's Word applied by the power of the Holy Spirit living within me. May we lay hold of the grace of God and step up to the joyful calling of being intentional, humble, Christ-exalting, self-denying husbands. To that end, let's get started.

## CHAPTER 1



## PROTECT HER

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I am not a big guy. I do know a little jujitsu, but I am not a cage fighter. If it is solely up to me to fend off a band of bad guys, it will not go well for me and my crew short of divine intervention. Perhaps in our increasingly pro-feminist culture such chivalrous overtures are not needed or even wanted. Perhaps the white knight who slays the dragon is viewed as outdated and insulting. Or perhaps we should take our cues from Scripture instead of the latest talk show. Obviously, I am arguing for the latter.

*Scene 1:* After creating man, the Lord creates a helper suitable for him: “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’” (Gen. 2:22–23). The man was very happy about the creation of the woman; he delighted in her.

**Scene 2:** “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6).

What happened? Before we crack the usual jokes about the woman’s sin, let’s take a hard look at our forefather, Adam. What was he doing during this tragedy? I can assure you, he wasn’t seeking more time with God and praying for his wife. No, he was apparently standing close to his wife, silently affirming her rebellion. If there was ever a time to speak up and protect your spouse from a foolish decision, it was that day in the garden! And yet, like so many of us, Adam took the path of least resistance and didn’t bother to make a fuss. Not only did his passivity and rebellion bring a curse upon himself and his wife, it has reverberated down through the lives of every single human being ever born. Praise God that he sent the promised Second Adam, Jesus, who would perfectly love and protect his erring bride (cf. Rom. 5:12–21).

## PURSUE GODLY MANHOOD

There seems to be a renaissance of manliness in our day. Even Walmart and other major retailers have started capitalizing on the new interest in beard oil, mustache wax, and work boots. Although I am moderately encouraged by these recent developments, there is still

a great deal of confusion to slice through when it comes to manhood in our culture. More alarming, there seems to be confusion about godly manhood among Christian husbands. Randy Stinson and Dan Dumas offer the following exhortation:

If ever there was a time we needed men to know their purpose and to be men again, it's now. Our world is filled with great uncertainty and instability, and leaders are hard to find. We need men who aren't preoccupied with their amusements or appearance, but instead are willing and able to take on manly challenges. But it's not enough for men to take up manly activities here and there. Men abound who can do manly stuff (like shave with a straight razor, build fires without matches, and deep fry turkeys) while still being disengaged where their leadership is needed most. Every day, men hide behind their computer screens or pleasure pursuits instead of engaging. We need men with consistent character: integrity, courage, perseverance and a willingness to sacrifice and lead for the greater good.<sup>2</sup>

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with beards, flannels, bonfires, work boots, pocket knives, pickup trucks, or hatchet throwing. In fact, it might do some of us a lot of good to put our phones down and spend some

time in the woods. Nevertheless, God's Word is more concerned with character than charisma. If your wife is to feel safe and protected under your leadership, you need to lay hold of God's grace with one hand and point to Paul's qualifications for godly manhood with the other. A wise friend reminded me that many times our wives need to be protected from *us*—our sin, our anger, our laziness, and our indifference. Not every Christian man is called to be an elder in the church, but the character qualities that Paul lists for elders in 1 Timothy 3 should be pursued by *every* man who follows Christ:

- **Above reproach** (3:2): Can your wife trust you? Would she agree that you are fit to disciple another man? Is the overall trajectory of your life one of godliness?
- **Husband of one wife** (3:2): Are you truly a one-woman man? Does your wife own your heart? Or does your activity on the Internet reveal that you have many women (virtually) in your mind and heart?
- **Sober-minded** (3:2): Is prayer your default position? Do you seek God's wisdom in Scripture before making a decision or offering a response?
- **Self-controlled** (3:2): Can you control your spending? Can you manage your health? Are you ruled by a destructive vice?

- **Respectable** (3:2): Is your walk with Christ (although imperfect) generally commendable? Is there consistency between your public and private lives?
- **Hospitable** (3:2): Do you regularly open your home to friends and neighbors? Do you consider your home a blessing to steward or a cave to hide in?
- **Able to teach** (3:2): Are you a Word-saturated man? Are you actively seeking ways to minister to and disciple other men?
- **Not a drunkard** (3:3): Are you free from the grip of alcohol? Do you know and respect your limit? Do you lay down your freedom to drink for the sake of others when necessary?
- **Not violent but gentle** (3:3): Are you known for being a bully? Do you sneer at the idea of being tender with your wife? Does your anger often get the better of you?
- **Not quarrelsome** (3:3): Are you a man who seeks and values peace? Or do you rather enjoy heated debates? Does strife seem to follow you wherever you go? If so, why?
- **Not a lover of money** (3:3): Are you consumed with a desire for material wealth? Does your lack of money cause great discontentment and dissatisfaction in your life and diminish your hope in God?

- **Managing your household well** (3:4): Is your home generally marked by order and love? Do your children feel safe and nurtured under your care?
- **Not a recent convert** (3:6): Are you aware of areas of spiritual weakness in which you need (and desire) to grow? What positive steps are you taking to grow in your knowledge of Christ and his Word?
- **Well thought of by non-Christians** (3:7): Does your attitude at work and in your neighborhood commend or dishonor Christ?

## DON'T LET CHIVALRY DIE ON YOUR WATCH

Let me be clear: being a nice, moral guy will not save you, nor will it save your family. God's wrath against your sin is only satisfied by Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). But even though acts of kindness are not the *root* of our justification, they are certainly the *fruit* of our justification. After rejoicing over God's sovereign grace toward sinners, Paul goes on: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Therefore, acts of kindness and love toward our spouses are not a works-based self-rescue plan; they are the overflow of our joy in Christ and the pursuit of joy in serving him! We all need this gospel reminder on a regular basis.

With the gospel of grace locked securely in our hearts and minds, let's turn our attention to Peter's first epistle. If I had lived at the time of Christ, I would have naturally gravitated toward the strong-willed yet short-sighted apostle Peter. Yet after being restored by Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter went on to become a shining example of humble, dedicated, biblical manhood. He issues the following orders to all Christian husbands: "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). What exactly is the burly fisherman telling us to do?

- **Study your wife:** Peter uses the word "understanding" (knowledge) in this verse, a word that in Scripture often refers to sexual intercourse. Having just preached the gospel (see 1 Peter 2:21–25), he shows how its implications should impact Christian husbands. Just as Christ displayed selfless sacrifice in meeting our greatest need (salvation), we too should seek to know our wives intimately and to meet their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. This means that we must focus on ourselves less. You cannot live with your wife in an understanding way if you are selfishly focused on your passions, your hobbies, your desires, and your career. Don't just mark "C" on every question in your

marriage exam—study for the test! Get to know her. Ask good questions. Pay attention. Get off your phone. Turn off the television.

- **Serve your wife:** When Peter refers to wives as “weaker vessels,” he is not referring to their mental capacity. He is simply making a general observation: men are physically stronger. Therefore, honor your wife through practical acts of service that remind her that you delight to care for and protect her: hold the door, pump her gas, fix her car, maintain your home, carry the bags, and be the first one downstairs to see what that weird noise was. In short, man up.
  
- **Enjoy your wife:** The “grace of life” that Peter refers to is not only salvation; he is referring to the blessing of marital union. In a culture that makes a sport out of mocking marriage and using demeaning words and phrases such as “the old ball and chain,” “my old lady,” and so on, you must protect your wife’s honor and God’s good design by speaking highly of marriage and expressing your enjoyment of the gift that God has given. This is especially important when speaking to or in front of your kids. Let them know that your marriage is a gift to steward, not a burden to tolerate.



## GUARD HER HEART TOO

Protecting your wife includes protecting her spiritually, not just physically. To this end, a Christian husband should exercise great care in guarding his wife from the many threats to her spiritual health. As you talk about life, jobs, kids, neighbors, church members, and money, be sure that your speech does not tempt her to sin. My wife and I communicate regularly; it is a gift in our marriage that has paid many dividends. However, I have foolishly steered many conversations away from healthy discussion to rank gossip and slander. We need Paul's words stamped on our brains and lips: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).

How do you know when you are failing to guard your wife's heart? Here are some simple questions to float through your mind as you aim to use your words to administer grace instead of breeding corruption: *Would I say this in front of the person I am talking about? Is my conscience alerting me, telling me to refrain from saying something? Are my words causing my wife to become bitter? Will my words point her to or away from Christ?*

**BOTTOM LINE:** Your wife should feel physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually safe under your care.

**ACTION STEPS:** Pursue godly manhood. Don't let chivalry die on your watch. Guard her heart too.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- ◇ Review 1 Timothy 3:1–7. What area(s) do you struggle with the most? Why?
- ◇ What are some practical ways that you can model chivalry in your marriage?
- ◇ What can you do to ensure that your wife and family feel safe under your care?

**PRAYER:** *God my rock, you have sheltered me from your wrath and guided my feeble steps in Christian growth. Only you know, O God, what errors and pitfalls you kept me from without my knowing it. You have given me a beautiful wife to have, hold, love, cherish, and protect. I often feel so weak, but you are my strength. Give me grace to guard her physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. May she blossom like a well-nurtured flower under the protection of my efforts and your watching eye. In Christ's name, Amen.*



## CHAPTER 2



## COUNSEL HER

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Most dudes do not like to talk about counseling. They often think of Dr. Phil or some other television personality prying into their personal lives with a crowbar and a jackhammer, eager to reveal their deepest insecurities. For some, the very word itself makes them sweat. They say with an uneasy chuckle, “Who needs a shrink? My deer stand is my therapy!” Fair enough. God’s good design and grace in nature are indeed means of refreshing our souls. Nevertheless, much of Christian discipleship and growth in holiness centers upon winsome, wise, Bible-saturated, grace-oriented counseling.

In my naïve zeal, I thought that memorizing Scripture and having adequate faith would be all the tools necessary to effectively lead and shepherd my family. I would imagine myself sitting in the living room, Bible open, sweater vest neatly pressed, pipe in hand, waxing eloquent in my unpacking of Second Corinthians with my wife and children sitting wide-