



By examining the lives of five men of the Bible, *The 5 Masculine Instincts* shows that your own instincts are neither curse nor virtue. Through exploring sarcasm, adventure, ambition, reputation, and apathy, you'll come to understand yourself and how your instincts can be matured into something better.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

WALMART



AMAZON



APPLE BOOKS



TARGET



LIFEWAY



GOOGLE PLAY



CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

BARNES & NOBLE



CONTENTS

Foreword	11
CHAPTER 1	
Men, Meat, and the Masculine Malaise	15
CHAPTER 2	
Learning to Recognize Your Instincts	29
CHAPTER 3	
Sarcasm: The Humor of our Age	43
CHAPTER 4	
Adventure: Cultivating New Eyes	71
CHAPTER 5	
Ambition: A Promised Land Lost	95
CHAPTER 6	
Reputation: The Image of a King	121
CHAPTER 7	
Apathy: A World too Wide	145
CHAPTER 8	
The Real Work Ahead	171
CHAPTER 9	
Nothing Left to Prove	183
Acknowledgments	191
Notes	193

Chapter 1

MEN, MEAT, AND THE MASCULINE MALAISE

"I call this turf 'n' turf. It's a 16 oz. T-bone and a 24 oz. porterhouse. Also, whisky and a cigar. I am going to consume all of this at the same time because I am a free American."

RON SWANSON

"Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but he always knew, or thought he knew, what he was looking for. For the first time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his address."

G. K. CHESTERTON

This book is about masculinity, but honestly, I'm getting tired of talking about masculinity. Maybe it's because I became a man in a world where talking about masculinity was the least masculine thing a man could do. Or perhaps it's because the topic has become so hostile and combative it's hard to keep it from turning into another online shouting match. These days, masculinity seems to have very little to do with who a man actually is. It's about politics and culture, brands and evolution, liberals and

conservatives, labels and stereotypes. There are only sides to take and a long list of ways to try and publicly prove it.

You've heard it all before. There are the obvious masculine tropes: beer, sports, women, guns, and cars. There are the old cautions of money, sex, and power. And there are the new cries of toxicity challenging masculine aggression, stoicism, and competition. But these conversations are all about symptoms—surface clichés. What they leave confused in the chaos of their wake are the everyday lives of the actual men I know. The real questions of masculinity lie much deeper than our culture's interest or opinions. And I'm afraid the questions are more complex than we may realize.

Let me give you an example of just how deep and just how complex the real conversations are. Let's talk about men and their instinct for meat.

* * *

I had never seen hives until rolling back my sleeves and discovering my arms covered in them. In twenty-four hours, they had spread to my back and chest. A few hours more, and they were on my face.

I've never been allergic to anything: not pollen, mold, peanuts, or shellfish, not even poison ivy, but my doctor was convinced I was having an anaphylactic reaction to something we couldn't identify. For three weeks, I had been growing steadily worse as we frantically changed shampoo, laundry detergent, toothpaste, deodorant, and vitamins, searching for something, anything. Still, each day the symptoms worsened. It had to be something I was eating.

Still miserable and covered in hives, I laid there trying to remember everything I had eaten over the last few days. Three days ago, my wife had made chili. Then I had ordered a burger from the Wendy's drive-through. Yesterday, it had been venison tacos—every year, I harvest and process a deer myself, loading our garage freezer with pounds of packaged deer meat and two back-straps—in my opinion, the best cut of meat in the world. There is nothing like a perfectly cooked medium-rare deer tenderloin, but I digress.

That's when I had a terrible thought. Can you develop an allergy to meat? Surely not. We had already tried cutting out dairy and gluten and a whole list of strange but apparently common food allergens. "God help me if I'm allergic to a bacon cheeseburger," I thought.

As I had done so many times over the last three weeks, I reached for my phone and began googling.

* * *

In 2014, the University of Hawaii at Manoa published results of an experiment on men's relationship with meat and masculinity.¹ One hundred and fifty men were selected to test an online pizza-ordering app. At least that's what they were told. Each man would be given a list of ingredients and asked to build their personalized pizza. They had no idea that they were really participating in a complex inquiry into their identity, which would seek to manipulate and expose the vulnerabilities of their masculinity.

Before placing their pizza order, each conducted a personality assessment that included questions about their conforming to certain gender traits. Regardless of their answers, they were given

one of two predetermined results. Half were informed they had scored higher than most men. The other half were told they scored lower than most men and had answered more in line with female participants. Their answers didn't actually matter. The researchers manipulated the results, so half of the participants would experience what they called a "masculinity threat condition."²

Having their manhood "scientifically" questioned, they were next tasked with ordering their pizza. The list of ingredients had been carefully tested on a control group and was categorized by two types: meats and vegetables. They included things like steak, bacon, and pepperoni as well as eggplant, olives, broccoli, and artichoke hearts.

What did the researchers discover? The men who had their masculinity questioned were statistically more likely to pile on meat. Or, as the study concluded, "Following the male identity threat manipulation, men were in general more likely to increase their intended meat intake."³ Eating more meat helped men feel better about having their masculinity questioned. Having eaten meat, they felt more like men again.

Believe it or not, there is a growing body of academic research that associates the consumption of meat with masculinity. And it's not just being proved through university experiments. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, American men eat 57 percent more meat than women, significantly more than the US Dietary Guidelines recommend.⁴

Why are men ordering more burgers and steaks? That's actually a very complicated question to answer. Some researchers believe that the association is strictly cultural and created through a pervasive consumer-driven caricature of men. You might remember that 2007 Burger King ad that depicted men marching in the

street chanting, “I am man and I’m way too hungry to settle for chick food.” Burger King was advertising its new Texas Double Whopper. Those commercials concluded, “Eat like a man, man.”

Other researchers find a much older explanation for men’s meat infatuation. Some biologists locate the association of men and meat with the development of the masculine emphasis on hunting. They describe changes in the bones of males and females from the Neolithic period, which seem to show females eating more wheat and barley while men began an increased consumption of red meat. Some have even identified this milestone as the birth of patriarchy.⁵

It gets more problematic. Our culture is also split on whether eating meat is the antidote to various forms of degenerative health issues or if eating meat is actually the disease that is destroying our planet and risking the future of humanity itself. I’m not being hyperbolic. Take, for example, the recent wave of men adopting the controversial Carnivore diet. Adherents are permitted to eat only meat, salt, and water. Proponents have described a long list of benefits, including increased and sustained energy and a general decrease in depression.

But others see their miracle diet as a curse. The British Independent news agency recently published an article entitled, “Fragile masculinity says meat is manly. If we don’t challenge that, people will die and the earth will be irreversibly damaged.”⁶ The author argues that a toxic form of masculinity is keeping us from adopting the necessary vegan diet required to solve global warming. I told you this would get complicated.

One thing should be clear enough: we can’t even agree on what men should eat. Men, by their instinct for more meat, are either responding to evolutionary law, chasing a cultural fad, brainwashed

by corporate marketers, or passively risking all of human existence. If the contents of the brown bag you take for lunch cause this much debate, anxiety, and uncertainty, what else is controversial and confusing about being a man today? The answer: a lot.

* * *

Oh, and it turns out you can become allergic to meat. As my hive-induced google searching soon uncovered, there is a tick-borne disease called alpha-gal—also known as The Mammalian Meat Allergy. Yes, a tick bite can leave you allergic to all things mammal. According to the Wikipedia page, it was rare but was documented in my geographic area.

That's when I remembered. A few weeks before my symptoms began, I had removed two ticks from my ankle, and the next day discovered a third still on the back of my leg. My doctor recommended I immediately stop eating all mammal meat and dairy products. A couple of days later, my symptoms were gone. I had alpha-gal. I was allergic to meat.

I quickly discovered that meat is in just about everything. Marshmallows and medication, toothpaste and deodorants, most chewing gum and anything cross-contaminated by the minimum-waged 16-year-old in the kitchen who just cut your veggie sandwich with the same knife he used to cut your friend's ham sandwich. I have since been introduced to all the "vegan" alternatives: tofu, tempeh, seitan, everything soy and almond, and a strange packet of grayish strips called vegan "bacon."

When I explain my situation, most men have the same reaction, "I'd rather die." They are joking—I think. My dad once suggested I drive to Amarillo and try that 72-ounce steak challenge.

“It will either kill you or purge it out of your system,” he said. He was joking—I think.

THE MASCULINE MALAISE

The list of masculine instincts men experience is much longer than their craving for meat but there seems to be just two ways men are being instructed to respond to those instincts. There are those who see traditionally masculine instincts as toxic and those who see them as salvific.

Based on what are perceived to be destructive masculine stereotypes and attributes—now called toxic masculinity—many in our culture continue to call for a deconstructing of masculinity, replacing it with an alternative list of less “dangerous” attributes. The American Psychological Association explained in a controversial 2019 publication, “Traditional masculinity—marked by stoicism, competitiveness, dominance and aggression—is, on the whole, harmful. Men socialized in this way are less likely to engage in healthy behaviors.”⁷

However, the energy with which society has embraced the toxic masculinity mantra has been met by an equally energized counterreaction. There are many who think traditionally masculine instincts shouldn’t be abandoned but pursued and indulged. They suspect the charge of toxicity is really an attack on manhood itself. They point to celebrities and politicians declaring that the “future is female” to prove

Men are constantly left on the defensive, often not sure what they are defending, but feeling threatened nonetheless.

their skepticism of anyone wanting to “cure” man’s toxic traits.

As the debate has intensified, masculinity has slipped into depersonalized parodies. We end up with cartoon characterizations of men, flimsy cardboard cutout heroes and propped-up strawman opponents. We compress the full experience of manhood into catchphrases and protest slogans. We speak of masculinity as if it were a brand men could like on Facebook or a sticker across the back of their pickups and Priuses. Men are constantly left on the defensive, often not sure what they are defending, but feeling threatened nonetheless. There is no way forward, only trenches to dig deeper.

Michael Ian Black lamented the way in which this lack of clarity is robbing men of what it means to be a man. He writes, “To be a girl today is to be the beneficiary of decades of conversation about the complexities of womanhood, its many forms, and expressions. Boys, though, have been left behind. No commensurate movement has emerged to help them navigate toward a full expression of their gender. It’s no longer enough to ‘be a man’—we no longer even know what that means.”⁸

You probably remember the 2019 Gillette Super Bowl commercial, which repositioned the company’s slogan from “the best a man can get” to “the best a man can be.” The commercial sparked immediate controversy with its references to the #MeToo movement, bullying, and sexism.

The commercial pictured men making unwanted passes at women, belittling their female colleagues at work, and condoning childhood bullying as a means to toughness. Depicted as an endless line of men behind their grills, they echoed the refrain, “boys will be boys.” The final line of the ad read, “It’s only by challenging ourselves to do more that we can get closer to our

best.” The commercial did what most of our conversations about masculinity do; it called men to try harder, to do more, and to make themselves better. But the question so rarely asked is how? How do we do better? Is it really as simple as trying harder? Are men monsters simply for a lack of effort? Can men be cured by marketing campaigns?

Our culture has become highly skilled in pointing out the problems, but, beyond public service campaigns and news headlines, we haven’t developed the same expertise in helping men solve those problems. We have lost the wisdom by which men become better, by which they mature into a better manhood.

We have come to believe that men can simply be changed from the outside. That with enough social pressure or shame or advertising dollars we can convince them to behave. Both sides see men’s problems as external. Both see the challenges as cultural conflicts. Both see the other as man’s greatest threat. They each have their ideal but only accusation and protest to obtain them. Neither offers a path for producing what they believe in. They rely on slogans, celebrities, and the power of social pressure—great for gathering crowds, stirring up online debates, and garnering votes, but not very helpful for cultivating individual character.

Unfortunately, the church has not done much better. Desperate to attract men and keep their attention, we’ve turned conversations about manhood into similarly extreme litmus tests of masculine interests: beards, bacon, and blowing things up. When more serious, we too have focused almost exclusively on the external behavior of men, defining masculinity by what men should and shouldn’t do. We call men to become better husbands, fathers, and church volunteers. It’s not that those expectations are wrong, but expectations themselves don’t make men better.

Marriage is no cure for a lustful heart, and having a child doesn't guarantee your own maturity. You can't confer character by a title or job description. And simply giving men more responsibility doesn't guarantee they'll suddenly form the virtues necessary to bear it.

Similarly, our conversations about Christian manhood usually turn into more debate: positions on submission, leadership, and authority. Men take sides and think the accuracy of their theological position is enough to secure their manhood. Those conversations do matter, but when they come before conversations on character, they tend to stunt growth rather than inspire it. Most of the men I know do want to be great husbands, fathers, and friends. They want to bear greater responsibility and serve others well too, but it's their own sense of inadequacy at the task that tends to hold them back.

In many ways, the Gillette commercial was right. Far too many men are wrong, far too many do practice and condone indefensible behavior, but the commercial and so many of our own conversations fall short of offering a better way. Men are confused about how to get better. And they are confused about what better even means. The constant barrage of accusation and outrage does not produce the character it seeks but rather defensiveness, resentment, and indifference, all poison to the real work of character. It's so much easier to give up and fall back to whatever feels right—to fall back to your instincts.

I've long been haunted by a line in one of Walker Percy's novels. "Men are dead, dead, dead; and the malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall . . . I know nothing and there is nothing to do but fall prey to desire."⁹ We become

nothing more than what we feel. We become our instincts.

Some can articulate it; they can talk about this experience of moral discouragement and disillusionment. Others express it only through their disengagement, too often coping through substance abuse, escaping through fantasy, pornography, and video games, or vicariously living out the success of sports teams and politicians.

So many are caught in this malaise. An uneasiness, a weariness, an unshakable sense that so much is wrong, that nothing really matters, and nothing can really be done about it anyway. Longing for something meaningful while simultaneously laughing at those who believe in such things. We give up on getting better, settling into this malaise as just the way we are as men. Indulging our raw instincts and questioning anyone who would question us, everything seemingly hostile. We're not sure what else to do with what we feel, afraid to admit we feel at all. We defend what we never really chose. We pick fights to avoid ourselves. Make enemies to have something worth fighting for. All of it an indulgence in this instinctive unease. What else is there to guide us?

In what is perhaps the most dangerous mistake of all, we come to think that mindless indulgence in our instincts is the proof of our masculinity, that what we feel must be our deepest truth; to risk any kind of introspection, a threat to manhood itself. We come to think that this male malaise is masculinity. To indulge is masculine. To question your instincts is only to take the bait and jeopardize the whole game.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR INSTINCTS

It has never been more important to develop the skills necessary to recognize your instincts. C. S. Lewis wrote that human instincts are “an unreflective or spontaneous impulse.”¹⁰ Instincts don’t require forethought or decision. They don’t require us to even know they are there to affect us. We have not chosen them or reasoned our way to their existence, yet they speak to us with a

Every soldier knows there is a time to fight and a time to retreat. The real question is which is true at this moment.

weight of conviction. An instinct is a way of perceiving who you are, the world you are in, and how you should act in the midst of it.

Our feeling these instincts, sometimes profoundly, seems to be enough evidence for trusting them. These instincts influence everything we do in small and

profound ways. No one has time to draw up a cost/benefit analysis for every decision, so we trust our instincts to guide us. Lewis described them as “Behaviour as if from knowledge.”¹¹ We act as if we knew what we were doing. But if you have never thought about what instincts might be guiding you, you don’t know what you’re doing. You act as if from knowledge.

The question, too often unanswered, is whether any particular instinct should be checked or trusted.¹² Instincts can be wrong. Every soldier knows there is a time to fight and a time to retreat. The real question is which is true at this moment. Trust only your instinct and you are prone to making the wrong choice. You need more than what you feel to live well. A soldier is made by discipline, not impulse.

I'm convinced this is the challenge costing too many men a better manhood. In a world of individualized truth and hyper-defensiveness, we've lost the ability to decide what to do with our instincts. We have failed to become their master. Instead, they rule us.

The philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche suggested, "An instinct is weakened when it rationalises itself."¹³ When you force your instincts to explain themselves, they suddenly lose some of their power to control you. It's time to put your instincts to a test. It's time to ask them some tough questions.

So, what are these instincts, robbing so many men of a better manhood? I want to offer you five of these masculine instincts and five biblical men who have struggled with them, men who by their successes and failures can show us a better way. They are our guides to a better manhood.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

TARGET 

WALMART 

LIFEWAY 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 