**Bourbon and Books**

*Year 1 Theme: From Sonship into Fatherhood*

Every man was once a boy and every father is a son. This foundational year of *Bourbon & Books* focuses on topics that are, in a certain sense, the most natural and the most challenging in the life of a male – as he grapples with becoming a man and strains to fully embrace what it means to be a father.

Basic movement of this year’s content is one from sonship into fatherhood.

We’ll begin by keeping the end in mind and turn our eyes to St. Joseph via Pope Francis’ letter *Corde Patris.* St. Joseph is the earthly model of manhood and fatherhood and a saint whose intercession we invoke during the inaugural year of *Bourbon & books*. Next, we will read about the goodness of boyhood from an expert on the problems within Western Culture -- Anthony Esolen, a frequent writer for *Magnificat.* Then, we can talk more specifically about masculinity and the masculine heart in David Gilmore’s *Manhood in the Making* and John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart.* I presume some of us have read this already, though maybe it’s been a while. Henri Nouwen’s classic *The Return of the Prodigal Son* will mark something of a transition for us as we begin to consider fatherhood more specificallyinJason Craig’s *Leaving Boyhood Behind.* This book addresses the need for male initiation into manhood and brotherhood. In the next leg of the journey, we’ll head back into some fiction and tackle Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird* with a specific focus on Jem’s coming-of-age and Atticus’ role in it. Next, Meg Meeker’s expertise will lead us into topics pertaining to the raising of daughters. In one final fictional piece, Rudyard Kipling’s *Captains Courageous* will allow us to consider all of the major themes of the year, before we end with a spiritual giant. Indeed, John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* will most fittingly bring to a close this year focused on the reality of fatherhood.

Now for the reading list and discussion questions (Please note that the questions listed in this document are merely a guide. If your group has specific questions about a text or a particularly fruitful tangent, don’t hesitate to pursue those):

1. *Corde Patris* (Pope Francis) - In his rather brief Apostolic Letter celebrating the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as the Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Francis proclaims that Joseph loved Jesus with a father’s heart (*corde patris*). In this letter, Francis offers a beautiful scriptural reflection on the life of St. Joseph while drawing out the contemporary implications for readers.
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. Based upon the Scriptural accounts and Francis’ reflection, how would you answer this question: Who is St. Joseph? Why?
      2. Which part of the letter was most striking to you? Why?
      3. How might you grow in your devotion to St. Joseph during this *Bourbon and Books* year dedicated to a movement from sonship into fatherhood?
2. *Defending Boyhood* (Anthony Esolen) - “Western civilization has no more eloquent defender than Anthony Esolen, a man who has counted the cost, and paid it, of leading the way in that defense. Following on his compelling prior volume, Defending Marriage: Twelve Arguments for Sanity, Professor Esolen returns, this time in defense of boys and an experience of boyhood that is on the wane, if not extinguished in many quarters of the modern world—and to illuminate the threats our precious sons face from harridans, harpies, and all purveyors and promoters of political correctness and of the misguided and ultimately doomed-though not before it has done much mischief-project of blurring the distinctions between boys and girls. Drawing on his own, in many ways all-American boyhood, Esolen, at times wistfully, at times, playfully, and at times prophetically—in the literal sense of employing the thunder of an Old Testament prophet, details what a good boyhood once was and what it can be again” (description from Amazon). In the Introduction, Esolen clearly states his reason for writing this book: he is not writing to “be nice,” but to make a point that the confusion about the sexes spinning out of the disorder of the sexual revolution has had a particularly negative impact on boys and how boys are educated. Esolen is comfortable with sexual difference and believes it is only truly just to educate boys and girls accordingly – along the line of sexual difference. This observation will appear undoubtedly come across as “shocking” to the contemporary reader.
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. What is your single greatest takeaway from this book and why?
      2. How did your boyhood stack up compared to some of the ideals set forth by Esolen? Where does this leave you?
      3. How does this book challenge your manhood/fatherhood?
      4. Do any resolutions arise for new courses of action in your life? Are you going to *do* anything differently as a result of reading this book? Get specific and concrete.
3. *Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain) - “Whether forming a pirate gang to search for buried treasure or spending a quiet time at home, sharing his medicine with Aunt Polly's cat, the irrepressible Tom Sawyer evokes the world of boyhood in nineteenth century rural America. In this classic story, Mark Twain re-created a long-ago world of freshly whitewashed fences and Sunday school picnics into which sordid characters and violent incidents sometimes intruded. The tale powerfully appeals to both adult and young imaginations. Readers explore this memorable setting with a slyly humorous born storyteller as their guide” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. As Esolen notes in *Defending Boyhood,* Twain admits that the boyish shenanigans he relates in *Tom Sawyer* actually occurred. Allowing the story to carry you down memory lane, share some stories about your boyhood. What are some of those iconic memories for you?
      2. Are experiences like those described in *Tom Sawyer* valuable in the life of a boy? Why? Why not?
      3. What do Tom’s experiences teach him about who he is? What do they teach him about life?
4. *Manhood in the Making* (David Gilmore) - “In the first cross-cultural study of manhood as an achieved status, anthropologist David D. Gilmore finds that a culturally sanctioned stress on manliness—on toughness and aggressiveness, stoicism and sexuality—is almost universal, deeply ingrained in the consciousness of hunters and fishermen, workers and warriors, poets and peasants who have little else in common” (Amazon description). Ultimately, Gilmore concludes that there is no such thing as a “universal” man, but there is a concept of a “ubiquitous man.” The gist of it goes like this: A male who wishes to be a man must protect, procreate, and provide. We highly recommend reading the *Art of Manliness* [review of this book](https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-3-ps-of-manhood-a-review/), along with each of the three articles on the 3 P’s: [Protect,](https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-3-ps-of-manhood-protect/) [Procreate](https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-3-ps-of-manhood-procreate/), [Provide](https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-3-ps-of-manhood-provide/).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. 1. What do you make of this idea that mere maleness (biologically speaking) doesn't make a man? How has this played out in your life?
      2. 2. Of the three P's of manhood, which makes the most sense to you? Which is the biggest challenge?
      3. 3. Where does Jesus/Christianity fit into this whole picture? Does Jesus alter or fill out the picture at all?
5. *Wild at Heart* (John Eldredge) - “John Eldredge invites men to: (1) Recover their masculine heart; (2) See themselves in the image of a passionate God; (3) Delight in the strength and wildness men were created to offer. In this provocative book, Eldredge provides a look inside the true heart of a man and gives men permission to be what God designed them to be—dangerous, passionate, alive, and free” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. 1. Do you agree with Eldredge's assessment that there are three desires written on the heart of every man (battle to fight, adventure to live, beauty to rescue)? Why or why not?
      2. 2. The question that haunts every man...is it a question that haunts you? How do you answer it?
      3. 3. What role does woundedness play in your life?
      4. 4. What needs to be healed in you? What is the path to this healing?
      5. 5. How will you fight the battle?
      6. 6. How will you rescue the beauty?
      7. 7. How will you live the adventure?
6. *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Henri Nouwen) - “A chance encounter with a reproduction of Rembrandt’s The Return of the Prodigal Son catapulted Henri Nouwen on an unforgettable spiritual adventure. Here he shares the deeply personal and resonant meditation that led him to discover the place within where God has chosen to dwell. As Nouwen reflects on Rembrandt’s painting in light of his own life journey, he evokes a powerful drama of the classic parable in a rich, captivating way that is sure to reverberate in the hearts of readers. Nouwen probes the several movements of the parable: the younger son’s return, the father’s restoration of sonship, the elder son’s resentfulness, and the father’s compassion. The themes of homecoming, affirmation, and reconciliation will be newly discovered by all who have known loneliness, dejection, jealousy, or anger. The challenge to love as God loves, and to be loved as God’s beloved, will be seen as the ultimate revelation of the parable known to Christians throughout time, and is here represented with a vigor and power fresh for our times” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. In what ways does the prodigal son resonate with your life? How does this book provoke you to grow in sonship?
      2. In what ways does the story of the elder brother resonate with your life? How does this book provoke you to grow in sonship in light of older brother tendencies?
      3. In what ways does the image of the father resonate with your life? How does this book provoke you to grow in fatherhood?
7. *Leaving Boyhood Behind* (Jason Craig) - “What makes a man? This is a question many men in our society today do not feel equipped to answer, because they were never initiated into manhood themselves. They do not know how to pass on authentic manliness to their sons, so boys get stuck in unending adolescence. Everyone suffers from the resulting crisis of male immaturity, and we see its effects everywhere in our society. Leaving Boyhood Behind shows how we can actually do something to address this crisis” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. How does the process of initiation resonate with your masculine journey? How did this happen for you? Or did it not happen? Where are the gaps? What are the consequences?
      2. How can any gaps in an initiation process be made up at this point?
      3. What brotherhood/community are we inviting our sons into? Does this book challenge our group to grow in any concrete ways?
      4. What can/does/should a Catholic process of initiation look like, concretely, for our children?
8. To Kill a Mocking Bird (Harper Lee) - “A gripping, heart-wrenching, and wholly remarkable tale of coming-of-age in a South poisoned by virulent prejudice, it views a world of great beauty and savage inequities through the eyes of a young girl, as her father—a crusading local lawyer—risks everything to defend a black man unjustly accused of a terrible crime” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. Atticus is often accused of allowing his children to run wild around the neighborhood. Obviously, this occurs in part because of his wife's untimely death. Nevertheless, Atticus must find some value in their freedom. What is it? Can this value be located within our circumstances today? Where? How?
      2. Consider the character of Atticus. What does he reveal about manliness?
      3. Try to describe Jem's process of leaving boyhood behind. What role does Atticus play in it?
      4. What role does the broader community play in Jem's coming of age?
9. *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* (Meg Meeker) - “Drawing on her thirty years' experience practicing pediatric and adolescent medicine, teen health expert Dr. Meg Meeker explains why an active father figure is maybe the single most important factor in a young woman's development. In this invaluable guide, Meeker shows how a father can be both counsel and protector for his daughter as she grows into a spiritually and mentally strong young woman” (description from Amazon).
   1. Discussion Questions:
      1. What is your single biggest takeaway from this book and why?
      2. Based upon what we’ve read so far this year, how is raising a girl different than raising a boy?
      3. Based upon what we’ve read so far this year, how is raising a girl similar to raising a boy?
      4. Based upon Meeker’s expertise, what needs to change in your life to grow as a father for your daughter(s) (or for possible future daughters!)?
10. *Captains Courageous* (Rudyard Kipling) - “Captains Courageous, published in 1897, follows the adventures of fifteen-year-old Harvey Cheyne Jr., the spoiled son of a railroad tycoon. After being washed overboard from a transatlantic steamship, he is saved from drowning by a Portuguese fisherman in the north Atlantic. The novel originally appeared as a serialization in McClure's. It is Kipling's only novel set entirely in America. Through a series of trials and adventures, Harvey, with the help of the captain's son Dan Troop, becomes acclimated to the fishing lifestyle, and even skillful” (description from Amazon).
    1. Discussion Questions:
       1. What does this book reveal about boyhood friendship?
       2. What does this book reveal about a boy coming-of-age?
       3. What does this book reveal about fatherhood?
11. *Redemptoris Custos* (Pope John Paul II) - “In *Redemptoris Custos*, Pope St. John Paul II depicts St. Joseph as an icon of faith, that is, one whose life exemplifies what it means to listen to God’s words and, in an unwavering way, act courageously upon them. *Redemptoris Custos* marks a watershed moment in reflection on the role of St. Joseph in the history of Christianity. In this document, the Pope interweaves biblical exegesis and profound theological insights regarding Joseph’s pivotal role in God’s plan of salvation. In an outstanding way, the Pope highlights St. Joseph as loving father, faithful spouse, laborer, and patron of the universal Church. It is most fitting that the Pope concludes his exhortation with the following prayer: ‘May St. Joseph obtain for the Church and for the world, as well as for each of us, the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’” (Dr. Marilyn Sunderman, RSM).
    1. Discussion Questions:
       1. How does Jesus’ childhood experience serve as something of a model childhood?
       2. How does the life of Joseph recapitulate the best of what we’ve talked about this year?
       3. How does the life of Joseph challenge you to be a better husband? What are you going to do about it?
       4. How does the life of Joseph challenge you to be a better father? What are you going to do about it?

Possible movie nights: *The Road* (2009), *Cinderella Man* (2005), *Boys Town* (1938)