

Kung Fu: that was one of my good ones. Well what's a few broken bones when we all know its good clean fun. Skateboards, I've almost made them respectable "I'm a Man." Joe Jackson wrote this song back in 1983. The song itself is weird but the underlying theme is men are reckless. This book came from an un-reckless life. I felt less than my father and less than my wife. Some man I was. Today I believe I am a man.

Even today it's hard to say "I'm a man." Somewhere inside me is a competing voice trying to bring me down. It just might be me, but I know it's not. There are many men out there looking for meaning in masculinity. What is it? Is it important? Will I ever feel justified as a man? These are important questions to be answered. I wonder if the lifelong pursuit is to feel comfortable in our own skin.

As I'm writing this they have laid comedian and actor Robin Williams to rest. I don't know why he took his life, but depression seems so odd for this man: a funny guy that made people laugh. How could he be depressed? It's because somewhere inside fame and fortune was not the answer. A wife and kids didn't do it for him. Why did Michael Jackson always change his appearance? Talent and honor as the king of pop couldn't satisfy his soul. They are not crazy people, but just men looking for answers.

The difference between the suicidal person and me in my mind is this: I am stubborn. At some point when I feel at my lowest I will trudge (begrudgingly) back into the bathroom and look into the mirror. I still practice what I preach telling myself "I'm a man." Over and over again I carry out this ritual month after month with the hope that one day I can turn to better things. My understanding is that substance abuse survivors have the same battle. We are never cured but just become better fighters.

I have given you instructions about what has worked for me. Will those instructions work for you? That is an interesting argument. What works for one seems to not work the same in others. You know, I'm fine with that. Thank God everyone is different. The goal is to start somewhere. I suppose you can look at it in two ways. First we could try where others have failed. Maybe that's a mountain to climb. When we get enough courage to change the road we're on it will be rough at the beginning. Failing to succeed seems nuts. A second way (and in my mind a better way) might be to go to where someone else has won. It's telling you nothing is impossible. So why not start where someone else succeeded

Carrie Underwood has inspired me. Her songs speak truth to me. In one song she says "you're just a fool to believe you can change the world." It would be sad if that was all she said but right after that Carrie answers "don't listen to what they say." There are many haters out there. The new Taylor Swift song "Shake it off" says "players will be players and haters will be haters." Both of these women know what it's like to be hated. They both chose to be players in a hater's game. It's the Ram truck commercial scenario "No guts no glory."

Gee Patrick you like to be inspired by women it seems. Unfortunately there are not many male heroes out there. Men don't like to talk about the battles inside: women do. I don't want to be called a hero but maybe it begins with me. Heroes don't brag and believe me I'm not bragging. When Jesus asked God to take this cup from him I know what that means. I'd rather be doing anything else than spilling my blood on these pages. I guess that's what heroes do. A war vet and a war casualty would rather not spill blood but somewhere deep inside they knew they had to.

I am certainly not Jesus. I am certainly not a war hero. I'm just a man who spilled his own blood on the journey of his life. I'm been the one who caused my own pain for the most part. The

hero part is that I won't quit. That's why I well up with tears when people succeed. That's why I continue to look back to the mirror. I care about you and I care about me. We are important. We need us men to bring forward a better world. Women can and will bring forth a charge. They need men to sacrifice themselves for their cause. If a woman says help we should help. If a woman says defend me then we should defend them. If a woman says (for God sakes do something about it) then by Gods will we should do something.

The first step is to go where heroes have gone. Some people call it a bucket list. No it is not a bucket list. Try things people have succeeded at. Why do we read inspiring books? It's because the writer won. Why do we cheer when our sports teams win? It's because they won. We love to walk in the paths where the famous have been. In many cases they were famous because they are our heroes. Walk in their shoes and feel what they felt. Hopefully you will be inspired by what inspired them.

If you need inspiration then read a book. Find a book by someone who made a difference. Most of the time, they tell of the mountains they climbed to succeed. There are trials and failures as they climbed to the top. They usually did the things that scared them. Somewhere inside each of them was a voice screaming "I have to do this." Maybe there are things that would scare you? I suppose that could be a bucket list to do.

I know hockey players that never won until their last year. Lanny McDonald of the Calgary Flames scored his first Goal in the Montreal Forum. He scored his last Goal in that same Forum and won the Stanley Cup for the first and last time in that building. I think he retired with a smile on his face. Those are the stories we need to read.

Joni Eareckson Tata was a lover of life. This young girl was out with friends on Chesapeake Bay in 1967. They were diving off the cliffs as they had done many times before.

On this day she miss-judged the depth of the water and broke her neck. Joni was left a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. That is not the end. She battled through depression and limitations to become a bestselling author and painter. She never quit. You should read her book.

Hero's always come from unexpected places. The light bulb failed a 1001 times before it succeeded. Lanny McDonald played 16 years before he won. Napoleon was short. The sound barrier was impossible to break. On and on I could go giving you examples to read about. Go where our heroes have been. Know in your heart that success is possible. Do they live with fears still? In most cases they do but that fear drives them rather than limits them.

I am just a guy living in Airdrie Alberta Canada. For most of you that means nothing. Go look Airdrie up. You will see that it is a very small place in a very large country. Try this: type Airdrie in Google Earth. Down the program will go until your there in Airdrie. Then slowly pull backwards until all you see is the Earth and the space around it. An Alien flying by would not see or even notice Airdrie little lone me in it. Yet, I exist. I am here. I am willing to write to you. To be noticed? No, to make a difference in someone's important life: yours.

As I finish up this book with some parting thoughts I would like to end with a small study into someone else's parting words. Let's talk about a writer in the Bible named Paul. As men goes he is a perfect case study. This man was smart and the head of his class. He rose up through the ranks to be important in the Jewish community. He led the charge to rid them of the Jesus threat. He was feared more than anything. One day on the Damascus road he was confronted by God. So let's study his manhood for a minute.

What happens to a man who questions himself? Maybe he even questions his manhood. I can honestly think that all the men in the Bible were like that. Moses feared his abilities. David struggled within himself in his Psalm writings. Peter struggled with what is right and wrong.

Even Judas who betrayed Jesus struggled with the truth. A famous man in the Bible named Paul struggled with his place in God's world.

No matter what you believe you might be struggling within yourself. It's not always about religion. We can struggle with many things. This Paul is just a great example of a man in a man's world who struggled between heaven and hell. He makes a point of saying in Romans 7 **"why do I do what I don't want to do."** This man is in the Bible and wrote parts of the Bible. How could he be struggling? Famous people and especially famous God people don't have problems or struggle do they? That is utterly wrong: we all do, and yes that includes all men.

I said we need to read about success so that we know how successful men think and succeed. Yes that is true, but they all struggled to reach the top: even a writer in the Bible named Paul. He thought he was a man. I bet Paul believed he is a man, yet he lived on the edge. He lived a reckless life. Read and think for a minute on these words from a man not seen as a religious man.

2 Corinthians 11:24-29

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food,[b] in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

Paul was also bitten by a snake and survived. He was humiliated by his peers and thrown right into the company of the very men he had accused, and yes he survived. I think insanity is one step away from humanity. Meaning the difference between nuts and sane is minimal. What's wrong with me Patrick? Nothing, you think and believe just like everyone else, even the great Paul. In Acts 9 Paul is a killer of Jesus followers but thinks he is doing it in the name of God. Jesus blinds him on the road to Damascus. Jesus then shouts out at Paul "why do you persecute me." Paul thinks it's God but God reminds him that Jesus is God. It is revelation time for Paul. Within this book can be revelation time for you too.

If we jump ahead to Acts 26 Paul remembers that fateful day on the Damascus road. Paul tells us more by something Jesus said to him: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." In farmers language an ox has on a yoke. The farmer uses a goad (a sharp stick to motivate the ox to move). An ox kicks against the goad because it bothers him. Jesus is asking why Paul is resisting the motivation. The question should be the same for us: why are you resisting the goad of Jesus just like Paul.

This brings me to 2 Timothy, chapter 4. Paul is in a roman prison preparing for his own execution. Ironically the same execution he wanted years ago for Christians on the Damascus road. I said before that our journey does take twists and turns. For Paul it's that way too. In 2nd Timothy we find Paul's humanity in play. In verse 7 Paul says "**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**" What will you say about the journey you are on? In the end can you say those words? Is there more to do or are you done?

Paul is in a cold damp prison. He is alone and lonely. Amazingly enough he remembers his friends. He desires their comfort, encouragement, and warmth. Paul calls for them to come in his letter. Men need to humble themselves to call on those we trust. Spend time with those who

edify us and care for our well-being. It is manly and masculine to want friendship; to desire friendship from other men. Is your race being run alone?

Paul asks for his cloak. He is cold and barren. God told Paul he will show him how much he will suffer for Christ Jesus. Paul did suffer for the cause he tried to kill. Now Paul admits he is cold just as he was cold towards others. Be warm towards others. They in turn will bring warmth to you. They will desire to see you happy, warm, and successful. What is humble? Humble is realizing that your struggles are no better or worse than any others. The reason people are who they are: is because of their struggles. Are you humble enough to admit you need your cloak?

Paul asks for his books. The writings of God bring understanding to life. The books of others also bring understanding. It might not be quite the same but I think you get what I mean. Paul is a man and he wrote letters inspired by God. They are still Paul's words just as much as they are Gods words. If we read this genuinely we can see the struggling Paul within these pages. Paul's books are a comfort to him. They can in turn be a comfort to you too.

Books are really stories and thoughts. They are the insides of the men and women that write them. Every thought in a book comes from some sort of experience. We are the sum of those experiences. I have grown by the books I have read. I have been affected by the writers and their lives. We need words of comfort just as much as we need the comforting words of a mother. Men need to be inspired. Men need to inspire. Books and stories are the way we do that. What is your story? Does it inspire you and those around you?

Paul then goes off rebuking several people who tried to ruin him. That does not seem very Christian. That does not seem very humble. All bad people are just lost children but within that is evil. Some people made the choice to accept evil. There is a thought that in the upper

room during the last supper there were 14 men in the room. Patrick there were twelve disciples and Jesus: 13 duh. It says in that very room the devil entered Judas. There were 14.

Paul knew evil because he was evil. He thought he was for God but he realized he was doing the devils work. Judas realized that too late and killed himself. Paul realized that too and called himself the chief of sinners. I kind of believe Paul was present at the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. His hands were forever left bloody in shame and guilt. Paul knows evil because he was evil.

There are those in our lives that try and bring us down. Maybe they are trying to bring us down to their level. Maybe they just want to feel significant. They find that significance when they are standing on the necks of others. Paul knew that type of evil. To be the best man you need to rid yourself of evil people. Yes Jesus said we will live among the weeds. That means the evil people, but we don't have to live with them. We just understand they are there in the background.

My favorite verse is my best friend. 1 Corinthians 15:33 written by whom else but Paul: **“do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good character.”** I have met Christians that have tried within all there might to ruin me. They think they are doing God's work just as Paul did before the Damascus road. I have also met those outside of religion that have tried to step on my neck to break it. Those people are no longer in my life. Am I sad about losing them? Sure but my heart is more important than their hate.

Paul is reminding Timothy and us that we need to release ourselves from hateful people. I don't care if it's a spouse, child, friend, co-worker, or family member: we need to be free of hate. I don't believe we should leave a spouse just for a change, but if there is humiliation and abuse: go and never look back. In my first marriage there was tremendous abuse. I am a man so how

can I be abused by a wife? Men are people too just so you know. She tossed me out but I needed the shove from an evil relationship. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:33 is so dear to me.

Paul then ends by saying "Do it before winter comes." Paul is no dummy. He needs saving before the winter comes. Jesus was asked in Matthew 24 "when will the end time come." He says in verses 17-24 **"Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath."**

Isn't this just the same as what Paul asks for in 2 Timothy. Jesus mentions the cloak, possessions, and winter. Paul is telling us in his words that we need to do what needs to be done before we get cold. Don't let your heart become like those who accept evil. To be a man in your life: do what needs to be done. Do it before you grow cold.

This whole book is a snapshot of my heart. I was cold and losing me in the worst way on a cliff in British Columbia Canada. I was a man but did not know it. In reality I did not know me. My journey did begin like Paul on the Damascus road. The difference was God used my failed marriage to take away my blindness to see life differently. These chapters fit together. One is not better than the other. They are a puzzle as a whole.

Each stop on this journey has completed me in Gods eyes one piece at a time. I have to tell you that my puzzle is far from done. I am still struggling through as Paul did. Paul was never finished on this side of heaven. I am not finished but I know much more about who I am. I also know about who God is too. If nothing else I know this one thing: I am a masculine man.