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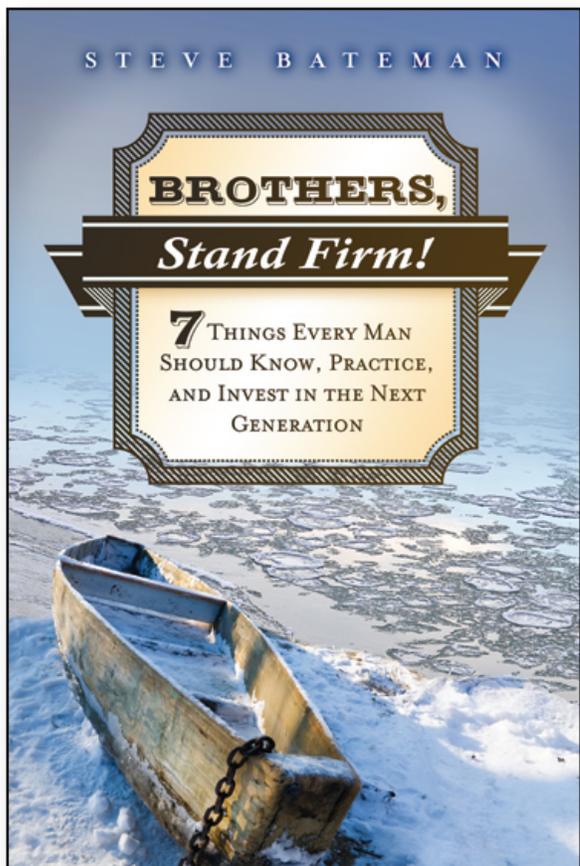
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BROTHERS, *Stand Firm!*



7 THINGS EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW, PRACTICE, AND INVEST IN THE NEXT GENERATION

STEVE BATEMAN

There are pivotal moments in history when the trajectory of marriages, families, businesses, movements, and nations could go one way or another, producing very different outcomes. This is such a moment for the church in America.

The need of our generation is the same as every other: a disciplined army of credible men who know, practice, and invest seven things in the next generation. This book is designed to help men get started in this most important adventure of their lives.

Steve Bateman has studied at Columbia International University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Reformed Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Which 'Real' Jesus?: Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, and the Early American Roots of the Current Debate* (Wipf & Stock, 2008). He is the Senior Pastor of First Bible Church, a multi-site church meeting in Decatur and Madison, AL.

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“Young people are leaving the church in droves. Now, more than ever, the church needs men—husbands and fathers—marked by competence, character and compassion. This book is a welcome and refreshing roadmap for every man who wants to make a difference in a young person’s world but does not know where to start.”

—JOSH MCDOWELL, Christian Apologist and Author

“Steve Bateman has written a book for men, but it’s really a book for anybody who wants to follow Jesus. Steve has clearly and winsomely addressed the key issues that affect our intimacy with Christ and our usefulness in the world. I’m going to ask our whole church to read it.”

—SANDY WILLSON, Senior Pastor, Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis and Council Member of The Gospel Coalition

“This is a book about what men should know, but I urge women to read it so you can be a strong and steady support to the men in your home and church as they seek to stand firm for the gospel in a crumbling culture.”

—SUSAN HUNT, Author, Speaker, former Director of Women’s Ministries for the Presbyterian Church in America

“This is a book for the thinking man who wants to make an impact on the next generation. It will challenge you to evaluate what you believe and why you believe it. It caused me to examine what I was imparting to the next generation. It will do the same for you!”

—PHIL WALDREP, Southern Baptist Minister, Founder of Gridiron Men’s Conference

“Pastor Steve Bateman is a faithful minister of the gospel as well as a great husband and a super dad. These callings come together in this book, which is really a primer on the Christian faith. While originally written for the men of his church, it is a gift to the Lord’s people everywhere.”

—TIMOTHY GEORGE, founding dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, AL

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Brothers, Stand Firm

Seven Things Every Man Should Know,
Practice, and Invest in the Next Generation

Steve Bateman

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon



BROTHERS, STAND FIRM

Seven Things Every Man Should Know, Practice, and Invest in the Next Generation

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To Josh and Sean, my son and son-in-law,
who have been called to stand firm in “such a time as this.”

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Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK IS A tribute to all the manly mentors in my life who have for decades stood firm in their allegiance to Jesus Christ. Their hair is grayer. Their bodies are weaker. Their course is nearly done. By their example of competence and character, they have inspired me to finish this race well. You know who you are.

This book for men would not be possible without a few key women. First and foremost, my wonderful bride Lori has been my main encourager throughout the long and arduous process that is writing a book. I wanted to quit. She didn't want me to. She won. My daughter, Joy, was single when I started writing this book, and she and her friends affirmed my conviction that the church has a shortage of strong young men filled with Christian courage. Yet, by God's grace, she found such a man (in our church!) before the book was completed. This book is a much better book because of the wise suggestions of my friend, experienced author and skilled theologian, Susan Hunt. And many thanks to Cynthia McPherson who did the copy-editing on this book and does so well the things I like the least: formatting and footnotes!

The book's cover is the creative concept of Joel McWhorter, a long-time friend, hunting partner, church member, deacon, and co-laborer at First Bible Church. This is not the first time he has given his talent to the cause of Christ. Also, Vance Helms, my colleague and Pastor of Discipleship at First Bible Church, has helped me a great deal with the discussion questions that are found at this book's website www.7things.org.

Finally, I wrote this book for the men of First Bible Church. For over two decades in this place my priority has been to entrust these seven things "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." By God's grace, we have an abundance of faithful men in this church. Now, Brothers, stand firm!

— Introduction —

Brothers, Stand Firm

CAMPING IN THE SNOW sounds like fun until you actually do it. As darkness falls, there is nothing to do except stare at a fire. Halfway through the night, you feel like you will never be warm again. Morning cannot come soon enough.

On Christmas Day in 1776, George Washington and the Continental Army had experienced their fill of winter camping. In the warmth of spring, the Americans had pushed British troops out of Boston. In the balm of summer, they took control of New York. In the heady days of July, the Founders signed the Declaration of Independence. A new nation was born.

By late August, however, a reinforced British army had ousted the Americans from New York, and Washington led his troops in a strategic withdrawal. In early December, they crossed the Delaware River and made camp in the fields of Pennsylvania. Long before waterproof boots, moisture-wicking clothes, and down-filled coats, they were cold, tired, and, above all, scared.

Fear is contagious. Cowardice is caught. Discouragement is infectious. Every morning, American troops woke to find more empty places around the campfire. In the middle of night, their brothers-in-arms ran from the fight, abandoned their posts, and headed for the soft comforts of home. Desertions were high and morale was low as the cause of the American Revolution hung by a thread.

On December 23, 1776, Washington gathered his men and read a recently published essay penned by Thomas Paine, beginning with those familiar and stirring words:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he who stands by it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.¹

1. Paine, "American Crisis," 135.

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Two days later, in the bitter cold of Christmas Day evening, Washington led his troops in one of the most audacious maneuvers in the history of war. After crossing the icy Delaware River, they attacked the unsuspecting Hessian troops at Trenton, New Jersey, and won a resounding victory.

Is This Our Trenton?

There are pivotal moments in history when the trajectory of marriages, families, businesses, movements, and nations could go one way or the other, producing very different outcomes. Many Americans are unaware of how close the United States came to meeting an abrupt end in its infancy. The Battle of Trenton, historians agree, was a turning point. Had it gone the other way, we must imagine a world without the United States.

For two thousand years the church at different times, serving in different nations, pressured by different cultures, has faced its own Trentons. Church history is the record of the gospel advancing in one generation, only to give up ground in the next. It is no accident that the Bible speaks of this struggle as war.

At the end of his life, the Apostle Paul invited Timothy to “share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3) and could say, “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim 4:7). For Paul, a partner in the gospel was a “fellow soldier” (Phil 2:25). Likewise, Jude commands disciples of Jesus to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

This war is not against “flesh and blood, but against the . . . spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Our weapons are not swords, or guns, or bombs, or fear, but the loving and persuasive proclamation of the Word of God, which is “sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). Our enemy, the devil (Matt 13:39), is against everything that God is for. He seeks to undo what God does, divide what God unites, and tear down what God builds up. You have an enemy who is committed to your destruction. He wants your life. He wants your wife. He wants your kids.

This enemy is a created and fallen being, more powerful than you, but weaker than God. So he focuses his limited resources on strategic targets. And you are a strategic target.

The enemy knows that if he can take out husbands and fathers, he can dismantle families. If he dismantles families, he destabilizes the church. If he destabilizes the church, the gospel will lose ground. Now, more than ever,

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the church needs men who will stand firm in the winter and take the fight to the enemy. The church needs no more summer soldiers or sunshine patriots.

The Situation in Thessalonica

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote to a church that was losing ground. Thessalonica was a strategic port city and Paul labored to plant a church there, expecting these new disciples to carry the gospel to surrounding cities and villages. Things started well and these new believers became famous as word spread that they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9). That kind of victory attracted the attention of the enemy who activated a two-pronged campaign he still uses today.

First, he attacks from the outside. That is, he will tempt unbelievers, especially those who hold religious or political power, to persecute the church. Acts 17 describes how Paul captured territory for God’s glory in Thessalonica through persuasive preaching. Immediately, religious and political authorities physically attacked the new church leaders and unjustly charged them with crimes against Caesar. These new believers were tempted to remain silent and deny Christ in order to protect their social status, financial assets, and political influence.

Second, he attacks from the inside. That is, he seduces people to doubt and distort the Word of God and infiltrate the church to influence others. Jesus had warned that many would come in his name claiming to speak for him, but they would “lead many astray” (Matt 24:5). In the case of the Thessalonians, false teachers had done just that. These religious leaders were claiming to speak for God, posing as apostles, and leading the church astray. For that reason, Paul warned the church: “let no one deceive you in any way” (2 Thess 2:3).

The attack may be external, coming in the form of verbal, physical, or political persecution from outside the church. Or the attack may be internal, coming in the form of eloquent, convincing, smooth-talking religious leaders inside the church. Either way, Paul writes to the Thessalonian believers to arm them so they can defend the faith in trying circumstances. Like Washington at Trenton, he exhorts them in an attempt to boost their morale:

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter (2 Thess 2:15).

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He calls them brothers because they are in the family of God. The Greek word here, *adelphoi*, literally means “from the same womb,” so it does not always refer only to males. It can be used in the generic sense of siblings. Because they received Christ, both men and women were adopted into the family of God, who became their heavenly Father. Genuine Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ who fight this enemy together, but as is the case in every war in all of history, men are expected to lead the way and spill the most blood in a just cause.

Standing is the posture of a soldier in battle. When he falls to the ground, he is at a disadvantage. When he runs from the fight, he puts the mission at risk, betrays the cause, and demoralizes his fellow soldiers. This is no time for breezy carelessness. This is the time for situational awareness. This is no time to retreat. This is the time to hold your ground, and as Paul told the Corinthians, “be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13).

What soldier goes into battle unarmed? In his hands he tightly grips the teaching of the apostles. “Tradition” refers to a body of treasured truth that is transferred from one person to another, from one generation to the next. So Paul tells them to hold to the traditions that he taught them, either face to face or by letter. For example, he had already sent them 1 Thessalonians. This letter is not just a word from Paul, but “a word from the Lord” (1 Thess 4:15). True Christians will affirm what the apostles affirm and deny what the apostles deny. That’s what the church has done from the very beginning, when the earliest Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

Brothers, stand firm and strongly hold to the sound teaching of the Word of God. The Bible is your sword (Eph 6:17) and you must master certain skills to use it well. Stand firm, because all around you, sunshine soldiers—professing Christians who wore the uniform in the parades of sunnier days—are surrendering that sword, turning their backs to the battle, and slipping away in the cover of night.

The Challenge for This Generation

Most chapters in this book begin with a quote from a well-known American who was raised in what most would call a Christian home. Many of them went to Sunday school, several were active in their church youth groups, and a few were PKs—preachers’ kids. By cultural standards, they are

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successful people, some achieving staggering amounts of fame and fortune. Yet they have all either rejected Christianity or the church of their childhood or practice a religion that would not be recognized by the apostles as Christian. I cannot make any judgments about their parents or the church they were raised in, one way or the other. All I know is that they believe they have heard the Christian message, understood it, and, for a variety of reasons, found it lacking.

Sadly, their stories are not unusual. At every turn, this defection is both lamented and praised, but few deny that it is happening. For those who hate the church, this is good news because Christianity loses its dominant influence on our nation's culture, laws, and policies. For those who love the church, there is a broken-hearted grief as the name of Jesus is besmirched and the culture spirals downward in moral confusion. There seems to be no end to the books and blogs addressing this alarming trend, and no shortage of theories to explain the decline. Surveys are conducted, polls are taken, focus groups are assembled, and twenty-somethings are asked, "Why did you leave the church?" The responses seem to be all over the map: The church is too judgmental, too shallow, too outdated, too anti-science, too anti-intellectual, too anti-women, too anti-gay, too political, too sexually repressive, too arrogant, too irrelevant, too intolerant, too exclusive, or just plain too uncool.

The church's failure to be a more beautiful bride of Christ is not the only explanation. Our children are growing up in a youth-glorifying culture that has infected them in more ways than we can know. Consequently, children, teenagers, and emerging adults today are often too selfish, too narcissistic, too self-indulged, too fixated on their self-esteem, too coddled, too pampered, too soft, too fat, too enamored with peer approval, too entitled, too naïve, too self-absorbed, and just plain too cool. If being cool is your goal, Jesus' summons to come and die with him sounds like a stretch.

We would be naïve to think that Christians have never faced this challenge before. Over the centuries, Christian parents struggled against the culture and their own fallen nature to disciple their children. We are not the first generation to wonder and worry about our sons and daughters. We are not the first generation to ponder a perilous future for the church in America. The need of our generation is the same as every other: a disciplined army of credible men.



BROTHERS, STAND FIRM

————— How to Use This Book —————

This book will be most helpful to you if you read it, think about it, agree with it, argue with it, and discuss it with other men in small groups. To help you do that, each chapter will end with a summary of things you should know in order to increase your competence. In addition, please visit www.7things.org to find a list of questions for each chapter to discuss with others in a small group. If you are a group leader, you can also download a free leader's guide at www.7things.org. If you are an individual reader studying this book on your own, the leader's guide is a great way to keep you focused.

—— 1 ——

Are We Losing This Generation?

At the end of the day, if there was indeed some body or presence standing there to judge me, I hoped I would be judged on whether I had lived a true life, not on whether I believed in a certain book, or whether I'd been baptized.

-LANCE ARMSTRONG¹

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! . . . Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments.

-MARTIN LUTHER, PREFACE TO LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM, 1529²

ONE OF THE MOST famous and disgraced athletes in the history of sport is adamantly opposed to biblical Christianity. While our Heisman Trophy and Cy Young winners are famous in the United States, they are anonymous beyond our borders. However, at least one American athlete has been loved and hated in both North America and Europe. As the seven-time winner of the Tour de France, Lance Armstrong knew what it was like to sit on the throne of the cycling world. His name recognition won him a host of endorsement deals, from beer to bikes to power bars. One thing he never endorsed was a life of following Jesus Christ.

1. Armstrong, *It's Not about the Bike*.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Christian creeds, confessions, and catechisms are from Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith*.

BROTHERS, STAND FIRM

As a cancer survivor, Lance Armstrong knows what it's like to stare death in the face. He also knows what it is like to contemplate what's on the other side. One night in his hospital room, he envisioned how a conversation with the Almighty will go:

If there was indeed a god at the end of my days I hoped he didn't say, "But you were never a Christian so you're going the other way from heaven." If so, I was going to reply, "You know what? You're right. Fine."³

You get the sense there is something in the back story that explains this designer religion we might call "Lancianity." It's a mixture of wishful thinking and brash defiance with a dose of anger thrown in. Born and raised in the Bible Belt and exposed to Christianity at a young age, Lance chose to reject it. Why? We'll get to that later, but for now, it is important to realize he is not alone as the generation behind him follows his deadly lead.

The Generation That Is Getting Away

A decade's worth of extensive surveys has produced a massive body of evidence that should alarm anyone concerned about the future of Christianity in America. Startling numbers of teenagers and young adults in the church are not keeping the faith. While every study varies, they all agree on four things.

First, the beliefs of young Americans who were raised in Christian homes have significantly departed from the historic Christian faith, while "only a minority of American teens appear to be 'bible literate.'"⁴ In a landmark longitudinal study, Christian Smith, Professor of Sociology at Notre Dame, concludes that as American teenagers are moving into their early twenties, they are "souls in transition," and many are moving away from the church. Even those "emerging adults" (ages 18–23) who grew up in churches described as conservative Protestant confessed to some troubling beliefs. Only 64 percent of them believe that only people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ will go to heaven. Forty-five percent believe that many religions other than Christianity may be true, so it is not surprising that 40 percent of conservative Protestant teenagers believe it

3. Armstrong, *It's Not about the Bike*.

4. Wachlin, "What do American Teens?"

ARE WE LOSING THIS GENERATION?

is okay for them to practice other religions besides their own.⁵ “The overall story,” writes Smith, “is clearly one of general religious decline among youth transitioning from the teenage years into the emerging adulthood.”⁶

Second, the ethics of young Americans raised in Christian homes are often barely distinguishable from those who were raised in non-Christian homes. Today’s emerging adults largely determine right from wrong by how they feel. Moral authority is found within them, not outside of them in some objective standard such as the Bible. Even if they say they believe the Bible, many of them see the Scripture as a rough guideline that must submit to the authority of their own sovereign emotions. All the religions of the world can be cherry-picked as individuals select the moral teachings in each that help them live better lives, fit into their own experience, and make them feel good about themselves. They feel free to leave out everything else they do not like. In the end, they live by the moral code of “What Seems Right to Me.”⁷

It follows then, that the less they attend church, pray, and read the Bible the more likely they are to binge drink, do drugs, neglect the poor and elderly, view pornography, have oral sex with casual partners, and have unmarried sexual intercourse. Sixty-one percent of the college students in our own congregations are sexually active, admitting they have had sexual intercourse within the last thirty days.⁸

Third, the church attendance of young Americans raised in Christian homes is in decline. Among conservative Protestants in their early twenties, 28 percent attend every Sunday while 24 percent never participate in public worship at all. That leaves about half of them to attend church whenever they feel like it. And often in the college years, they don’t much feel like it.⁹

Isn’t this just a normal event for college students? Haven’t they always slacked off of church attendance during the college years only to return afterwards? When they get married and start having children, surely they’ll settle down and get back to church, right?

5. These numbers could be worse, and in many churches they are. For example, according to Smith, among emerging adults from *mainline* Protestant churches, only 59 percent believe in the deity and physical resurrection of Jesus, and just 33 percent believe that faith in him is the only way to heaven. Not surprisingly, six out of ten say they never read the Bible.

6. Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 118.

7. *Ibid.*, 156–57.

8. *Ibid.*, 257–78.

9. *Ibid.*, 116.

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Some of them do return, but increasingly, more stay away for several reasons. First, they are delaying marriage and parenthood. The average age for marriage in 1970 was 22 while today it is 27, if they get married at all. American culture now extends adolescence far beyond the bounds of previous generations, enabling for many a party-college lifestyle well into their twenties. The longer they stay away from the church, the less likely it is that they will come back. In fact, one third of college-aged conservative Protestants do not expect to be attending church when they are 30 years old.¹⁰

Fourth, and especially troubling, fewer young adults who were raised in church see the importance of marrying a Christian. Just 39 percent of conservative Protestants responded that it was extremely or very important to marry someone of their own religion.¹¹ Scripture repeatedly warns believers against marrying unbelievers,¹² yet these warnings are largely ignored. Husbands and wives are exhorted to work together in a holy partnership, raising up the next generation for God's glory,¹³ so a Christian's first criterion for a marriage partner should be an unapologetic commitment to Christ. If that standard is not in place, the future of vibrant Christianity is, humanly speaking, in jeopardy.

A Lesson from Lance Armstrong's Father

I cannot emphasize this point enough: teaching the next generation requires more than a transfer of biblical knowledge. It also requires an authentic, valiant, Spirit-empowered application of biblical knowledge to your own life.

The fall of Lance Armstrong is one of the most dramatic and heart-breaking in the history of sport. Stripped of his titles for the illegal use of performance-enhancing drugs, the requests for endorsements have ceased. Millions of promised dollars have now slipped through his hands. Friendships have been shattered. Trust has been destroyed. Sadly, the world now views him as a cheat and a liar, rich in athletic competence, but short on moral character.

Lance Armstrong never knew his biological father and still does not want to meet him. That man got his mother pregnant and then disappeared before Lance was two years old. When he was three, his mother married

10. Ibid., 140.

11. Ibid.

12. Deut 7:3-4; Ezra 10:2; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 Kgs 11:4.

13. Mal 2:15; Deut 6:7.

ARE WE LOSING THIS GENERATION?

Terry Armstrong, who adopted him and gave him his name. “Terry Armstrong was a Christian,” writes Armstrong, “and he came from a family who had a tendency to tell my mother how to raise me. But, for all of his proselytizing, Terry had a bad temper, and he used to whip me, for silly things. Kid things, like being messy.”¹⁴

When Lance was a teenager, his mother underwent surgery. Instead of caring for her and being at her side in the hospital, Terry insisted on chaperoning Lance at a swim meet. “I didn’t like it when he tried to play Little League Dad,” he writes, “and I thought he should be at the hospital. But he insisted.” And then something happened that forever fractured the tenuous bond between Lance and Terry Armstrong.

“As we sat in the airport waiting for our flight, I gazed at Terry and thought, *Why are you here?* As I watched him, he began to write notes on a pad. He would write, then ball up the paper and throw it into the garbage can and start again. I thought it was peculiar. After a while Terry got up to go to the bathroom. I went over to the garbage can, retrieved the wadded papers, and stuffed them into my bag. Later, when I was alone, I took them out and unfolded them. They were to another woman. I read them, one by one. He was writing to another woman while my mother was in the hospital having a hysterectomy.”¹⁵

Lance Armstrong, arguably one of the best-known athletes in the history of sport, will be forever remembered as a liar and a cheat. Sadly, he grew up in the home of a man who was a professing Christian whom he accuses of being a liar and a cheat. And to this day, Lance Armstrong wants nothing to do with Christianity.

Things to Know

- What are the 4 ways this generation is departing from the historic Christian faith?

14. Armstrong, *It’s Not about the Bike*, 20.

15. *Ibid.*, 24. Lance Armstrong divorced his wife and the mother of his three children and moved in with singer Cheryl Crow in 2003. He has since left Crow and fathered two children with his girlfriend Anna Hansen.

Where Are the Men?

In my faith, you're just supposed to have faith, but I was always like—'Why?' . . . At this point, I'm just kind of a drifter. I'm open to possibility. My sponge is so big and wide and I'm soaking everything up and my mind has been radically expanded.

—KATY PERRY, RECORDING ARTIST, ACTRESS¹

How will you bishops answer for it before Christ that you have so shamefully neglected the people and paid no attention at all to the duties of your office? . . . you do not take the slightest interest in teaching the people the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or a single part of the word of God.

Woe to you forever!

—MARTIN LUTHER, PREFACE TO LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM, 1529

IF WE ARE NOT careful, we could despair, concluding that the decline of the church in America is inevitable, but the two greatest predictors of whether or not the children in our churches will keep the faith should strengthen our resolve.

First, the most powerful influence on a person's religious beliefs and practices is the parents. Most emerging adults see themselves as similar to their parents in terms of faith. There is no drastic rebellion or wholesale rejection of their parents' doctrine or ethics as they enter their twenties.² That can be bad news in that it may explain where young adults are getting most of their unsound doctrine and sloppy ethical thinking. However, it is good news in that parents still represent the most powerful human influence in a child's life.

1. Marikar, "Brad Pitt and More."
2. Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 129.

WHERE ARE THE MEN?

The second predictor that the church's sons and daughters will continue in the faith is active involvement in church life. *Specifically, if a teenager knows and is known by multiple adults, other than his or her parents, who personally love and live by the Bible, it is more likely that the teenager will love and live by the Bible.* These adults in the church serve as mentors who can "train them in the right believing and living of their faith."³ It is impossible to measure, this side of heaven, the positive impact made by nursery workers, Sunday school teachers, youth pastors, and mission trip chaperones. The more of these adults there are in a child's life, the more likely the child will remain in church as he grows older.

Note that it is not just simple, ritualistic church attendance that made the difference, but rather the young person's sense of belonging (knowing and being known) in the church that is the most accurate predictor of church involvement later in life.

A Gospel Warning to Proud or Despairing Parents

There is no guarantee here and exceptions abound. Even the most consistent and godly parents may see a son or daughter turn away from Christ and his church. God is the only perfect Father, yet many of his children wander. It is a heart-broken God who declares "Children I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Isa 1:2). If it can happen to God, it can happen to us. On the other hand, even the most inconsistent and spiritually immature parents may see their children thrive in their walk with Christ and in church life. This usually happens because their children come under the influence of some other godly adults. If your children know, love, obey, and exalt Jesus Christ, that is only by the grace of God and you have no cause for boasting. If your children are far from God even though you have been faithful to teach and model the Christian faith, pray earnestly that, like the prodigal son in the famous story, they will see the insanity of eating pig food (Luke 15:16), but we would be naïve to think that parents make no difference.

Generally, but not certainly, the more serious parents are about their commitment to Jesus Christ and historic, apostolic Christianity, the more serious their children will be as well. Children who hear their parents earnestly teach the Bible and watch their parents consistently apply the Bible are more likely to continue in the Christian faith for the rest of their lives.

3. Ibid., 234.

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“Parents matter most,” writes Kenda Creasy Dean, Associate Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton University, “when it comes to the religious formation of their children. While grandparents, other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers are also influential, parents are by far the most important predictors of teenagers’ religious lives.”⁴

And yet, as in all other things, parents must keep the gospel at the center of their parenting. In chapters 16–19, we will take an in-depth look at the gospel, but for now keep in mind that the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died in the place of sinners (like you, me, and your children) and was raised from the dead in order to reconcile us to God. Those who receive the gospel are deeply, powerfully, and radically transformed, so that they will want to know, love, obey, and exalt Jesus Christ. Because God’s justice is so firm, there is no hope for those who trust in their own righteousness, no matter the depth of their goodness. Because God’s mercy is so deep, there is always hope for those who turn to Christ, no matter the depth of their sin. Nothing humbles the proud and comforts the despairing like the gospel.

We are not trying to raise little Pharisees. It is tempting to read a book like this in order to find out how to raise “nice” children who are well behaved and compliant, staying out of trouble and growing up to marry other “nice” people. We don’t want our children to embarrass us in front of our friends. Forgetting the gospel and how God has treated us in Christ, we are tempted to manipulate our children, withholding our love when they fail, accepting them on the basis of their performance, motivating them with fear, guilt, and pride.

Surely, as parents we don’t want our children to mess up their lives with the “big sins” that result in DUIs and unwanted pregnancies, but the answer is not moralism, focusing on outward conformity to God’s laws to earn God’s acceptance (and probably a parent’s acceptance as well). While our children need to know God’s moral standards, they also need to know they can never meet them because the hidden “little sins” are damnable too. That’s why they need Jesus. Give them the gospel! The only person who ever met the moral standards of God died in the place of those of us who never will. It’s possible for a child to be raised in a “Christian home” and never hear that it is only by the power of the gospel that we are transformed. Even if you have raised a moral child, it is possible you have not raised a godly child.

4. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 18.

WHERE ARE THE MEN?

It is a foolish father who thinks he alone can teach his children all they need to know. So if he is serious about transferring the Christian faith to his children, he will work in close partnership with his wife, and together, they will see to it that their children are in church on Sundays, being cared for and taught by other adults who reinforce at church what they are learning at home. They will not make their children's busy extracurricular schedules the center of family life. Instead, they will require their children to attend church with them just as they require their children to attend school, and they will pray that their children will grow to love it. By making public worship of God on the Lord's Day a priority, they will teach them that God is more important than club soccer and baseball travel teams. They will do this even though this sport-worshiping culture conspires against them. They will do this because they are Christian parents.

As Christian parents, we form alliances with one another in helping to raise each other's children in the covenant community of faith. I treasure the investment that so many adults in my church made in our children. As my son grew up, I took him with me on camping trips, hunting trips, fishing trips, and mission trips along with my friends. He observed first-hand how Christian men talk and act and think and laugh and joke and pray and treat each other. To this day, though he is now married and moved away, he knows that my friends at this church are his "uncles in the Lord" who will do anything they can for his good. In addition, my children grew up under the sound teaching and creative outreach of strong youth pastors who love teenagers. I largely attribute any parenting success we have had to those men and women in our church who taught and cared for our children. Sadly, those teenagers whose parents are not personally devoted to teaching and applying Scripture at home and who do not make active, significant involvement in church life a priority do not usually thrive as Christians on the college campus or in emerging adulthood.

Where Are the Men?

So we pray that our children grow up and seek out believing spouses, establishing Christian homes that bear testimony to the world of God's love and grace. Yet for many young single women in the church, this is a huge challenge. Where are the men? Mark Regnerus writes that "the ratio of devoutly Christian young women to men is far from even. Among evangelical churchgoers, there are about three single women for every two single

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men.” In most churches, even in conservative evangelical churches, there is a “shortage of young Christian men.”⁵

There are more women in most churches than men, and often the men who are in church don’t know as much as the women about the Bible. Add to this, there is more fatherlessness than motherlessness. About 30 percent of children in America currently live in a single parent home, and 80 percent of those homes are headed by mothers. Half of all children in America will live in a single parent home at some time before they turn 18. Children raised in single parent, fatherless homes are more likely to be in poverty, go to prison, get pregnant out of wedlock, have an abortion, struggle in school, experience depression, and attempt suicide. They are also less likely to attend church.⁶ Not surprisingly, teenagers who are “highly devoted” to the Christian faith “tend to have highly devoted parents who are married and well-educated.”⁷

There are, of course, many single mothers in our churches who are heroically leading their children to follow Christ. I am grateful for these women in our own church and I am encouraged by their faithfulness. They lay down their lives for their children, paying the price in secret sacrifices that none but God can see. Yet they are not raising their children alone. Our church family surrounds and supports them, giving their children models of Christian manhood. The success that many of these single moms experience in raising godly kids does not suggest we need fewer godly men in the church, but instead makes the case we need more of them.

So the church needs credible men. George Gallup notes that “women may be the backbone of a congregation, but the presence of a significant number of men is often a clear indicator of spiritual health.”⁸ God designed men to lead at home and in the church. “Fathers,” exhorts the apostle Paul, “do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). Certainly, mothers should be teaching their children the ways of the Lord, but Christ-loving mothers desire to

5. Regnerus, “The Case for Early Marriage.”

6. Waite and Gallagher, *Case for Marriage*, 129.

7. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 47.

8. Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going*, 37. In fact, if you are a man reading this book right now, you and I are beating the odds. Women buy about 75 percent of Christian books, and booksellers adjust their marketing appropriately. Men don’t buy and read as many books as women. Of the top hundred Christian books, there are normally three times more books specifically directed to women than men. Not surprisingly, there are more women writing books than there are men (Murrow, 65–66).

WHERE ARE THE MEN?

be in partnership with a husband who assumes the role of a servant leader, neither pushy nor passive.

When it comes to biblical instruction that is “centered in the home,” write J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett, “there can be no question that the Bible puts the burden of instruction primarily on parents, and especially on fathers.”⁹ David Murrow observes that “in spiritual matters kids tend to follow their fathers. Throughout human history, men have been the religious leaders of society. A Christianity without significant masculine presence will atrophy and die.”¹⁰

I believe that there is a shortage of young Christian men because there is a shortage of old Christian men. There are too few seasoned and credible veterans of the Christian life who are capable of taking younger men under their spiritual wing and helping them get established in a life of following Christ. In the American church, there is a dangerous shortage of credible men.

Things to Know

- What are the two greatest predictors of whether or not your children will hold to the Christian faith?

9. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 195.

10. Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going*, 48.

— 3 —
A Credible Man

I think it's my faith that keeps me grounded, especially because I'm a Christ-follower for sure. Live like Christ and He'll live in you. And that's what I want to do.

—MILEY CYRUS AT THE AGE OF 15¹

. . . the pastors of the churches act most wisely when they early and carefully catechize the youth, laying the first grounds of faith, and faithfully teaching the rudiments of our religion by expounding the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the doctrines of the sacraments, with other such principles and chief heads of our religion.

—THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, 1566²

“THERE ARE TWO THINGS you can do on earth, but you can't do in heaven.” That's what the speaker said and immediately, he had my attention. I don't remember the details of his message, but I remember this clear statement.³ What are the two things?

First, you can't sin in heaven. In heaven, the believer who daily fought temptation, daily failed, and daily asked for God's forgiveness will fight no more. In that glorified state, the war with sin will finally be over.

Second, you can't tell unbelievers about Jesus in heaven. There will be no unbelievers in heaven and everyone there already knows Jesus.

Okay. That makes sense.

But then he asked a question.

1. McKay, “Pop Tarts.”
2. 25:1.
3. The speaker was Rick Warren, Senior Pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

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“Of those two things, which one did God leave you here on earth to do? Why didn’t he just take you to heaven the moment you trusted Christ as your savior? Did he leave you here so you could sin some more? No! The reason you are here is to glorify God by telling the world about Jesus.”

Okay. That makes sense too.

Every Christian Man’s Duty

Every Christian man has the privilege and responsibility to bear witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). As Jesus sent out his apostles to be witnesses of what they saw (the death of Christ for our sins, his burial, and his resurrection), all Christians are authorized to bear witness to the apostles’ message and how they have come to believe it (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 3:15). For Christian men, bearing witness begins at home, offering a credible testimony to our wives and children. It doesn’t end there, for we are also commanded to make “disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19–20), so we bear witness to our friends, neighbors, and co-workers. This is how we fight this war. Not by violent force, but by persuasive words, speaking the truth in love, urging people to come to Christ. But men, when you open your mouth to speak, why should anyone listen to you? What makes you a credible witness for Christ?

The first obstacle to getting a fair hearing is *ignorance*. If you don’t know what you are talking about, you will soon be found out. If you don’t get your facts straight when it comes to the Bible, people will summarily dismiss your testimony. If you cannot articulate and defend the Christian faith, don’t expect your children to go much beyond your level of competency. If you are biblically illiterate, you are entering the battle unarmed. You cannot pass on what you do not possess.

The second obstacle is *hypocrisy*. It is hard to determine which man does more damage to the cause of Christ: a man who doesn’t know what he’s talking about or a man who knows but doesn’t *do* what he’s talking about. Even if you can ably present Christian doctrine and skillfully make the case for it, the impact of your words is diminished if you do not live in submission to that doctrine. If you are angry, arrogant, or selective in the commands of Scripture you choose to obey, your testimony is damaged goods. Even people who don’t go to church know that we should practice what we preach. So,

Ignorance + Hypocrisy = No Credibility

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When it comes to transferring the faith to the next generation, many men are disqualified because they lack credibility. Credibility comprises two main components that remove the two obstacles. The first component is *competence*. A competent man can articulate and defend his faith in Jesus Christ. He will be able to explain the core doctrines of Christianity to his own children as well as his friends. Though unbelievers may not agree with him, they will conclude that he is an able spokesman for the Christian faith.

The second component is *character*. A man of character proves over time to be humble, disciplined, kind, and trustworthy. He not only knows the Bible, but earnestly labors to obey it. When hypocrisy corrupts a man's life, his wife finds it difficult to respect him. When our children see a duplicitous lifestyle in us, acting one way at church and another at home, they want less to do with our religion. Unbelievers leverage our hypocrisy as one more excuse to summarily dismiss the claims of Christ. What they all need to see in us is character. To be a man of character is to be above reproach, a person of integrity, who speaks the truth, keeps his promises, and seeks to meet the real needs of others. Over the course of years, the Christian man patiently builds a good reputation, even with people outside of the church. He is not a perfect man, but when he errs, he takes responsibility, repents, and makes it right.

The Most Credible Man

Let's keep it simple. If you don't remember anything else, remember that your goal is to become more like Jesus. When you read about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 for example, note that it is simply a catalogue of the virtues of Jesus. During his earthly ministry, he perfectly manifested love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Or think of the qualifications for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:1–7. As the Overseer of overseers, Jesus was and is a man “above reproach.” Jesus showed us what it is like for a man to have character.

What about his competence? He was never bested in a debate. Never. His mastery of Scripture was evident to all and they were “astonished at his teaching” (Matt 7:28). Those who foolishly tried to trip him up were put to silence (Matt 22:34). Those who attempted to trap him in some logical inconsistency learned their lesson and did not “dare to ask him any more questions” (Matt 22:46). Jesus showed us what it is like for a man to have competence.

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Working together, his peerless competence and perfect character gave him ultimate credibility.

Both/And

While competence is the ability to recall the *content* of the Bible, character is the humility that obeys the *commands* of the Bible. While competence is what you know, character is who you are, and it takes both elements to be a credible witness. It is possible to be competent, a good debater, and yet lack character. It is also possible to be a man of character, a good man, but lack competence in articulating and defending the faith. A credible man is the one with both character and competence securely in place and growing.

Think about it. When you hire a new employee, do you want someone with competence or character? When your alma mater searches for a new head coach, do you hope they find someone who has competence (he can recruit and win) or one who has character (he will protect your school from NCAA sanctions)? If you are a marketing executive selling golf equipment, do you want to secure an endorser who has competence (he can win on the tour) or character (he is faithful to his super-model wife)?

The answer of course is that you want and even demand both. We demand both in our surgeons, our pilots, and the young men who want to marry our daughters. It is not *either/or* but *both/and*. Why should it be any different when it comes to bearing witness for Christ? What kind of man will God use to bring him the most glory: men with competence or character? God always has, and always will, use men with both. His design is to use a credible man. So,

Competence + Character = Credibility

God only knows how many young Americans abandoned the church because they knew a church member who lacked credibility. Sadly, nearly three out of four unchurched people believe “the church is full of hypocrites.”⁴ Drew Dyck surmises that most young people who leave the church “have been exposed to a superficial form of Christianity that effectively inoculated them against authentic faith.”⁵

In our attempts to be culturally relevant, we have too often dumbed down the faith, underestimating the ability of our children to learn the

4. Kelly, “Study: Unchurched Americans.”

5. Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian*, 43.

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vocabulary of historic Christianity. As Susan Hunt writes, “When a child is born into our family, we do not revert to cooing and babbling in order to be baby-friendly . . . I intentionally use words I want the children to learn.”⁶ Instead of teaching solid, sturdy doctrine, the church gave our children motivational messages designed to elevate their self-esteem. Instead of giving them authentic role models who denied themselves, took up the cross, and followed Jesus, the church gave them babysitters who entertained them with silly games and slick presentations. We didn’t challenge them to learn sound doctrine or think critically and they easily met our low expectations. To make matters worse, many significant men in their lives who professed to be Christians did not prove to be credible witnesses. Consequently, when we send many of our kids to the university, we are not sending troops to the battle but lambs to the slaughter.

A Modest and Ancient Proposal

I am optimistic that we can stop the bleeding, but it will not be easy. Neither will it be novel. It is not simply a matter of more programs, trendy techniques, or innovative approaches. There is nothing new in what I am proposing. In fact, it is mostly very old. My thesis is this: the church is healthiest when large numbers of adults, especially men, are actively involved in the time-tested process of catechizing.

Catechism is from a Greek word that means “to instruct orally,” “to make hear,” or “to echo back” and for centuries that’s what men did. They orally instructed their children and new believers who came into the church. They made them hear the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Apostles’ Creed. They asked them questions about the core doctrines of the Christian faith and expected them to echo back the answers. They did not necessarily do this in a classroom setting but also at the dinner table, walking down the road, or riding on a horse.

This was not a mere transfer of information. An essential part of catechizing is modeling the life that is being taught, not just telling, but showing. The teacher must be trustworthy, sincerely devoted to Christ, genuinely interested in his students, creating an environment where the student feels safe enough to ask tough questions and even express real doubt without fear of condemnation.

6. Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant*, 46.

A CREDIBLE MAN

Christians have done this before. In the historic creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the church, we find the heart of the Christian faith as it has been passed down through the generations. So in this book, I will refer to documents that are centuries old. To remind us that we are not breaking new ground, that we stand on the shoulders of giants, and that we are not the first generation of parents to face this dilemma, the second opening quote of every chapter of this book will be from one of these documents. Some of the wording is archaic and may be difficult for you at first, but your labor will be rewarded.

What Children Need Their Dads to Know

There will be thousands of unplanned teachable moments with your children. The Lord will give you ample opportunity to arm your sons and daughters with the Word, but will you see the opportunities for what they are and will you be ready when they come? While it is never too late to get started, I can tell you from personal experience and every study I've seen on the subject, the sooner you start the better. The foundation of your parenting work should be done by the time your son or daughter is fourteen.⁷ Start the day you bring your son home from the hospital and use every opportunity you can to teach him. Be alert on football fields and baseball diamonds, in fishing boats and duck blinds. Be diligent while helping your daughter with her homework, driving her to soccer practice, washing the dog, or tinkering in the garage. Intentionally look for any opening for catechizing your kids. If you do this right, they will learn, but they often won't even know that you're teaching them. They are watching and listening more than you know in these years.

What Wives Need Their Husbands to Know

The purpose of this book is to help men become more credible witnesses for Christ in their homes, in their churches, at work, and in their communities. The scope is limited to seven basic things that every Christian man ought to know. Our wives need us to know these things. Some of our wives may not know that yet. They might not say that these are things they *want*

7. Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 247. "The vast majority, then, of those youth—85 percent—who have by the age of 18–23 ever committed to live their lives for God appear to have made their first commitments before the age of 14."

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you to know, but these are certainly things they *need* you to know, and the sooner you know them, the better. Likewise, our children, our churches, our neighbors, and our nation need us to know these things, practice these things, defend these things, and invest them in the next generation.

The situation is urgent but there is hope. In the Bible and throughout church history, we have seen these defections before. We have seen God's people waver, retreat, and lose ground in one generation, only to see God come to the rescue in the next. God has never given up on his people and he will not give up on us now. By his grace, we can repent. We can return. We can reform. We can rebuild what has been torn down. And it begins, I believe, by recovering seven things that many professing Christians have forgotten, if they ever knew them. These seven things form the essential core of historic, apostolic Christianity. These are seven things that every Christian man should know and pass down to the next generation. These are seven things worth fighting for.

Things to Know

- What are 2 obstacles to credibility?
- What are 2 components of credibility?