

## THREE

# *THE QUESTION THAT HAUNTS EVERY MAN*

The real tragedy of life is in what dies inside a man while he lives.

**Norman Cousins**

He begins to die, that quits his desires.

**George Herbert**

Are you there? Say a prayer for the Pretender

**Jackson Browne**

**O**ur local zoo had for years one of the biggest African lions I've ever seen. A huge male, nearly five hundred pounds, with a wonderful mane and absolutely enormous paws. *Panthera leo*. The King of the Beasts. Sure, he was caged, but I'm telling you the bars offered small comfort when you stood within six feet of something that in any other situation saw you as an easy lunch. Honestly when I took my boys there as children, I felt I ought to shepherd them past him at a safe distance, as if he could pounce on us if he really wanted to. Yet he was my favorite, and whenever the others would wander on to the monkey house or the tigers, I'd double back just for a few more minutes in the presence of something so powerful and noble and deadly. Perhaps it was fear mingled with admiration; perhaps it was simply that my heart broke for the big old cat.

This wonderful, terrible creature should have been out roaming the savanna, ruling his pride, striking fear into the heart of every wildebeest, bringing down

zebras and gazelles whenever the urge seized him. Instead, he spent every hour of every day and every night of every year alone, in a cage smaller than your bedroom, his food served to him through a little metal door. Sometimes late at night, after the city had gone to sleep, I would hear his roar come down from the hills. It sounded not so much fierce, but rather mournful. During all of my visits, he never looked me in the eye. I desperately wanted him to, wanted for his sake the chance to stare me down, would have loved it if he took a swipe at me. But he just lay there, weary with that deep weariness that comes from boredom, taking shallow breaths, rolling now and then from side to side.

For after years of living in a cage, a lion no longer even believes it is a lion . . . and a man no longer believes he is a man. 🗨

## THE LION OF JUDAH?

A man is fierce . . . passionate . . . wild at heart? You wouldn't know it from what normally walks around in a pair of trousers. If a man is the image of the Lion of Judah, how come there are so many lonely women, so many fatherless children, so few *men* around? Why is it that the world seems filled with “caricatures” of masculinity? There's the guy who lives behind us. He spends his entire weekend in front of the tube watching sports while his sons play outside—without him. We've lived here nine years and I think I've seen him play with his boys maybe twice. What's with that? Why won't he *engage*? And the guy the next street over, who races motorcycles and drives a huge truck and wears a leather jacket and sort of swaggers when he walks. I thought James Dean died years ago. What's with him? It looks manly, but it seems cartoonish, overdone.

How come when men look in their hearts they don't discover something valiant and dangerous, but instead find anger, lust, and fear? 🗨 Most of the time, I feel more fearful than I do fierce. Why is that? It was one hundred and fifty years ago that Thoreau wrote, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,”<sup>1</sup> and it seems nothing has changed. As the line from *Braveheart* has it, “All men

die; few men ever really live.”<sup>2</sup> And so most women lead lives of quiet resignation, having given up on their hope for a true man.

The real life of the average man seems a universe away from the desires of his heart. There is no battle to fight, unless it’s traffic and meetings and hassles and bills. The guys who meet for coffee every Thursday morning down at the local coffee shop and share a few Bible verses with each other—where is their great battle? And the guys who hang out down at the bowling alley, smoking and having a few too many—they’re in the exact same place. The swords and castles of their boyhood have long been replaced with pencils and cubicles; the six-shooters and cowboy hats laid aside for minivans and mortgages. The poet Edwin Robinson captured the quiet desperation this way:

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,  
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;  
He wept that he was ever born,  
And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old  
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;  
The vision of a warrior bold  
Would set him dancing.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,  
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;  
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,  
And kept on drinking.<sup>3</sup>

Without a great battle in which a man can live and die, the fierce part of his nature goes underground and sort of simmers there in a sullen anger that seems

<sup>2</sup> *Braveheart*, directed by Mel Gibson (Seattle: Icon Productions and The Ladd Company, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Arlington Robinson, “Miniver Cheevy” in *The Town Down the River* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 2019), 97–9.

to have no reason. A few weeks ago I was on a flight to the West Coast. It was dinnertime, and right in the middle of the meal the guy in front of me drops his seat back as far as it can go, with a couple of hard shoves back at me to make sure. I wanted to knock him into first class. A friend of mine is having trouble with his toy shop, because the kids who come in “tick him off” and he’s snapping at them. Not exactly good for business. So many men, good men, confess to losing it at their own children regularly. Then there’s the guy in front of me at a stoplight yesterday. It turned green, but he didn’t move; I guess he wasn’t paying attention. I gave a little toot on my horn to draw his attention to the fact that now there were twenty-plus cars piling up behind us. The guy was out of his car in a flash, yelling threats, ready for a fight. Truth be told, I wanted desperately to meet him there.

Men are angry, and we really don’t know why. 🗨️

And how come there are so many “sports widows,” losing their husbands each weekend to the golf course or the TV? Why are so many men addicted to sports? It’s the biggest adventure many of them ever taste. 🗨️ Why do so many others lose themselves in their careers? Same reason. I noticed the other day that the *Wall Street Journal* advertises itself to men as “adventures in capitalism.” I know guys who spend hours online, e-trading stocks. There’s a taste of excitement and risk to it, no question. And who’s to blame them? The rest of their life is chores and tedious routine. It’s no coincidence that many men fall into an affair not for love, not even for sex, but, by their own admission, for adventure. So many guys have been told to put that adventurous spirit behind them and “be responsible,” meaning, live only for duty. All that’s left are pictures on the wall of days gone by, and maybe some gear piled in the garage. L. E. Sissman wrote,

Men past forty  
Get up nights,  
Look out at city lights  
And wonder  
Where they made the wrong turn

And why life is so long.<sup>4</sup>

I hope you're getting the picture by now. If a man does not find those things for which his heart is made, if he is never even invited to live for them from his deep heart, he will look for them in some other way . Why is pornography the number one snare for men? He longs for the beauty, but without his fierce and passionate heart he cannot find her or win her or keep her. Though he is powerfully drawn to the woman, he does not know how to fight for her or even that he *is* to fight for her. Rather, he finds her mostly a mystery that he knows he cannot solve and so at a soul level he keeps his distance. And privately, secretly, he turns to the imitation. What makes pornography so addictive is that more than anything else in a lost man's life, it makes him *feel* like a man without ever requiring a thing of him. The less a guy feels like a real man in the presence of a real woman, the more vulnerable he is to porn.

And so a man's heart, driven into the darker regions of the soul, denied the very things he most deeply desires, comes out in darker places. Now, a man's struggles, his wounds and addictions, are a bit more involved than that, but those are the core reasons. As the poet George Herbert warned, "he begins to die, that quits his desires."<sup>5</sup> And you know what? We all know it. Every man knows that something's happened, something's gone wrong. We just don't know what it is.

## OUR FEAR

I spent ten years of my life in the theater, as an actor and director. They were, for the most part, joyful years. I was young and energetic and pretty good at what I

<sup>4</sup> L. E. Sissman, "Small Space," in *Night Music: Poems*, ed. Peter Davison (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 58.

<sup>5</sup> George Herbert, *Jacula Prudentum: Outlandish Proverbs, Sentences, etc.* (London: T. P. for Humphrey Blunden, [1640] 2018), 9.

did. My wife was part of the theater company I managed, and we had many close friends there. I tell you this so that you will understand what I am about to reveal. In spite of the fact that my memories of theater are nearly all happy ones, I keep having this recurring nightmare. This is how it goes: I suddenly find myself in a theater—a large, Broadway-style playhouse, the kind every actor aspires to play. The house lights are low and the stage lights full, so from my position onstage I can barely make out the audience, but I sense it is a full house. Standing room only. So far, so good. Actors love playing to a full house. But I am not loving the moment at all. I am paralyzed with fear. A play is under way and I've got a crucial part. But I have no idea what play it is. I don't know what part I'm supposed to be playing; I don't know my lines; I don't even know my cues.

This is every man's deepest fear: to be exposed, to be found out, to be discovered as an impostor, and not really a man. 🗨️ The dream has nothing to do with acting; that's just the context for my fear. You have yours. A man bears the image of God in his strength, not so much physically but soulfully. Regardless of whether he knows the biblical account, if there's one thing a man does know he knows he is made to *come through*. Yet he wonders . . . *Can I? Will I?* When the going gets rough, when it really matters, will he pull it off? For years my soul lived in this turmoil. I'd often wake in the morning with an anxiousness that had no immediate source. My stomach was frequently tied in knots. One day my dear friend Brent asked, "What do you do now that you don't act anymore?" I realized at that moment that my whole life felt like a performance, like I am always "on." I felt in every situation that I must prove myself again. After I spoke or taught a class, I'd hang on what others would say, hoping they would say it went well. Each counseling session felt like a new test: *Can I come through, again? Was my last success all that I had?*

One of my clients got a great promotion and a raise. He came in depressed. *Good grief*, I thought. *Why?* Every man longs to be praised, and paid well on top of it. He confessed that although the applause felt great, he knew it only set him up for a bigger fall. Tomorrow, he'd have to do it all over, hit the ball out of the

park again. Every man feels that the world is asking him to be something he doubts very much he has it in him to be 🗡️. This is universal; I have yet to meet an honest man who won't admit it. Yes, there are many dense men who are wondering what I'm talking about; for them, life is fine and they are doing great. Just wait. Unless it's really and truly a reflection of genuine strength, it's a house of cards, and it'll come down sooner or later. Anger will surface, or an addiction. Headaches, an ulcer, or maybe an affair.

Honestly—how do you see yourself as a man? Are words like *strong*, *passionate*, and *dangerous* words you would choose? Do you have the courage to ask those in your life what *they* think of you as a man? What words do you fear they would choose?

I mentioned the film *Legends of the Fall*, how every man who's seen it wants to be Tristan. But most see themselves as Alfred or Samuel. I've talked to many men about the film *Braveheart* and though every single one of them would love to be William Wallace, the dangerous warrior-hero, most see themselves as Robert the Bruce, the weak, intimidated guy who keeps folding under pressure. I'd love to think of myself as Indiana Jones; I'm afraid I'm more like Commodus in *Gladiator*.

The comedian Garrison Keillor wrote a very funny essay on this in *The Book of Guys*. Realizing one day that he was not being honest about himself as a man, he sat down to make a list of his strengths and weaknesses:

### **Useful Things I Can Do:**

- Be nice.
- Make a bed.
- Dig a hole.
- Write books.
- Sing alto or bass.
- Read a map.
- Drive a car.

### **Useful Things I Can't Do:**

Chop down big trees and cut them into lumber or firewood.  
Handle a horse, train a dog, or tend a herd of animals.  
Handle a boat without panicking the others.  
Throw a fastball, curve, or slider.  
Load, shoot, and clean a gun. Or bow and arrow. Or use either of them, or a spear,  
net, snare, boomerang, or blowgun, to obtain meat.  
Defend myself with my bare hands.<sup>6</sup>

Keillor confessed: “Maybe it’s an okay report card for a *person* but I don’t know any persons . . . For a guy, it’s not good. A woman would go down the list and say, ‘What does it matter if a guy can handle a boat? Throw a curveball? Bag a deer? Throw a left hook?’ But that’s a womanly view of manhood.”<sup>7</sup> Craig and I were joking about this as we hacked our way through grizzly-infested woods in Alaska. The only other guys we met all day were a group of locals on their way out. They looked like something out of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine—sawed-off shotguns, pistols, bandoleers of ammo slung across their chests, huge knives. They were ready. They had what it takes. And we? We had a whistle. I’m serious. That’s what we brought for our dangerous trek through the wild: a whistle. Talk about a couple of pansies. Craig confessed, “Me—what can I really do? I mean really? I know how to operate a fax machine.”

That’s how most men feel about their readiness to fight, to live with risk, to capture the beauty. We have a whistle. You see, even though the *desires* are there for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to love, even though our boyhood dreams once were filled with those things, we don’t think we’re up to it. Why don’t men play the man? Why don’t they offer their strength to a world desperately in need of it? For two simple reasons: we doubt very much that we have any real strength to offer, and we’re pretty certain that if we did offer what we have, it wouldn’t be enough. 🗡️ Something has gone wrong and we know it.

What’s happened to us? The answer is partly back in the story of mankind,

<sup>6</sup> Garrison Keillor, *The Book of Guys* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 17–18.

<sup>7</sup> Keillor, 18.

and partly in the details of each man's story.

## WHAT IS A MAN FOR?

Why does God create Adam? What is a man for?

If you know what something is designed to do, then you know its purpose in life. A retriever loves the water; a lion loves the hunt; a hawk loves to soar. It's what they're made for. Desire reveals design, and design reveals destiny. In the case of human beings, our design is also revealed by our desires. Let's take adventure. Adam and all his sons after him are given an incredible mission: rule and subdue, be fruitful and multiply. 🗨️ "Here is the entire earth, Adam. Explore it, cultivate it, care for it—it is your kingdom." Whoa . . . talk about an invitation. This is permission to do a heck of a lot more than cross the street. It's a charter to find the equator; it's a commission to build Camelot. Only Eden is a garden at that point; everything else is wild, so far as we know. No river has been charted, no ocean crossed, no mountain climbed. No one's discovered the molecule or fuel injection or created Beethoven's Fifth. It's a blank page, waiting to be written. A clean canvas, waiting to be painted.

Most men think they are simply here on earth to kill time—and it's killing them. 🗨️ But the truth is precisely the opposite. The secret longing of your heart, whether it's to build a boat and sail it, to write a symphony and play it, to plant a field and care for it—those are the things you were made to do. 🗨️ That's what you're here for. Explore, build, conquer—you don't have to tell a boy to do those things for the simple reason that it *is his purpose*. But it's going to take risk, and danger, and there's the catch—are we willing to live with the level of risk God invites us to? Something inside us hesitates. 🗨️

Let's take another desire—why does a man long for a battle to fight? Because when we enter the story in Genesis, we step into a world at war. The lines have already been drawn. Evil is waiting to make its next move. Somewhere back before Eden, in the mystery of eternity past, there was a coup, a rebellion, an

assassination attempt. Lucifer, the prince of angels, the captain of the guard, rebelled against the Trinity. He tried to take the throne of heaven by force, assisted by a third of the angelic army, in whom he instilled his own malice. They failed, and were hurled from the presence of the Trinity. But they were not destroyed, and the battle is not over. God now has an enemy . . . and so do we. Man is not born into a sitcom or a soap opera; he is born into a world at war. This is not *America's Got Talent*; it's *Saving Private Ryan*. There will be many, many battles to fight on many different battlefields.

And finally, why does Adam long for a beauty to love? Because there is Eve. He is going to need her, and she is going to need him. In fact, Adam's first and greatest battle is just about to break out, as a battle for Eve. But let me set the stage a bit more. Before Eve is drawn from Adam's side and leaves that ache that never goes away until he is with her, God gives Adam some instructions on the care of creation, and his role in the unfolding story. It's pretty basic, and very generous. "You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" ([Gen. 2:16–17](#) NLT). Okay, most of us have heard about that. But notice what God *doesn't* tell Adam.

There is no warning or instruction over what is about to occur: the Temptation of Eve. This is just staggering. Notably missing from the dialogue between Adam and God is something like this: "Adam, one more thing. A week from Tuesday, about four in the afternoon, you and Eve are going to be down in the orchard and something dangerous is going to happen. Adam, are you listening? The eternal destiny of the human race hangs on this moment. Now, here's what I want you to do . . ." He doesn't tell him. He doesn't even mention it, so far as we know. Good grief—*why not*?! Because God *believes* in Adam. This is what he's designed to do—to come through. Adam doesn't need play-by-play instructions because this is what Adam is created *for*. It's already there, everything he needs, in his design, in his heart.

Needless to say, the story doesn't go well.

Adam fails; he fails Eve, and the rest of humanity. Let me ask you a question:

Where is Adam, while the serpent is tempting Eve? He's standing right there: "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too" ([Gen. 3:6](#) NLT). The Hebrew for "with her" means right there, elbow to elbow. Adam isn't away in another part of the forest; he has no alibi. He is standing right there, watching the whole thing unravel. What does he do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He says not a word, doesn't lift a finger.\* He won't risk, he won't fight, and he won't rescue Eve. Our first father—the first real man—gave in to paralysis. He denied his very nature and went passive. And every man after him, every son of Adam, carries in his heart now the same failure. Every man repeats the sin of Adam, every day. We won't risk, we won't fight, and we won't rescue Eve. We truly are a chip off the old block. 🗡️

Lest we neglect Eve, I must point out that she fails her design as well. Eve is given to Adam as his *ezer kenegdo*—or as many translations have it, his "help meet" or "helper." Doesn't sound like much, does it? It makes me think of Hamburger Helper. But Robert Alter said this is "a notoriously difficult word to translate."<sup>8</sup> It means something far more powerful than just "helper"; it means "*life-saver*." The phrase is only used elsewhere of God, when you need him to come through for you desperately. "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you" ([Deut. 33:26](#)). Eve is a life giver; she is Adam's ally. It is to *both* of them that the charter for adventure is given. 🗡️ It will take both of them to sustain life. And they will both need to fight together.

Eve is deceived . . . and rather easily, as my friend Jan Meyers Proett pointed out. In *The Allure of Hope*, Jan said, "Eve was convinced that God was withholding something from her."<sup>9</sup> Not even the extravagance of Eden could convince

\* I'm indebted to Crabb, Hudson, and Andrews for pointing this out in *The Silence of Adam*.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 22.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Meyers, *The Allure of Hope: God's Pursuit of a Woman's Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 31.

her that God's heart is good. "When Eve was [deceived], the artistry of being a woman took a fateful dive into the barren places of control and loneliness."<sup>10</sup> Now every daughter of Eve wants to "control her surroundings, her relationships, her God."<sup>11</sup> No longer is she vulnerable; now she will be grasping. No longer does she want simply to share in the adventure; now, she wants to control it. And as for her beauty, she either hides it in fear and anger, or she uses it to secure her place in the world. "In our fear that no one will speak on our behalf or protect us or fight for us, we start to re-create both ourselves and our role in the story. We manipulate our surroundings so we don't feel so defenseless."<sup>12</sup> Fallen Eve either becomes rigid or clingy. Put simply, Eve is no longer simply *inviting*. She is either hiding in busyness or demanding that Adam come through for her; usually, an odd combination of both. 🖊

## POSERS

Adam knows now that he has blown it, that something has gone wrong within him, that he is no longer what he was meant to be. Adam doesn't just make a bad decision; he *gives away* something essential to his nature. He is marred now, his strength is fallen, and he knows it. Then what happens? Adam hides.

"I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" ([Gen. 3:10](#)).

You don't need a course in psychology to understand men. Understand that verse, let its implications sink in, and the men around you will suddenly come into focus. We are hiding, every last one of us. Well aware that we, too, are not what we were meant to be, desperately afraid of exposure, terrified of being seen for what we are and *are not*, we have run off into the bushes. We hide in our office, at the gym, behind the newspaper and mostly *behind our personality*. Most

<sup>10</sup> Meyers, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Meyers, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Meyers, 63.

of what you encounter when you meet a man is a facade, an elaborate fig leaf, a brilliant disguise. 🖊

Driving back from dinner one night, a friend and I were just sort of shooting the breeze about life and marriage and work. As the conversation deepened, he began to admit some of the struggles he was having. Then he came out with this confession: “The truth is, John, I feel like I’m just bs-ing my way through life, and that someday soon I’ll be exposed as an impostor.” I was so surprised. This is a popular, successful guy who most people like the moment they meet him. He’s bright, articulate, handsome, and athletic. He’s married to a beautiful woman, has a great job, drives a new truck, and lives in a big house. There is nothing on the outside that says, “not really a man.” But inside, it’s another story. It always is.

Before I ever mentioned my nightmare about being onstage with nothing to say, another friend shared with me that he, too, is having a recurring nightmare. It involves a murder, and the FBI. Apparently, in his dream, he has killed someone and buried the body out back of his house. But the authorities are closing in, and he knows that any moment they’ll discover the crime scene and he’ll be caught. The dream always ends just before he is found out. He wakes in a cold sweat. “Any day now, I’ll be found out” is a pretty common theme among us guys. Truth be told, most of us are faking our way through life. We pick only those battles we are sure to win, only those adventures we are sure to handle, only those beauties we are sure to rescue. 🖊

Let me ask the guys who don’t know much about cars: How do you talk to your mechanic? I know a bit about fixing cars, but not much, and when I’m around my mechanic I feel like a wuss. So what do I do? I fake it; I pose. I assume a sort of casual, laid-back manner I imagine “the guys” use when hanging around the lunch truck, and I wait for him to speak. “Looks like it might be your fuel mixture,” he says. “Yeah, I thought it might be that.” “When was the last time you had your carb rebuilt?” “Oh, I dunno . . . it’s probably been years.” (I’m guessing he’s talking about my carburetor, and I have no idea if it’s ever been rebuilt.) “Well, we’d better do it now or you’re going to end up on some country road

miles from nowhere and then you'll have to do it yourself." "Yeah," I say casually, as if I don't want to be bothered having to rebuild that thing even though I know I wouldn't have the slightest idea where to begin. All I have is a whistle, remember? I tell him to go ahead, and he sticks out his hand, a big, greasy hand that says *I know tools real well* and what am I supposed to do? I'm dressed in a coat and tie because I'm supposed to give a talk at some women's luncheon, but I can't say, "Gee, I'd rather not get my hands dirty," so I take his hand and pump it extra hard.

Or how about you fellas who work in the corporate world: How do you act in the boardroom, when the heat is on? What do you say when the boss is riding you hard? "Jones, what the devil is going on down there in your division? You guys are three weeks late on that project!!" Do you try to pass the buck? "Actually, sir, we got the plans over to McCormick's department to bid the job weeks ago." Do you feign ignorance? "Really? I had no idea. I'll get right on it." Maybe you just weasel your way out of it: "That job's a slam dunk, sir. We'll have it done this week." Years ago I did a tour of duty in the corporate world; the Big Man was a pretty intimidating guy. Many heads rolled in his office. My plan was basically to try to avoid him at all costs; when I did run into him in the hallway, even in "friendly" conversation, I always felt about ten years old.

How about sports? A few years ago I volunteered to coach for my son's baseball team. There was a mandatory meeting that all coaches needed to attend before the season, to pick up equipment and listen to a "briefing." Our recreation department brought in a retired professional pitcher, a local boy, to give us all a pep talk. The posing that went on was incredible. Here's a bunch of balding dads with beer bellies sort of swaggering around, talking about their own baseball days, throwing out comments about pro players like they knew them personally, and spitting (I kid you not). Their "attitude" (that's a tame word) was so thick I needed waders. It was the biggest bunch of posers I've ever met—outside of church.

That same sort of thing goes on Sunday mornings, it's just a different set of

rules. Dave runs into Bob in the church lobby. Both are wearing their happy faces, though neither is happy at all. “Hey, Bob, how are ya?” Bob is actually furious at his wife and ready to leave her, but he says, “Great, just great, Dave. The Lord is good!” Dave, on the other hand, hasn’t believed in the goodness of God for years, ever since his daughter was killed. “Yep—God is good, all the time. I’m just so glad to be here, praising the Lord.” “Me too. Well, I’ll be praying for you!” I would love to see a tally of the number of prayers actually *prayed* against the number of prayers promised. I bet it’s about one in a thousand. “And I’ll be praying for you too. Well, gotta go! You take care.” “Take care” is our way of saying, “I’m done with this conversation and I want to get out of here but I don’t want to appear rude so I’ll say something that sounds meaningful and caring,” but in truth, Dave doesn’t give a rip about Bob. 🗨️

## STRENGTH GONE BAD

Adam falls, and all his sons with him. After that, what do you see as the story unfolds? Violent men, or passive men. Strength gone bad. Cain kills Abel; Lamech threatens to kill everybody else. God finally floods the earth because of the violence of men, but it’s still going on. Sometimes it gets physical; most of the time, it’s verbal. I know Christian men who say the most awful things to their wives. Or they kill them with their silence; a cold, deadly silence. I know pastors, warm and friendly guys in the pulpit, who from the safety of their office send out blistering emails to their staff. It’s cowardice, all of it. I was intrigued to read in the journals of civil war commanders how the men you thought would be real heroes end up just the opposite. “Roughs that are always ready for street fighting are cowards on the open battlefield,”<sup>13</sup> declared one corporal. A sergeant from

<sup>13</sup> Henry Colyer, “Henry J. Colyer to Mother, July 16, 1863,” Letter, *Colyer Papers in For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, by James M. McPherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 9.

the same division agreed: “I don’t know of a single fist-fighting bully but what he makes a cowardly soldier.”<sup>14</sup> The violence, no matter what form, is a cover-up for *fear*.

What about the achievers, the men running hard at life, pressing their way ahead? Most of it is fear-based as well. Not all of it, but most of it. For years, I was a driven, type A, hard-charging perfectionist. I demanded a lot of myself and of those who worked for me. My wife didn’t like to call me at work, for as she said, “You have your work voice on.” In other words, your fig leaf is showing. All that swaggering and supposed confidence and hard charging came out of fear—the fear that if I did not, I would be revealed to be less than a man. Never let down, never drop your guard, give 150 percent. Achievers are a socially acceptable form of violent men, overdoing it in one way or another . Their casualties tend to be their marriages, their families, and their health. Until a man faces this honestly, and what’s really behind it, he’ll do great damage.

Then there’s the passive men. Abraham is a good example. He’s always hiding behind his wife’s skirt when the going gets rough. When he and his household are forced by a famine down to Egypt, he tells Pharaoh that Sarah is his sister so that he won’t be killed; he jeopardizes her in order to save his own skin. Pharaoh takes Sarah into his harem, but the whole ruse is exposed when God strikes the Egyptians with diseases. You’d think Abraham would have learned his lesson, but no—he does it again years later when he moves to the Negev. In fact, his son Isaac carries on the tradition, jeopardizing Rebekah in the same way. The sins of the father passed along. Abraham is a good man, a friend of God. But he’s also a coward. I know many like him. Men who can’t commit to the women they’ve been dragging along for years. Men who won’t stand up to the pastor and tell him what they really think. Pastors and Christian leaders who hide behind

<sup>14</sup> George W. Tillotson, “George W Tillotson to Elizabeth Tillotson, July 9, 1864,” Letter, *Tillotson Papers in For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, by James M. McPherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 9.

the fig leaf of niceness and “spirituality” and never, ever confront a difficult situation. Guys who organize their paper clips. Men who hide behind the newspaper or the television and won’t really talk to their wives or children. 🗑

I’m like him too—a true son of Abraham. I mentioned that the early years of our life in the theater were good ones—but that’s not the full story. I also had an affair . . . with my work. I married my wife without ever resolving or even knowing the deeper questions of my own soul. Suddenly, the day after our wedding, I am faced with the reality that I now have this woman as my constant companion and I have no idea what it really means to love her, nor if I have whatever it is she needs from me. *What if I offer her all I have as a man and it’s not enough?* That’s a risk I was not willing to take. But I knew I had what it took at the theater, and so slowly I began to spend more and more time there. Late nights, weekends, eventually every waking moment. I was hiding, like Adam, running from the fact that my strength was being called for and I really doubted I had any.

The evidence is clear: Adam and Eve’s fall sent a tremor through the human race. A fatal flaw entered the original, and it’s been passed on to every son and daughter. Thus every little boy and every little girl comes into the world set up for a loss of heart. Even if he can’t quite put it into words, every man is haunted by the question, “Am I really a man? Have I got what it takes . . . when it counts?”

🗑 What follows is the story we are personally much, much more familiar with.