

Chapter One

When A Dog Is More Manly

*Heaven goes by favor.
If it went by merit, you would stay out
and your dog would go in.
(MARK TWAIN)*

When I joke during men's conferences that my cairn terrier, Haggis McStitch, has taught me more about what it means to be a man than most men's gatherings, I'm not really joking.

Haggis is the most popular being in our home. He's the same breed as Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*, though I shudder to point this out because Toto didn't represent the breed well. Like most terriers, Haggis is a mountain of a dog inside a compact body.

When we went to pick him up in Redding, California, the first dog we saw looked robust, winsome, and cuddly.

"Is this *Haggis*!?" my daughter screamed with delight. "He's so cuuuuuute!"

"No," said Richard, the breeder. "That's his brother, Barley. This," he said, pointing, "is Haggis."

I looked at Haggis and decided Richard had pointed at the most expensive rat in all of history. Haggis was ugly. His coarse hair was pressed down, revealing his scrawny frame. He didn't have his brother's round healthiness, or becoming face, or attractive coloring. I wanted to leave right then and there.

Rip-off, I thought. But thankfully we would find that there's far more to Haggis than meets the eye.

"He's the feistiest dog I've ever bred," Richard added. Nearly four years later, I can only say amen.

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A *cairn* is what the Scottish call a pile of stones. Cairn terriers have been bred to kill whatever is lurking between or underneath those stones: rats, mice, weasels, ferrets. It takes a lot of guts—that's a blue-collar word for "courage"—to go into lightless holes and instantly fight whatever you ambush.

Once, after our family returned from a trip, we found small poop droppings on our living room windowsill. Then we noticed that Haggis would not leave a certain broken TV outlet alone. Then he didn't sleep for days, which etched haggard exhaustion onto his face. (This happens when a dog—or a man—is kept from what he was designed to be and do.) We finally put two and two together and lowered him into the nearby crawl space.

He immediately kicked into action, his brindled coat bristling. Within seconds he found the intruder: a foot-long rat hiding behind the paper backing of fiberglass insulation. He shook it, breaking its neck, and brought it to me.

A family has never been prouder of a four-legged beast. Haggis had rid our home of a troubling invader. We paraded him around the house on our shoulders like Alexander the Great after the Battle of the Hydaspes. Haggis ate what we ate that night. We toasted him with wine, milk, and tap water. I considered having the rat stuffed and mounted for posterity's sake.

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Actually, we think it was his third rat that year. Sometimes Sandy, my wife, makes the squishy discovery in the morning with her bare toes. Her screech could set off car alarms as she leaps through the morning air like an epileptic River Dancer. On the bright side, this is an opportunity to teach our children biology.

They also learn criminology as we form a crude circle around the little carcass that's always lying on its side. We proceed to analyze the whole scene—like on *CSI*, but without HD-grade makeup, flaming egos, or withering sarcasm.

Me: "Not a house rat. It's too skinny. And look at the coarse hair. This one's wild."

We savor the word *wild*...

Garrett, my thirteen-year-old: "There's no blood. Haggis must have got him and snapped his neck."

Elliot, my fifteen-year-old: "Yeah, Filly usually chews the heads off. You can hear it at night if your door's open." (Filly is our American shorthair cat, a beautiful, natural-born hunter, but one whose tougher nature is unemployable for noble means.)

Abby, my eleven-year-old, with her hands still over her eyes, provides a two-tiered alibi for our other cat. "Hobbes slept in my room last night. Besides, she's a weenie. I love her, but it's true. She can't kill anything." (Somehow, in Hobbes's puny brain, wires are crossed. Instead of bringing us vermin, she delivers leaves, twigs, rubber frogs, and at her best, crunchy dragonflies.)

Hardwired Courage

A dog's courage can be a real pain. For example, we have to sneak into our own backyard, soundlessly, or else Haggis bursts forth, on Secret-Service-level alert, sniffing every molecule of air for any whiff of evil and, often, barking on a rampage from border to border, warding off imaginary foes. Though he's doing his job with bravado and gusto, sometimes we wish he'd take a chill pill.

Sometimes a boy's burgeoning courage can be a real pain as well. I have coached boys for nearly fifteen years. I've written before about the times when it's tempting to kill their manly fire—to squash it, to "break its neck" in order to sidestep disruption and achieve the highly popular state of "compliant comfort." We neuter them early nowadays.

Once I inherited a courageous player from a fellow coach who didn't want him, who didn't see what his born leadership could do, could become. This was the age-old ruse of painting the courageous one as the black sheep.

"He's a dangerous player," the coach told other coaches. But what he and most of our culture consider *dangerous*, people of eras less obsessed with status-quo comfort have lauded as spirited and vigorous. Though this player was being labeled a "hothead," I noticed that he had never been thrown out of a game (unlike other "more respectable" players).

This boy who was once slandered and reviled became part of the backbone of my team. His spirit and his will didn't need breaking, but direction. Let me tell you this: He's the kind of young man who someday will have the guts, unlike his cattle-herd peers, to stand up and, like a prophet, say NO! on behalf of the oppressed and the weak. He's the white knight our society pegs wrongly as the black sheep because we've forgotten that it takes inner heat—not a big toothy grin—to do the right thing.

When I say things like this in church, it's usually only the oddballs, sadly, who give an amen. In today's timid culture, our average neighborhood church is largely made up of mild people searching for Bible verses to sanctify mildness. Courage as a liability? It is, in our commonly distorted understanding of why we're here, of how we were made, of what we're charged to do.

We were preparing for a *700 Club* interview in our home one morning when Haggis somehow slipped out the front door unnoticed. We couldn't find him, and immediately it was hard to keep my mind on anything else. All I could really think about was Haggis, out there by himself. *What if he gets hit by a car? What if he's attacked by bigger dogs? ...*

That evening, Elliot and I sat on our front porch, weeping.

Elliot: "He's such a friendly dog. What if someone takes advantage of him?"

Me: "I hope he's not hurt."

Elliot, with heat in his eyes: "If someone hurts him, I'll kill 'em!"

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My evangelical Protestant upbringing has had me well trained in what it thinks an ideal Christian, especially a man, should be. I'm still a regular Pavlov's dog sometimes, and I hate it. Right there, instinctively, like an old biddy with perfectly coiffed blue-gray hair, with shame-dripping lips ready to pounce on any infraction, I almost launched into a *tsk, tsk, tsk* lecture of disapproval against my son. I would have corrected his strong language, admonished him that "anger will get you nowhere," and dropped any number of blah-blah-blah warnings a Christian man is supposed to pass on to his sons.

Sometimes we evangelical men are good in the worst sense, when our virtues become so excessive that they become vices. We may not sleep around like the younger brother in Jesus' preposterous story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11), a revealing of God's grace that is so extravagant and illogical by human standards that God the Father comes off as a seemingly crazy old fool with white and tangled mad-scientist hair that flails in the wind as he runs half-robed down the dirt lane to embrace a son whose decision to return contains not one edifying quality. He's the heartbreaker, the broke and selfish druggie in the family whose God is his appetite and who turns to God, not because He is good and worthy of honor, but because all other options of filling his churlish belly are gone. Prayer, wrote Twain, is the last bastion of a scoundrel, and we need to look no further than the prodigal son for proof. And if we're honest, ourselves.

Unlike the prodigal, we evangelical men are often too dutiful and rule-bound to be so spirited and uninhibited. We're too governed—but by what? Does our goodness come from a love of truth, or from the fear of living, of exposure? Do we refuse to chase after skirts, not because we love our wives and fear our Lord, but because we don't have enough guts to walk on the wild side? Some of us avoid adultery, not because we're gallant and committed, but because we're afraid to.

Do we come home after work, not because we long to fervently know our wife and kids, but because home is where the comfort is, where our bread is buttered? If so, then men who have never darkened the doorstep of a church do that as well.

I fear our "goodness" has a lot more to do with Pavlov's slavish behavior modification than soulful transformation. We're the dutiful older brother, who isn't enslaved by a host of deadly sins, but by a collection of virtues gone deadly. We're the ones who refuse to take part in the party even when God pleads for us to [Luke 15:32]. Instead of gluttony, we killjoys have our "principles" and our practice of self-denial that leaves us and others stone cold.

We're the charitable ones who don't take, not because we fear being a burden, but because we don't want to be obligated. To receive is to be inferior, so we hide behind a charitable spirit instead. Instead of pride, we're falsely modest, pretending to possess a level of humility that is a churchy rouse. Instead of rage, we're indifferent, which gives the appearance of gentleness—the Gold Star of Sunday school behavior today. And instead of being slothful, we're hyper-concerned with other people's business, not because we care much about them, but because we fear what they're behavior might do to *us*.

The older brother, my fellow evangelicals, is too often the image looking back at us: joyless, trivial, bored, angry, and trapped by religiosity. God implores both brothers, the law-less and the hyper-lawful, to change.

So I fought the knee-jerk reaction to correct my son the way the older brother might and instead affirmed my son's inner heat.

If someone did mistreat or abuse Haggis, I *hope* Elliot would be angry—I hope he'd be indignant (which means "much to grieve"). If I can't feel grief, I'm either spiritually ill or spiritually emasculated. Grief is essential to a courageous, muscular faith and to a loving orientation toward others. You'd never know it from how we treat it today, but indignation actually is an indicator of a balanced and loving soul. (We'll look at grief in chapter 11.)

So instead I said, "He's probably okay, pal. Someone will take him in. They'll see our posters and call us."

That night, around three o'clock, which is maybe the hardest hour to keep one's courage screwed on, I stepped out onto the same porch and called for Haggis through the slight and dry summer wind. He didn't stir through the bushes or come running from down the street, haggard yet unharmed. No prayers were answered that night.

I was just a middle-aged man with a betraying hairline, standing half-naked on his front step with his heart torn open, unable to rest. My brindle-coated friend, brimming with tenacity and courage and eagerness and fervency and devotion, suddenly was gone. The void was so large that whole facets of me seemed to vanish within it.

After what felt like weeks, we got the "I have your dog" call the next afternoon. We jumped into our Suburban like Marines on a special op. Haggis was home within a half hour and received more hugs and kisses than he ever could have wanted.

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Haggis continues to enliven and inspire us to go boldly forward throughout our days. We have grown to appreciate his courage even when it costs us rest, like when he hears a real or imagined bump in the night and fires off a series of semiautomatic warning barks. He is our sixteen-pound sentinel on the watchtower. He monitors our borders while we enjoy blessed REM sleep. He's our happy fighter, our dancing warrior of Celtic lore.

The martial spirit of Haggis affects us the way Vietnam veteran Tom Mitchell was affected by his unit's war dogs.

When we were sick, they would comfort us, and when we were injured, they protected us. They didn't care how much money we had or what color our skin was. Heck, they didn't even care if we were good soldiers. They loved us unconditionally. And we loved them. Still do.

Haggis's pugnacious nature takes its toll on him. When our children frolic in the pool, he's there, ever watching, his small, Canadian bacon pink-like tongue hanging out. "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown," wrote Shakespeare, and Haggis is plenty worried when our kids are exposed and vulnerable. Our cats have never guarded or worried about our children.

Recently I visited one of my best friends in his home as he was recovering from an accidental gunshot wound that almost took his life. His dog, Stella, made sure to keep her body between us. She didn't leave his side—no one trained her to be that way, but still there was visible strain on her dogged, worn face. What makes dogs do that?

Before Haggis there was Conrad Lewis, our German shepherd. When Elliot was just a toddler, Conrad put his body between him and two adult Chow Chows in our front yard.

Those were tough dogs—we later found out that the Chows had chewed the testicles off a Rottweiler weeks earlier. And Conrad was still a puppy. He literally put his life on the line for my son. What trait possessed him then?

Masculinity: Unwanted

I thoroughly enjoy Haggis's companionship while hiking, snowshoeing, and fishing, even though his fur only protects against so much—if we're in nature's raw winter elements long enough, he needs extra covering so he won't freeze to death. Have you tried lately to buy a jacket for a dog? It's a real education. Try it, and you'll see how we're even trying to drive the manliness right out of *canines*.

When we were going fly-fishing on the Klamath River for winter steelhead, I went to Petco and asked the clerk for directions to the dog jackets. She took me to an assortment that mostly were either fake leopard skin or (I kid you not)

adorned with colored boas. "Do you have any jackets for dogs that are heterosexual?" I asked. Good night, I'd rather eat my own hair mixed with mayonnaise than put one of those things on Haggis.

And Haggis is a dog. We've gone mad, mad, mad at expecting little *boys* to behave like little *girls*. Boys are being gunned down by manliness gone bad and by those who do not accept or appreciate it. Our culture tells young boys that traditional masculinity is bad, that men are stupid and deserve to be the object of disdain, contempt, and ridicule. Then we expect them to grow up and exemplify honor, integrity, and valor.

Boys are vulnerable, and gutting a boy's manly courage is easy. Put him in the care of men or women who don't understand what creates a courageous soul, the kind of people who mistake manners for morals. Give him a Sunday school teacher or pastor who indoctrinates him into worshiping a false god, a gentle Jesus meek and mild.

Give him a mother who was beaten by her father. She'll do the best she can to attack burgeoning manhood in her boys. She'll look at powerful men with contempt and then use her verbal acumen to castrate young male souls. Thereby she condemns a boy's manhood: When she criticizes his father, the boy will struggle with the belief that he's the fruit of defective seed.

Or give him an overprotective parent who fights all his meaningful battles for him.

Give him coaches and teachers who refuse to push him further than he wants to go, or who don't get a kick out of irrepressible and sometimes irresponsible little-guy energy.

We strain our necks to get a glimpse of dogs that exhibit noble masculinity, whether in the Iditarod or in the backseat of a police car. Conversely, masculine-lite dogs lie on laps and shun uncomfortable weather. They cause no man to offer them his respect. Manly, courageous dogs are determined to pack multiple lifetimes into one, very much like manly men.

This same dogged attribute exists in you as well, and it will emerge and thrive if you will go against wrong-headed spiritual training to nurture and grow it.

Our Unnamed Spiritual Need

What is it about a dog that captures us so? Why, for example, is it usually guys in their twenties and early thirties—often an exceedingly fearful time in a man's life (underreported and under-ministered to)—who feel a deep inner need to get a big dog? Children yearn for them too. I read a few years ago that the number one topic kids look up in the encyclopedia is dogs.

I believe it, but why? What is it that captivates us? What quality, what trait, what x-factor are we trying to get from a creature whose bargain includes biting fleas, insidious ticks, smelly carpets, and outrageous vet bills? Is there an element we're trying to graft into our deficient, trivial, boring lives?

There's *something* that makes the words of animal rights activist Roger Caras ring true: "If you don't have a dog—at least one—there is not necessarily anything wrong with you, but there may be something wrong with your life."

Many of us, when we get a dog, think that our objective is somehow to make them semi-human. But have you noticed that there's a part of *you* that longs to be more like *them*? "The more I see of men," said Madame Jeanne-Marie Roland, "the more I admire dogs." Me too. Some people think animals will be in heaven, and some don't. But I admit that if there are no dogs in heaven, then there's a part of me that wants to go wherever they're headed!

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When Haggis ran away and got lost, he took with him a trait that I could sense I needed as much as I need air. I couldn't name it then. I can name it now.

This name, this container, answers a riddle that plagued me for a long time. Here's an example. A seminary professor's mind can ponder wisdom, order, and justice. His brain can help him to discern the weightier matters of

theology and assist him with understanding sacred text in its original language. His heart can affirm what is valuable and beautiful and stir a desire within him to love God, his wife, his children, and his neighbor. It can inspire him to lift his hands toward heaven as he praises God in corporate worship.

But if he has no animating urge, no motivating courage or gumption compelling him to take the risks that are required to create and establish justice, he becomes a paper lion, a punch line, a cautionary tale. If he has no fire burning in his belly, no tenacity to inflate his chest and lungs, he won't be able to withstand, genuinely and authentically, the turmoil that accompanies the realities of loving people on earth or God in heaven.

What good is such a person who earnestly studies God with his mind, sincerely praises him from his heart, but fails to *actualize* either his thoughts or his emotions? Where is his fiery faith put into being—which, by the way, is something God expects from us? What if a man does not labor to put feet on the good desires born in his head and heart? Doesn't that make him the noisy gong that the apostle Paul denounces? Isn't he what James would call a talker but not a doer?

Maybe I just described your father. Or a sibling. Or a friend. Or you. I know this much: I just described the life I lived for far too long.

For years and years I was not connecting with or activating a special region within me, a dimension that my spiritual training didn't even address or, when it briefly touched on the matter, told me was off limits and sinful. It's a God-designed area, within me and within you, where courage and its fruits—unsentimental love and a martial spirit (to name just two)—are forged and stored.

This is a soul region that the ancient Greeks studied, praised, and placed warning signs around. It's a place that is a gift to those we love—if we'll do the soul-work required to grow it and unleash it. It's also a curse if it isn't seasoned and disciplined. At times it appears elusive. It's a lost piece in our spiritual puzzle. For many of us, it's our absent ingredient, the missing link in our spiritual journey.

The Greeks called it *thumos* (sometimes spelled *thymos*). This powerful word bulges with meaning, and it doesn't translate into English without some hitches. God created men and women with thumos, a "fight drive," a courageous and animating spirit, without which we don't grow in spiritual breadth and depth, are unable to deeply love, consistently fail to lead or surmount the sins of our flesh.

Think of thumos as a Thermos container of spiritual heat and spiritual juice. It's a pugnacious yet playful drive, an attribute that separates the men from the boys, the women from the girls.

Thumos, wrote the ancient Greeks, is one of three main parts of our soul, along with *logos* (head and logic) and *eros* (heart and emotions). It's found—or at least should be found—more in men than in women, making a man's spirituality and his earthly responsibilities similar but also different. It is largely due to this difference that men have become a cultural target of bigotry, resentment, even hatred. Thumos is a mighty gift and, like many giftings, can also be a burden.

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Thumos is the reason two preachers will talk about God's requirement for social justice and mercy, yet only one will commit the deeds required to usher them in. It's why some men think that their men's ministry group at church should do more than flip pancakes every fourth Saturday morning. It's why one guy stands and denounces brutality while others pretend to have lost their vision and their speech.

Most Christians leave far more than their sin at the cross: We are admonished by the church and, in a different sense, by our culture to forsake our thumos and its fruit, courage—which is essential to deep and abiding love—as if they were a scarlet *T* covering our genitals. The church doesn't give us spiritual swords and other martial weapons for battle when we become Christ-followers. It gives us acoustic guitars and open-toed sandals, and then shows us how to become pacifist folk singers. "Jesus is our Savior," we're told in Sunday school. "Now let's make some rainbows!" No wonder leadership is so rare and elusive.

And this makes sense, given the hair-model Jesus many of us grew up with. He has a killer smile and is very popular with the gals ... just not so popular with the guys. A neutered Jesus doesn't garner another man's allegiance and faith but rather his irritation and scorn.

It's Neither Heart Nor Mind

Your thumos is not a subset of your feelings or emotions. An awakened heart is invaluable for our spiritual life, but when overemphasized, it actually can lead us away from a rounded-out understanding of our God-created design. *Hearts alone do not lead us into worthy battle.* And hearts sometimes lead us astray. Rudolph Hess, swearing in the Nazi party in 1934, exhorted his hearers in a manner that should make all of us carefully evaluate our fickle home of emotion: "Do not seek Adolph Hitler with your brains; all of you will find him with the strength of your hearts."

Thumos is where our head and heart converge, quarrel, and then put feet underneath our courageous intentions. This is an integral part of our fulfilling the good works that God has prepared for us in advance—if we have the guts (a blue-collar definition of thumos) to play our part by being obedient to transcendent causes larger than our own ego and appetites. It's the place where we talk to ourselves in the age-old effort to "screw on our courage." Men talk to themselves more than women, and again, this is not a coincidence.

Just as our heart alone isn't adequate to enliven our spiritual growth, reason (thoughts, mind) provides clarity but doesn't provide strength and impetus. Our lives are only strong, purposeful, and meaningful when we *do something* loving, beautiful, freedom-giving, redemptive, and worthy of respect. Or as J. D. Salinger's troubled Franny puts it,

Everything everybody does is so—I don't know—not *wrong*, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and—sad-making. And the worst of it is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way.

Go and *do*, the prophets and other malcontents tell us—don't just *think* and *feel*.

Those who have been shot at in the line of military duty will tell you that if they'd waited for courage to flow before they responded, it would have been far wiser just to have stayed in bed. Something else within them, from another region of their soul, kicks into action. Rarely does one feel courageous in the face of opposition, and so over-reliance on one's heart or mind can be a trap. Courage must be manufactured within another inner place.

Yet thumos-courage is not only part of the physical life, it also can have a moral dimension. When Boris Pasternak refused the Nobel Prize and with it the opportunity to deliver a speech to expose the lies of the former Soviet Union, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was mortified by Pasternak's lack of thumotic energy.

Solzhenitsyn's response, much like Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," shows us the elegant strength of thumos—the prophet-like justice it demands, the sacrifice it often requires from those who flex it, and the need for us, when necessary, to overrule our heart, because though love can flow from that region, so can life-stopping, love-freezing fear.

All the more vividly did I see [the Nobel Prize], all the more eagerly did I brood on it, demand it from the future! I had to have that prize! As a position to be won, a vantage point on the battlefield! ... I should resolutely accept the prize, resolutely go to Stockholm, make a very resolute speech. ... [I would] touch off the explosive charge ... [and] speak for all those who had been stifled, shot, starved or frozen to death! Drag it all to the platform of the Nobel Prize ceremony and hurl it like a thunderbolt.

Those are passionate, heart-drenched words, but they are more than passion. They drip with courage as well, born from the thumos-place within the man that binds emotion and intellect together. The place where a man stands and says what he stands for is right, and that those who stand against him are wrong. It's the place from which Jesus was able to say, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." Minus an appreciation for thumos, these are the ravings of a lunatic.

In *Unleashing Courageous Faith*, we'll explore the many facets of thumos: where we find it, what kills it, what fuels it, and so forth. For now, let me offer this hopeful insight up front: *It's already in you. The potential is there.*

We want men to have a heart so that they can more tenderly express love. Likewise, we need to help men, as the Wizard of Oz did for the Cowardly Lion, to have thumos so they can create a more muscular, manly form of love: that practical, unsentimental, no-strings-attached, kingly, prophetic, forceful love that lays down its life for another without fanfare or an arsenal of publicists—the kind that makes nations weep, faith grow, and God be glorified.

The Soul's Third Dimension

Gentler virtues, tougher virtues—we need them both—but they are found and forged in different places and through different practices and disciplines. The church, and some para-church organizations like Ransomed Heart, Promise Keepers, Iron Sharpens Iron, and Women of Faith currently are helping the Tin Men: those who need to find their hearts. This is a remarkable and noble accomplishment of immeasurable impact. But we also need to help the many, many Cowardly Lions find their courage as well. And note the three—not two—main characters who need to rediscover their essence: more than just brain (Scarecrow) and heart (Tin Man)! We're so familiar with this third facet of being that often we don't even notice or consider it.

These three soulish "parts" of us have been hiding for a long time. And, as the song by the band America goes, Oz never gave them nothing that they didn't already have. It's there, in you, simmering but elusive, like your last moment of *déjà vu*. We need each other to find it, grow it, and honor it, so that someday we can say, like the Cowardly Lion, "What makes a king out of a slave? Courage!"

This force inside us is one that's shrouded in mystery like a mighty wind. Wind is an ancient symbol for thumos, and it's one of the ways the Holy Spirit is revealed in Scripture. This is where our heroic instinct is grown and where it's housed; this is where our innate longing to act nobly is found. We desperately need to tap it—this power that's missing in our culture and mostly missing in the church—but we don't know how. And, truthfully, we aren't even sure that we should. Our spiritual training has us believing it's a kind of Pandora's box, maybe best left untouched.

Listening to the well-meaning but naïve and spiritually negligent voices of mildness will lead to our demise. If you treat thumos as if it's just another flavor at the ice-cream counter of ministry, you will forgo love and the protection of what is good, right, and honorable. You will miss out on much growth and adventure, and the ability to subdue the cravings of your flesh. You will not have the skills you need to be the leader you want to be. You will remain fragmented and unstable in your nature.

All of us—and especially men—must lay claim to thumos so that God's grace in us can construct a new and dynamic person. Most of us will never fight a physical battle against an enemy; we will use our thumos, or not, for moral courage against both the evil spirit of the age that erodes human dignity and also against our own tendency to take the easy way through life, which halts spiritual growth. We must harness thumos to rise above the mediocre, trivial, social-club Christianity in which we too often find ourselves, shaking off the fearful and uninformed critics who worship comfort instead of truth. Because a shift is taking place: God is calling his people to fight for justice, and more and more of them are answering the call.

We have flexed compassion the world over to combat poverty and disease. But one of the most underreported reasons people's lives are so desperate isn't that they don't have the ability to feed and educate themselves—it's that others oppress them, rob them, maim them, and enslave them. Many don't need more bags of rice—not ultimately. They, like the estimated twenty-seven million people in actual slavery, like the 160,000 kids who stay home *daily* from American schools for fear of being bullied, need justice to rain down upon them from the hands of righteous people who will fight on their behalf. That's right, *fight*—one of evangelicalism's most feared words and even more feared actions. We need the men to move first—that's almost always how it works.

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Thumos has a sinister side as well as a noble side, which should lead a man to embrace, not crucify, his martial spirit (that's the subject of the next chapter). Before we get into that, I need to give a disclaimer.

One of the hazards of being a writer, and there are many, is that you never quite live up to your words, especially if you write about spiritual matters. You always fall short. So just let me say straightaway that I do not hold myself up as some giant when it comes to thumos.

This will not shock those who know me. I've lacked thumos for much of my life. At the same time, I've undertaken a good amount of soul-work to grow it, season it, deploy it. I am guilty of cowardice, though I don't think this sin (yes, sin) defines me.

In this book I will share with you my victories and the victories of others. And if my thumos is strong enough, I will share with you my defeats, because it's not our strengths that make us relatable and lead to fellowship and even brotherhood or sisterhood. It's our weaknesses, through which we're perfected, that bond us.

And while we have sibling-hood on our minds, now's a good time to point out a distinction about this book that, like thumos, is bound to raise eyebrows. Both genders possess thumos, and it tends to express its animated spiritedness differently. Generally speaking, a woman's is expressed most strongly in intimate relationships, especially with children, and a man's tends to be deployed upon the world "out there," that is, outside the house. Of course there is overlap, and of course there are exceptions, and those exceptions should be honored instead of being used as material for jagged punch lines. We should applaud the good side of thumos wherever we can find it. (We'll talk about the other side in chapter 4.)

Here's an example. A friend of mine and his wife were having dinner with another couple and talking about gender roles. The other couple was more liberal, so they had a more general, less specific interpretation. In fact, the well-educated husband thought their understanding was so broad that if at nighttime they suspected someone was trying to break into their home, he said, it would be the responsibility of the person closest to the bedroom door to get up and investigate. His usually-just-as-liberal wife looked at him first with horror and then with contempt.

Liberal or conservative, theist or atheist—a man, muscular or weakling, is expected to confront the intruder. This has to do with more than innate physical strength. It's also because men possess a palpable thumotic energy that can either be valorous or sinister, depending on how it's used. God is thumotic, and as his image bearers, so are we.

Finally, a warning: Thumos is disruptive. Many people think disruption is sinful, and it's certainly unmannerly. In a church culture dominated by female sensibilities that make it wired more for safety than for battle, morality and manners are pervasively put forward as one and the same. That Jesus was mighty unmannerly is just one indicator of our drift and diminishment.

Thumos bites into what's wrong with the status quo and will not let go, much like Haggis with a bone. There are people, lots of people, inside and outside the church, who love the status quo. They do not take kindly to anyone messing with *what is*—even when *what is* is killing them and others. So know that when your thumos urges you onto whatever battlefield has long been awaiting you, you're going to make some enemies. Jesus said to pray for your enemies, and he wouldn't have said this if you weren't going to make some. And he never said you couldn't have any.

Excerpted from:

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