

“Mike is like your trusted advisor, having that conversation with you that you’ve been dreading but that you know you need to have. At the end, your future will be a lot brighter, because you’ll be heading into the light.”

—Chris Bolinger,
Amazon best-selling author of *Daily Strength for Men*

“Most men are isolated, self-sufficient, independent, macho, and living in the darkness. Mike Hatch gives a biblical foundation and argument for living radically and powerfully in the light. Mike’s life proves it works!”

—Dr. Hal Hadden,
Founder of Christian Leadership Concepts

“Mike Hatch takes men on an empowering journey by sharing his journey, insights from Scripture, winsome stories, and a simple rubric for understanding how to root one’s identity in Jesus Christ.”

—Dr. Kurt Bjorklund,
Author of *Prayers for Today*; Senior Pastor,
Orchard Hill Church, Wexford, Pennsylvania

“This book is for every man...young or old! Mike deliberately takes you on a journey using his life and the lives of men in the Bible to uncover genuine manhood: To be known by God, grown by God, owned by God, and empowered by God. He exposes the starvation we endure without the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. His transparency inspires you and his passion compels you to go ALL-IN with the God who created you.”

—J.S. Shelton,
Author of *UNMUZZLED:
Escaping Sexual Sin, Satan’s Grip on Men*

“As a ministry brother, I’ve had a behind-the-scenes look at Mike’s life and share in his passion to empower men with the Gospel. With vulnerability and 20+ years of pastoral experience, he wrote this book to help guys like you and me stop hiding in the darkness of past mistakes by stepping into the light of God’s grace. I’ll be sharing this one with my guys!”

—Kent Chevalier,
Athletes in Action: Pittsburgh Steelers Chaplain,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

“I am hard-pressed to name any men’s book with more searing honesty, courage, and truth—the truth that will set you free—than my friend Mike Hatch’s *Manhood: Empowered by the Light of the Gospel*. Mike offers a realistic and powerful path to freedom on the masculine journey. In my 10 years in men’s ministry, I have found that men are uncomfortable admitting the obvious, that they can’t meet all their own needs, that they are not self-sufficient. Like the angel finding Gideon cowering in the winepress, Mike names the inadequate mess of masculinity a mighty warrior and calls forth the redeemed man of God within us. He invites us to leave the shadowy darkness and walk forth into Christ’s glorious light.”

—Bob Jamison

“Mike understands the deep insecurity many men experience but desperately work to conceal. Through his own story and years serving men of all ages, Mike will help you recognize insecurity as a symptom of your disempowerment. You are not who you could be, and deep down you know it. Through scripture, encouragement, and transparency, Mike will lead you to a better empowered form of manhood. And, right now, the world needs men empowered by God, empowered to serve, sacrifice, and submit to Him.”

—Chase Replogle,
Pastor and Author

“As I read *Manhood: Empowered by the Light of the Gospel*, I was struck by the authenticity of the message and the messenger. This is a resource that highlights the strength of character every man desires, a depth of manhood grounded in honesty, self-awareness, and God-ordained servanthood. I recommend Mike Hatch, his ministry to men, and this work without hesitation.”

—Dr. Craig Fry,
President of CLC

“Mike asks the questions: Are tired of hiding? Are you worn out from carrying the burden of shame and guilt? Is the dissonance between who you really are and who people think you are tearing you apart? I believe that we all deal with those issues at some point in life. Mike does a great job sharing his journey to empowerment and wholeness in a raw and compelling manner. His words will encourage you to refuse to remain in the darkness and challenge you to step into the light.”

—Chris Buda,
Attorney, Pastor and Executive Director
of the Pittsburgh Experiment

MANHOOD: EMPOWERED

by the Light of the Gospel

BY

MIKE HATCH

Deep River
BOOKS

Manhood: Empowered by the Light of the Gospel
Copyright © 2023 by Mike Hatch

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV.® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked HCSB are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.® Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used with permission by Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CSB are from The Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible®, and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers, all rights reserved.

Cover design by Jonathan Lewis with layout by Jason Enterline

ISBN—13: 9781632695987

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023900698

Printed in the USA

2023—First Edition

31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1—Disempowered.	17
Chapter 2—Empowered Manhood	31
Chapter 3—Stage 1: Known by God	47
Chapter 4—Stage 2: Grown by God	63
Chapter 5—Stage 3: Owned by God	81
Chapter 6—Empowered by the Light.	97
Epilogue.	113
About the Author	117
Endnotes	119

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my beautiful bride, Lisa. Thank you for being my faithful advocate and my brick wall of truth. This book simply doesn't exist without God's grace manifest through you.

To my son, Matteo. May this book serve as a reminder that your heavenly Father will never leave you nor forsake you.

INTRODUCTION

When I was in college, I worked at the Tie Rack in the Pittsburgh International Airport Airmall selling neck ties. One evening I had just finished my lunch and was in the bathroom rinsing the used Tupperware container when a guy in the stall behind me came to my attention. I thought it was peculiar that, when he came out of the stall, he raced out of the restroom without washing his hands.

Then, at about that moment, I heard something strange from the other side of the restroom. As I peered around the wall of sinks to investigate, I saw three women cackling, whispering to each other, and looking over at me!

Now, my first thought was, “Wow, how embarrassing, those women are in the men’s restroom.” Then, as the truth of the situation sunk in, I realized, “No, I’m in the women’s restroom!”

No wonder that “guy” in the stall behind me left so quickly. “He” was a woman.

I felt my face get flush with warmth. Then a feeling of paralysis gripped my whole body as I stood staring at myself in the mirror. I had to do something quick. But what? How was I going to save face? How could I avoid being found out by a broader audience? How was I going to get out of this alive—and with my dignity intact?

I made the only acceptable decision I could think of: I decided to walk out of that restroom like I owned the place—like I had as

much right to be there as anyone else. As I walked out of the women's restroom that day, head held high, several women walked right by me on their way in and never looked twice at me. Whew! I lived to see another day!

My reason for telling you this story is that most of my young life was spent feeling like that day in the women's restroom—particularly the part where I was paralyzed from fear, feeling caught in a place I shouldn't be, and trying to find a way out without being noticed. I was living in the dark, engaging in secret sins I had worked hard at keeping secret. I felt like I could never be my authentic self, because no one would want to be around that guy.

A deep sense of insecurity characterized my life, and I lived out of fear that one day someone would find out the awful truth about my sin, and then the masquerade would be over. I thought my only recourse was to fake it and pretend like I owned the place. Feigning confidence became my go-to coping mechanism to hide my insecurity.

What I didn't realize was that this impostor syndrome I was struggling with was a symptom of a deeper, more fundamental problem of living in the dark. Jesus said in John 3:19–20, “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”

To live in the dark was disempowering because I was denying the truth about who I was, and by extension I was denying the truth about who God is. In my attempt to hide my secrets I also hid my true self. As a result, I lost the ability to thrive—to live courageously and fulfill God's purpose for me as a man. I have found this to be true not just for myself but for other men as well.

I have mentored or disciplined men for twenty years. I started working with high school boys and young adult men through the ministry of Young Life. Then, as I built relationships with business leaders in the community and worked with the local Young Life Committee, I discovered the same trends among men, regardless of age. It was surprising at first how these men, with families who were senior to me, who seemed so much more successful and mature than me, would confess that they still struggled with fear and insecurity in the same ways I did—insecurity about their marriage, disappointment with their career, or simply feeling incompetent as a man because of father wounds. Regardless of how successful or put-together they looked on the outside, the undercurrent of disempowerment eventually made itself known in our conversations.

After Young Life, I was asked to become the men's pastor at a large church in Pittsburgh where it became my full-time job to think about men's discipleship. Once again, the same consistent and persistent theme of disempowerment played out in nearly every man I encountered.

Currently, as the National Relationship Generator for CLC, a men's discipleship ministry, I consult with pastors and church ministry leaders about men's discipleship. It shouldn't have surprised me, but not even male pastors are immune to this epidemic of disempowerment. Often the first step to effective men's discipleship in a church is for the *pastor* or *ministry leader* to step out of the dark and into the light themselves. Most pastors I know understand the struggle of keeping up appearances in order to maintain the trust of their congregation. God forbid they confess to struggling with sin. I was caught off guard by how pastors would confide in me as a fellow pastor because I was an outside, objective party and wasn't tied to

their community. They felt the freedom with me to come up for air for the first time in a long time and admit they were struggling with disempowerment.

So, what does it mean to be disempowered? The Latin root *dis* means a “lack of, not,” as in dishonest, or “apart, away” as in discard. The root of *empowered* is “power,” which means to have the faculty or ability to do something or act in a particular way.

Dis-empowerment means to lack power or agency, or to be deprived of power, authority, or influence. Someone who is disempowered is weak, ineffectual, or unimportant.

One of the best biblical examples of a disempowered man is Samson in Judges 16. Samson’s live-in girlfriend, Delilah, tricked him into telling her what the secret to his superhuman strength was—his long hair. He told her that he would lose his strength if his hair was cut short. Samson didn’t know that Delilah was a spy for the Philistines, Israel’s archenemy. While Delilah kept Samson sleeping, the Philistines shaved his head and he lost his strength. The Philistine army was then able to subdue him. They gouged out his eyes and enslaved him.

Samson was now blind, and no longer had his super-strength because “the LORD had left him” (Judges 16:20). He was helpless, powerless to do anything about his situation and powerless to serve God the way he had originally been called to do. Samson had been disempowered.

In his fantastic book *The 5 Masculine Instincts*, Pastor Chase Replogle vividly describes Samson’s predicament:

The miraculous gift of God’s calling and purpose disintegrated into this: A blind prisoner, shackled and enslaved. The path of self-pursuit always leads to this place. Our faith becomes manipulative. Our senses are

eventually dulled. Our vocation is sold into slavery . . . where God is abandoned and self becomes center, the whole world begins to contract. It has all been a trap. We are betrayed. We betray ourselves.¹

Like Samson, most of us, as men, are disempowered because we refuse to come into the light and become prisoners to the dark. We fake it and pretend like we own the place. The truth is: we're hiding. The darkness has become our refuge and we've gotten too complacent with its disempowering lies.

This disempowerment often looks like a deep, sometimes subconscious insecurity that manifests in a fight-or-flight response to anything that threatens to reveal the shame we work so hard to conceal. We feel inadequate and incompetent at home and in our marriages. We live duplicitous lives, lacking a centered identity that would otherwise provide the fortitude we need to lead our families well or maintain personal integrity.

The sins of our forefathers haunt us and steal our confidence. We fail to see the meaning and purpose in our careers. We're drowning in a sea of shallow acquaintances, and isolated from any deep, meaningful connections. However, you would have been hard-pressed to get me to admit any of this because the risk was too great that I would lose everything.

Does any of my story resonate with you? Maybe, like me, you are tired of hiding? Are you worn out from carrying the burden of shame and guilt? Is the dissonance between who you really are and who people think you are tearing you apart?

Keep reading. I believe God is about to do a mighty work in your life.

The feedback I received from a friend who read this introduction before it was published was that it made him feel bad about

himself. My guess is that you might be feeling similar, so allow me to take a moment to encourage you before moving on.

I love sports, and I'm a very competitive person, so it can be hard for me to lose. Often when I'm playing Ping-Pong or cornhole and I keep falling behind in the score, I will joke around by saying, "Well, this will only make my comeback win look even better!" Similarly, however bad your current situation is, it will only serve to highlight God's goodness and faithfulness as He works to change you for the better.

Confronting the ugly truth of our sin is only the first step, and God wants to move us quickly forward from there. In fact, Hebrews 4:14–16 says that Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way we've been tempted. As a result, God wants us to approach His throne of grace "with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (v. 16). God doesn't want us to dwell in the past or fall into despair about our sin. He wants us to walk confidently in his grace and mercy.

First John 2:1 adds, "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus empathizes with us in our weaknesses, and he is advocating on our behalf. In a sense, he's like our defense lawyer. In fact, the Bible teaches that Jesus is the judge, jury, defense lawyer, and the one who was punished in our place. This has been a comforting truth for me to dwell on because it leaves no one of consequence to condemn or point the finger at me. God, the only one who ultimately matters, has the last word—and this is where we'll find the empowerment we're looking for.

As one who has walked through this process myself, I can tell you there is so much hope! It's not a coincidence that you picked up this book. God has led you to this very moment. If you feel bad about your current situation, be encouraged that this is evidence

of the Holy Spirit at work in your life right now—drawing you out of the dark and back into the light, liberating you from slavery, and empowering you to live a godly life.

How to Use This Book

The purpose of this book is to be as practical and actionable as possible. Therefore, you will find prompts throughout the book that will refer you to resources to help you along the way, wherever you are in your journey to empowered manhood.

You can use this book as an individual, or in a group setting. There are questions and scriptural cross-references at the end of every chapter to help you think through and apply the content to your specific situation. Go to empoweredmanhood.com to see additional free videos where I help you process what God is doing in your life through this book. You'll also find additional follow-on digital courses, as well as recommendations to men's resources and experiences I've seen work in my own life.

Lastly, make sure you join the Empowered Manhood Facebook group, where you can connect with me and other men who are on the same journey. My goal for this group is to help you connect with other men, not just online but also in your local area. You'll find, as you continue to read, that connection with other men is key to empowerment.

I suggest reading a chapter, then using the chapter summary to review what you read. Lastly, use the questions at the end of the chapter as a way to internalize and apply what you've learned. If you're going through this material with a group, these questions will be great prompts for discussion. Then, go to empoweredmanhood.thinkific.com to watch the video associated with that chapter. In these videos, I provide insights and recommend trusted resources to facilitate further study or next steps.

Men, wherever you find yourself as you pick up this book, remember that only God is good and faithful. We are not. In fact, the more desperate your situation, the more hope I have for you because you've been broken, and stripped of any prideful illusions about what you think you have to offer God. Rather, I pray you approach this book like the tax collector in Jesus's parable in Luke 18:9–14. Unlike the arrogant priest who presumed upon God's grace, the shameful tax collector stood at a distance from the temple altar: "He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner'" (v. 13). Jesus said that it was the tax collector, not the priest, who went home justified before God.

I pray that during your journey you will "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18–19). Amen.

CHAPTER 1

DISEMPOWERED

This, then, is the judgment:
The light has come into the world,
and people loved darkness rather than the light
because their deeds were evil.

—John 3:19 (HCSB)

My Shameful Truth Exposed

I still remember that night sitting on the couch looking out the window of our apartment and wondering if my fiancée would ever come back. I was absolutely overwhelmed by shame. I had really hurt her and there was nothing I could do to help ease the pain I had caused her. She was gone and all I could do was sit there and wait.

Maybe she'd come back? Maybe I could talk to her? Maybe I would lie? Maybe I could hide the truth? I went through all the rationalizations, but there was nowhere to turn or hide from the truth of what I had done. The curtain was pulled back on everything I had hidden for most of my life on this one, tragic evening. The worst part was the awful price my sin would exact on my unsuspecting

fiancée. The sound of her painful cries will forever be etched in my memory.

Eventually, after a very long hour, she returned, but that was simply when the misery and pain seemed to escalate for us both. She was so hurt, and yet torn, because at one time I was her strength—her safe place. Now she desperately wanted to find refuge in me again, but I had just betrayed her trust profoundly. It felt like the death of someone she thought she knew. I wanted to wrap my arms around her, comfort her, and provide solace but any movement toward her was rejected—and rightly so. You see, just a few hours earlier she had walked in on me while I was looking at pornography on the computer.

I had desperately struggled with an addiction to pornography since high school and my fiancée had no idea the extent of my secret. I had worked very hard to hide this shameful part of my life. I knew it was wrong, but I was powerless over its control of me. If someone I respected had found out that I did these disgusting and repulsive things in secret, it would have been more than I could bear. Therefore I hid it in the dark, and did everything I could to prevent this secret from coming into the light. No one saw it, but there was always a constant battle between light and dark raging inside of me.

The Battle between Light and Dark

As a child, I vividly remember being scared out of my mind to descend into the dark abyss that was my grandparents' cellar. If the lights were on, I *might* dare to venture down those stairs. However, the lighting wasn't very good, and scary, dark corners abounded where anything could hide and jump out and attack me. Being asked to fetch a can of soup or take a laundry basket down conjured as much fear in me as being confronted by the devil himself.

After making my way down the stairs I would move as quickly as possible past the side of the basement with the crawl space, where I imagined angry, dead people were buried and wanted to pull me in and eat me. Clothes hanging on clotheslines all around cast ghostly shadows on the cement block walls, looking like they were laughing and mocking me. There were old tables and other furniture that needed to be navigated, which gave nasty creatures all sorts of places to hide under before snatching me by the ankle and pulling me down to the underworld. Any unexpected sound at all would paralyze me with fear. Finally, the tingle up my spine seemed to send electrical charges through my whole body, inspiring me to literally sprint back up the stairs to safety. As a result of being in a rush I would often forget something. That meant descending once more, to confront my worst fears all over again!

From a very early age, most of us understand the ominous truth about the darkness. We're scared of the dark before ever being taught that there is anything in the dark to be scared of. It is the unknown, the secrecy, that concerns us. That mystery creates in us a fear of what we can't see or understand. We suspect that what we don't know will hurt us. Most kids feel much more secure with the lights on. Nightlights and leaving the bedroom door cracked provide some relief because it allows light into the darkness and helps reveal what is hidden.

Sadly, later in life, the darkness became my place of hiding, a refuge of isolation where I would indulge my fantasies without fear of anyone finding out. Ironically, contrary to my early childhood experience, I felt safer and more comfortable in the dark than I did in the light. Whether it was making out with a girl on the couch with the lights off or sneaking out at night to vandalize a neighbor's house, I learned to find protection under the cover of darkness.

The older I got, the more sophisticated and insidious the darkness became. I learned how to navigate in the shadows by lying and manipulating others. I would misrepresent other people in order to make myself look better, and I became an expert at gaining people's approval to get what I wanted. Eventually, I became one of the very monsters I once feared as a child, lurking in the dark. The darkness was darkest inside of me.

Somehow, as men, our attitudes about the dark change over time. The light which was once so reassuring becomes threatening, and the dark which was so ominous becomes a place of escape. It's been said that darkness is simply the absence of light. Darkness then, in and of itself, is really nothing but a void. It is nothing, really . . . until we choose to use it to hide from the light. Once we do that, the battle between light and dark begins.

This struggle between light and dark has been going on throughout all human history. In fact, mankind has been telling stories infused with the themes of light and dark, good and evil, since the beginning of time. Award-winning journalist and writer Scott Neuffer says, "Authors have played with the distinctions of light and dark for as long as others have reinforced their separateness."²

Themes of light and dark are also used in nearly every religion. An article published by The Center for Critical Research on Religion states, "As a perceptual experience, a metaphor, and an instrument of devotional practice and mystical technique, light in its various modalities—clear, colored, radiant, glowing, shining, and even blinding—has played a central role in histories of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Manichaeism, and Neoplatonic mysticism, as well as in Buddhist and Hindu esoteric traditions, to name only the most well-studied."³

Ancient literature and religions from every culture around the globe have used the metaphors of light and dark to illustrate this

ancient dichotomy. Look at any compelling narrative of any significance and you will find this theme to be ubiquitous, whether it is implied or explicit. Nowadays, the most compelling themes of light and dark appear in film. A paper published in 2013 by the University of Amsterdam highlights three poignant examples: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *Apocalypse Now*, and a famous 1926 German film, *Faust*.⁴

The Fellowship of the Ring, part of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, uses bright light to depict the good elves in the city of Rivendell and contrasts that with the “dark lord” Sauron, who lives in the murky-looking Mordor. In *Faust*, director F. W. Murnau used bright light to depict an angel, in contrast to the dark silhouette of Satan. Francis Coppola brilliantly utilizes light and dark in his film *Apocalypse Now* when the character Captain Willard (played by Martin Sheen), is locked up in a dark, underground prison. Another “enlightened” character, Colonel Kurtz (played by Marlon Brando), sits in broad daylight as he reads from a report to convince Willard that he (Willard), has always backed the wrong side of the war.

Finally, I don’t think any man can think of a more compelling depiction of light and dark than in the *Star Wars* characters Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker—especially when Darth Vader pleads with his son Luke, “If you only knew the pow-wer of the dark side.”

From a biblical perspective, it is quite simple: light represents good and darkness represents evil. Light is truth, purity, and righteousness; while darkness represents lies, evil, and nefarious activity. This metaphor originated at creation, as Genesis 1:3–4 tells us: “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. *God saw that the light was good*, and God separated the light from the darkness.”

Interestingly, darkness is not explicitly created by God, but simply exists as a byproduct of the existence of light. He does

not use any adjectives to describe the darkness; he simply separates the light from the dark. Perhaps that is why God describes light as good and omits any description of the darkness. And yet, as inconsequential as the dark seems to be, it has an incredibly powerful influence over us.

Resigning to the Darkness

While I was still in college, I remember buying the book *Every Man's Battle*, with high hopes of attaining victory over my addiction to pornography. It seemed to offer a fairly simple, straightforward plan—and it even said that if I stuck to the plan, I would see freedom from lust after a few months. However, I was still too dependent on my own willpower and lacked a community of men willing to take the journey with me. Therefore, my attempt at putting the book's strategies into practice failed. After many attempts and failures, I gave in to despair and stopped believing freedom was possible.

Eventually I began to believe that managing my sin and image would be easier. I was already good at that. My thought process was that if I could just keep the number of times I fell to a minimum while managing my image, I could hold out until I was married. Marriage was the promised land. Of course, I now know how foolish this thinking was. I fooled myself into believing the lies I was being sold in the dark. As the Casting Crowns song "Slow Fade" says, "It's a slow fade when you give yourself away." Little by little, piece by piece, the truth was compromised, and I slowly resigned myself to the dark.

To my fiancée, pornography was an issue pedophiles and rapists struggled with. Her Christian fiancé, who was a church staff member and leading a youth ministry, could not possibly be associated with such dark and evil types. So, that day she walked in on me while I was on the computer suddenly caused her to question

everything she thought she knew about me, because so much had been hidden from her.

I too suddenly started to question everything I thought I knew about myself because the truth was hidden from even me by the lies of the dark. What I discovered is this: being hidden in the dark, whether it was by myself or with someone else, gave me permission to do things I would never consider doing in the light. This caused me to live my life out of the fear of being found out, which handicapped my faith and stole my confidence.

The darkness I found refuge in was now suddenly stripped away by the light of truth for both me and my fiancée. I could no longer lie to myself or anyone else because the ugly, shameful truth had been revealed. What I didn't realize at the time was that God, in his mercy, had just thrown me a lifeline. It didn't feel like a rescue, however. Rather, it felt more like a violent intrusion. The truth was that God had begun to do something miraculous in my life through the power of his revealing light.

I would eventually learn through this painful experience that only when a man bravely steps into the light of God's truth does he find everything he needs. There is an irony in this: As men, we are taught to be strong, self-reliant, and have no problems or "issues." We're convinced not to expose ourselves to the light. So we cower in the dark, afraid to be found out or have our worst fears realized. We fear others will discover that we don't have what it takes, that we're incompetent—or worse, that we're unworthy of love because of our sin. As a result, we resign ourselves to the dark because there doesn't seem to be another way. We manage our dual worlds as best we can, but it is nearly impossible to completely remove the feeling that things just aren't right.

Inevitably the moment comes when we are confronted with the unmanageability of our sin, just as I was when my fiancée walked in

on me. However painful and traumatic, these can be the most honest moments in our lives if we allow them to be. It's only through honestly confronting what we hide in the dark that we find the freeing "pow-wer" of the light.

Disempowered

To be disempowered means to be powerless. In his powerful book *Unmuzzled*, J. S. Shelton compares disempowerment to a muzzled dog: "Just as a muzzle incapacitates a dog. . . . A muzzled man feels restricted and unworthy to pray, seek, and speak to God."⁵ The disempowered man is restricted and prevented from taking meaningful action for God's sake. They have been silenced, and they miss out on God's blessing.

Disempowerment thrives in the darkness, where evil things are hiding. What is it that you're hiding? Maybe pornography isn't a part of the dark where you reside. Maybe for you it's alcohol, drugs, entertainment, or gaming. In my experience, 95 percent of the time the root of pornography is pretty close to the root of all of these other vices, which seduce us with fantasy or promise us an escape. They lure us into the dark and capture our imaginations. They short-circuit our ability to endure discomfort and prevent us from cultivating true character.

You probably don't need reminding that the internet, social media, and online gaming have only exacerbated our battle with the dark. Modern media entices us with promises to relieve the pressure of realities we feel incapable of handling. Men would rather live in the fantasy worlds of gaming and virtual relationships than engage with gritty, real-world experiences. One man once told me, "Real life is just too disappointing." No wonder, right?

After spending enough time in the dark, the risk of coming into the light and being exposed is too great—too unbearable for men.

This is especially true when most men in our culture have been taught to hide our weaknesses and insecurities. Yet stepping into the light is exactly how we find the power and freedom to live out our true purpose. In turn, we discover new levels of character and integrity we never thought possible.

Again, I ask you: What are *you* hiding?

If you can't quite answer this yet, you may be wondering what others are hiding. You may not be able to tell from the outside looking in, because men are masters at keeping up appearances. Personally, this made it very hard for me to find authentic connection with other men. We might be faithful attenders at church, involved in our son's or daughter's activities, maybe even killing it at work, but in our quiet moments we feel the deep ache of disempowerment. Thus, you may not even know what it is you're hiding. This is what happens when you are truly in the dark.

Have you chosen to hide in the dark rather than walk in the light? If so, you, like the rest of us, have been disempowered by the lies of the dark which cause us to live out of fear and insecurity. The truth is that becoming the empowered man God intended can only be achieved through what God has already done, not by what *we* do. Maybe you've discovered this the way I did while trying to apply the strategies of *Every Man's Battle* alone.

Men, it is time to stop cowering in the dark and come out of hiding. Our world needs us to bravely step into the light and courageously embrace the truth. Our women and children need men who are humble and well-acquainted with God's grace. Only through walking in the light of the gospel will we become the men our world needs so desperately.

We need courageous men who are convinced of God's goodness—not because we feel self-sufficient or that we have all the answers, but because we are well-acquainted with the God who *is*

all-sufficient and *does* have all the answers. Empowered men who have come into the light are humble and gentle because they are keenly aware of their own infirmities. A man like this reflects the character of God who is a refuge for the weak and the vulnerable. We can't be a refuge for others without first finding refuge in God ourselves, in the light.

Our world also needs courageous men of strength who will compete for God's redemptive purposes. However, this strength will not come from us but from the God who redeemed us. We cannot expect to be used by God for his redemptive purposes without first being redeemed ourselves. The first step to empowered manhood is out of the dark and into the light.

Chapter Summary:

- The truth was revealed when my fiancée walked in on me while I was on the computer looking at pornography. Everything I had been hiding in the dark was suddenly laid bare and I was confronted by the destructive nature of my sin.
- The battle between light and dark is well documented throughout history in religions, ancient literature, and media. When we choose to hide in the dark, we forfeit the freedom of the light and give our secrets power over us.
- If we try to fight the battle against the dark in our own strength, we will lose. It is only through confronting the sin and bringing it into the light that we'll experience the freedom and confidence we've been longing for.
- If you've been hiding in the dark, then you're disempowered. The only way to empowered manhood is to step into the light, by entrusting yourself to God.

Questions for Discussion and Further Study

1. Have you ever been exposed unexpectedly, or had something you were hiding uncovered in an embarrassing way? Explain.
2. If you haven't experienced that worst-case, nightmare scenario of being found out, what would it look like if you did? Who in your life would be affected?
3. Where do you see the battle between light and dark in our world? Where do you see it in your own life?
4. Have you resigned yourself to the darkness? What does this look like in your life?

5. Read 2 Samuel 11–12, which tells the story of Israel’s king, David, hiding his sin in the dark. After you’ve read that, read Psalm 51, which is David’s response to his sin being exposed.
- As you reflect on these passages, write your own psalm to God, acknowledging your sin and expressing gratitude for God’s forgiveness and mercy. Make sure to include descriptions of God’s character that are most encouraging to you.
 - If you’re meeting in a group, share your psalms with each other.

Visit empoweredmanhood.thinkific.com for more insights and resources about disempowerment.

NOTES
