

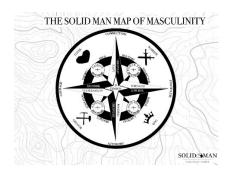
 $strong \cdot present \cdot confident$ 

# **Solid Man Integrity Group Lesson 19**

**Pillar Four** 

Mastering Your Masculinity - Part Three
The Cornerstones and the Commodities of
Masculinity

19



#### 4 The Four Cornerstones and The Four Currencies

#### The Four Cornerstones of Masculinity

The Four Cornerstones are concepts that create the foundation at the heart of the masculine soul. As the "cornerstone" in a building is the primary part of the foundation of that building structure, these "cornerstones" are primary parts of the structure of Masculinity.

Each of the Four Cornerstones are directly related to one side of the two Masculine Paradoxes.

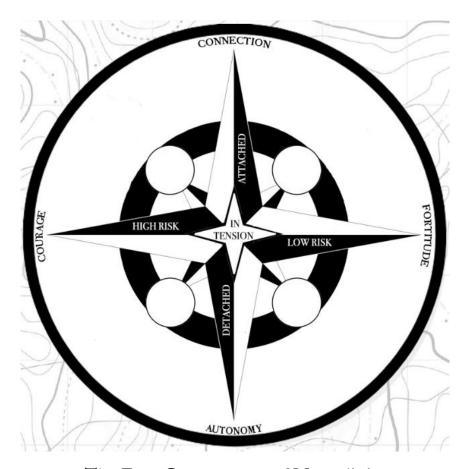
On the Low-Risk side of the Risk Paradox we find the cornerstone of **Fortitude**.

On the High-Risk side of the Risk Paradox we find the cornerstone of **Courage**.

On the Detachment side of the Relationship Paradox exists the cornerstone of **Autonomy**.

On the Attachment side of the Relationship Paradox is the cornerstone of **Connection**.

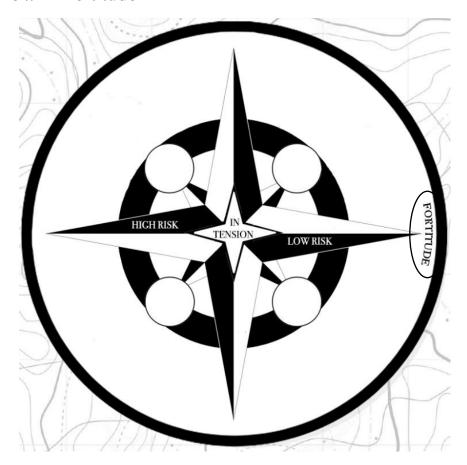
The Four Cornerstones upon which Masculinity is built are; Fortitude, Courage, Autonomy and Connection



The Four Cornerstones of Masculinity

It is essential for any man who desires to develop his masculine heart to engage in these four concepts with intent and purpose. The work must be done to explore the essence of each cornerstone, deepen understanding of these concepts, evaluate the degree to which these exist within you and embrace personal practices which move you toward a full mature masculine presence in the world.

#### Cornerstone #1 – Fortitude



The Cornerstone of Fortitude, on the Low-Risk side of the Risk Paradox

Found on the secure or Low-Risk side of the Risk Paradox, is Fortitude. Fortitude is a word which means what it says, a man is a "Fort" or a "Fortress". There are places around the world that are named for being (either in history or presently) places of protection and military might, places like Fort Collins or Fort Sumpter.

I remember walking on the grounds of Fort San Felipe del Morro in Puerto Rico. Here was a place set in the stone at the entrance of San Juan Bay designed to keep any ship that came near under complete control. In a very strategic position and with more than 400 cannons and other armaments it had been a place of strength and might protecting Puerto Rico for centuries.

A fort is a stronghold, designed to protect, hold fast against attack and be an impenetrable force against other forces that come near. It is closed off and built up "against". It is strong. It is imperturbable. It is unshakeable. This is Fortitude.

Fortitude is closed off, walled up and strong as hell.

Fortitude is an environment of Low-Risk as it holds space that is safe and secure. Fortitude uses wisdom to make choices that are conservative and safe. It is powerful and protective. Fortitude is not open, nor is it vulnerable and only vulnerable if it might bring more strength through collaboration, but even then only so far.

#### Fortitude is Strength.

Strength is core to a man's life. Men have been designed for Strength. Strength is a man's glory. Strength is the ability to be free from external influence, to influence/change the world around you and to protect those you love and care for.

Fortitude is played out in two arenas, the physical and the psychological/spiritual. You will want to be as strong as possible with your body in the physical arena, and you will become powerful with your internal core. This work is geared toward making you into a beast with internal strength, where not many things will shake your core.

#### Fortitude is powerful.

The physical is External Fortitude and the psychological/spiritual is Internal Fortitude. Both are required to be a man of Fortitude.

The masculine is by nature very linked to the physical world. While our muscles and body are significant expressions of Strength, our voice is potentially even more powerful. As a man ages, his Strength transitions from his muscles to his voice; where wisdom and mastery of life gives him what some call gravitas, true influence.

## • A man's Voice is powerful.

A man with substance can rein in a troubled moment with a strong "No." His voice can be commanding and influential. His voice can bring wisdom and restraint. We can teach, influence and bring life with our voice. Voice is a part of our Strength that has been forgotten or disregarded often.

Your Voice will only be strong and influential if your core is strong. A strong core is internal Fortitude; my core identity, worth, values, character and confidence are deep, immovable and unwavering. A man who has this, has a strong influential Voice.

# From the beginning to the end of a man's life, strength is central.

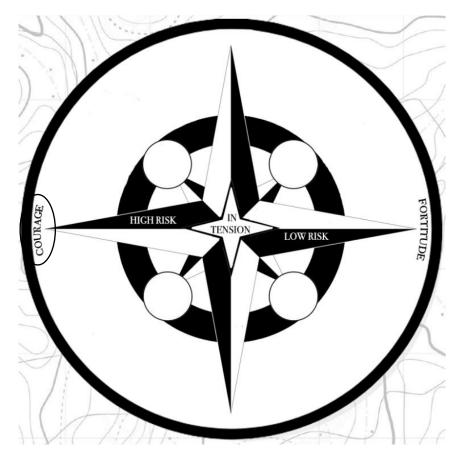
Since Fortitude is a posture of being closed, this is often an aspect of the masculine that is seen as bad or even toxic. That is just wrong, every person on the planet has enjoyed the shelter of a strong masculine presence during their lives, or they have longed for it. The closed off Fortitude of the masculine soul provides some amazing benefits to all who rest in this safe harbor.

As Fortitude is closed to danger or threat, it is open to a select few to be within the confines of the safety of that fort. We will talk more about who is able to rest within that Strength. Not everyone has that privilege.

• Not everyone has the privilege of resting in your Fortitude.

#### Cornerstone #2 – Courage

On the High-Risk side of the Risk Paradox is Courage, the next Cornerstone.



The Cornerstone of Courage, on the High-Risk side of the Risk Paradox

Courage only exists in the face of Vulnerability or danger, so Courage is found in the world of High Risk. Courage is the ability and willingness to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation with intentional action or voice.

Physical Courage is holding fast in the face of physical pain, hardship, death, or threat of death, while moral Courage is the capability to act rightly in the face of opposition, shame, scandal, or discouragement.

Courage is universally seen as a deeply respected masculine trait, often because it is expressed with selflessness and purpose. While a man often may be willing to face physical danger (either to protect or for adventure), many men do everything they can to avoid emotional or personal Vulnerability, which also takes Courage. Like I said earlier, men enjoy and respect watching men do highly risky behaviors, even if it just for the fun of it. Most of us have done things we look back on as something thrilling that we actually survived, with a sense of accomplishment.

Men respect courage and whatever form it takes we respect it and often look at it with admiration. We feel a sense of pride and self-respect when we face our deepest fears. Remember that Courage is not the absence of fear but standing strong in the face of fear.

Men will maintain what seems to be what could be called stoic strength, but sometimes it a submission to fear of exposure or being found to not be good enough. It is just withdrawal from a situation where I might be found out. Keeping myself from being exposed or seen for what I really am is not courage, it is allowing fear to rule me. It takes Courage to allow yourself to be vulnerable, to be seen or possibly fail.

## Courage is Vulnerability and Vulnerability is Courage.

This is where many men reject the concept of Vulnerability as a part of Masculinity. There is a reason to reject Vulnerability, but only if there is no balance with Fortitude. A man with Vulnerability and no Fortitude is not being masculine, just as a man with Fortitude and no Vulnerability is not as well. The disdain for Vulnerability exists when it is seen as weakness and many men in our culture have chosen to be submissive and weak, this is weakness, not Vulnerability.

# Vulnerability is not weakness.

Some reject the idea of Vulnerability if a man seeks to be vulnerable to achieve a woman's endearment or validation. I would agree here. If that is the reason for engaging in openness or vulnerable expression of emotion, to get a woman to like you or be attracted to you, that is the weak and pathetic posture of an orbiter. Anything done with the hope of acceptance or approval is weak. That is not the Vulnerability I am speaking of, that is just submitting yourself to her judgement.

For men, Vulnerability is not weak, it is a courageous choice to be open and exposed to potential harm (either from relationship or adventure). Living a mature and healthy life with vitality requires periodic and timely choices of risk, openness and exposure.

We will talk shortly about how and when a wise man spends his valuable vulnerabilities. Just so you know, it is not often and with very few.

#### Vulnerability is not Strength.

Some see Vulnerability as Strength. This is an absurd thought. The definition of Vulnerable is that you're in a position of High Risk. When you're Vulnerable, you're exposed to potential harm or damage, either physically or emotionally. It is inherently placing yourself in a position of exposure. This is not a strong position. However, the ability to choose to live openly, wholeheartedly and exposed to possible hurt is Vulnerable, it does take Courage, and Courage reveals a type of internal Strength.

Some men have no interest in building their lives on the Fortitude side of the equation, as though Strength and Power are a toxic parts of a man. These men seem to be willing to complete the castration process themselves, hopefully only figuratively, but none-the-less they eliminate a significant aspect of the masculine soul. This is a distortion of Masculinity as much as the man who is hyper-masculine with only Fortitude without taking the risks of Vulnerability.

Wisely choosing to put yourself in vulnerable situations is risky, but life-giving. It is interesting that forgoing Fortitude is also a move to get women to approve of you, that just doesn't work. You will eventually be rejected and even ridiculed by those you thought would approve of you. The doormat gets no respect.

## Being vulnerable does not mean being a doormat.

There are many contexts in which a man will experience Vulnerability; pursuing intimacy with your spouse, playing with your kids, grieving at your grandmother's funeral, pride with your child's accomplishment, revealing your dark secrets to your closest friend, giving a toast at a wedding, feeling deeply when you learn you have cancer, starting your new business, or experiencing the incompetent feeling of beginning to learn a musical instrument or martial art. All these things and all the categories I mentioned a few pages ago when I was talking about exposure and Risk.

Since we are alive, we will be vulnerable. You will have health problems. You will age. You will have relationship issues. Life will fall apart at times. If you do all you can to avoid any vulnerable situation or any Vulnerability, but you'll just be a dick. You will remain closed off to the richness and fulness of life.

# • Courage is impossible without Vulnerability.

Courage is living with a life of openness, engagement and availability. It opens you to abundance and vitality. As Fortitude is Closed, Courage is Open. The balance between the two IS the tension of the Risk Paradox.

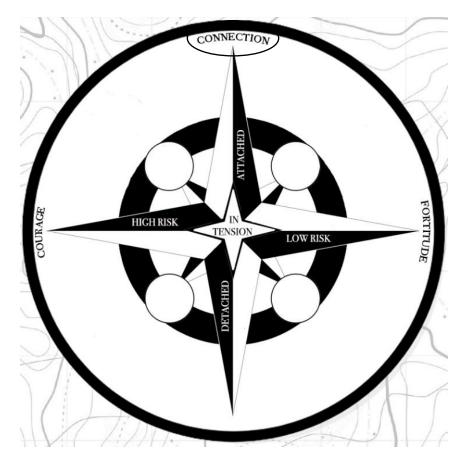
#### • Courage is required to experience the fullness of Masculinity and life.

As stated earlier, life is unfair. We've been born with limitations, some more than others. When we choose ownership, responsibility and agency rather than victimhood, then we can begin to move with Courage in the most vulnerable parts of life and experience our masculine self.

Vulnerability is seen as weakness in our culture. Placing yourself in a position of risk where you are at the mercy of others is insanity to most men. Vulnerability is openness, transparency and exposure. It is leaving yourself open to attack, indefensible. At first glance, the last thing any man in our world would intentionally allow himself to be is Vulnerable. Contrary to the cultural viewpoint, Vulnerability is one of our greatest allies in the quest for integrity, solidness and healthy relationships. Vulnerability is actually a display of what's really under the hood, true strength and manhood.

Vulnerability is the true show of strength. A man who is unable to be vulnerable is actually showing weakness and fear. He believes he will die or be hurt if someone rejects his true self. A strong man can open himself with Courage and confidence, knowing he can withstand anything, even rejection or an attempt at shaming.

#### Cornerstone #3 – Connection



Cornerstone of Connection, on the Attached side of the Relationship Paradox

Connection is interaction with others where you are respected, loved and wanted. Connection exists when other people know your story, accept you and are in this journey with you.

Connection creates what I refer to as entities that don't exist if there was no relationship; a family, a marriage, a community or village, a tribe, a church, a team, a band of brothers or a group of friends. These are entities that have personality and substance.

A couple who are married has two people (entities) who come together as "one" to create a new entity, the couple. Then they may add others, whether that's kids or friends to develop their community (a bigger entity). The defining factors of a relational entity is people and connection.

• Relationship connection is one of our primary needs as humans.

Since it is so important, we will be fearful of rejection or abandonment if people see who we really are. When we don't believe we are ok, acceptable or worthy (when shame defines you) we will do relational backflips and contortions to somehow keep connected without letting ourselves be known.

We will sell out ourselves in order to be accepted or belong in relationships. We may wear masks or develop a false persona in order to fit in. We may trade our integrity for connection. We will do what others want. We live to please. We will give up ourselves to keep the peace or try to get what we need.

We do not reveal our true selves because we believe we will not be accepted if people knew who we really are. We live like a chameleon until Toto pulls back the curtain and we are exposed for who we really are, which at first is terrifying, but is actually a very good thing.

We know this is a sham to begin with; I am not presenting my true self, so even if they do accept me, they are not accepting the true me. That connection is based on a non-reality. Relationship will not truly exist until you present your true self.

#### • Connection is impossible without Autonomy, being my true self.

This is another place where Courage is part of our masculine endeavor; allowing your true authentic self to be seen and known. As you are able to be you, you can then build the relationships you need, so you can thrive.

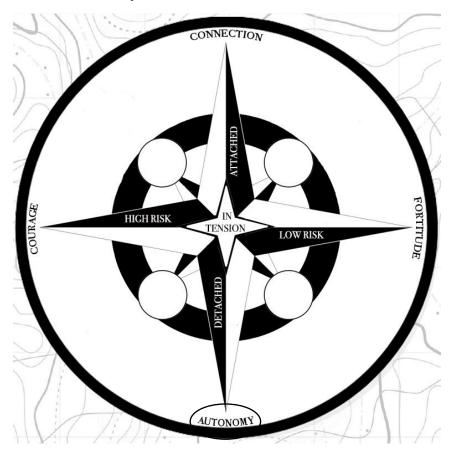
Connection is developing and experiencing meaningful relationships, support, community, belonging, camaraderie, intimacy, being known, accepted, and liked. Whether it is expressed in your sexuality, family, gang, or political party; Connection is absolutely important for the human soul. The tension between Autonomy (being my true self) and Connection (letting my true self be attached) is necessary for the masculine soul.

Remember how science is beginning to notice how everything is in some kind of relationship? Everything is connected. We cannot escape connectedness, we will be connected. Our task is to take responsibility to take those connections and choose how you will develop them; healthy or unhealthy, loving or abrasive, distant or close, it is our choice.

Many men seem to be choosing to keep from relationship or commitment. It makes sense when you know that a prime driver in a man's decision making is the concept of Return On Investment (ROI). The ROI is an important consideration when choosing to marry or make a family. In our culture today with a high rate of divorce and the very negative outcomes, men seem to be thinking twice if it will achieve for them the return they want, since the odds are not very good.

This is where the Commodities come in; with whom, how, and when will I spend my precious and limited Commodities? This is a huge question of ROI. What or who will get me the outcome that I want from my investment? Or is that even possible?

#### Cornerstone #4 – Autonomy



Cornerstone of Autonomy, on the Detached side of the Relationship Paradox

The Cornerstone on the Detached side of the Relational Paradox is Autonomy. This idea of being Detached seems odd to many people since we all know that "No man is an island." While that is true, we do indeed need others in our lives, this is the tension that is created by having a well-balanced life. We need balance.

Autonomy is having integrity with your being. It is having an internal frame of reference. It is having the freedom to be yourself, to pursue that which pleases you and helps you thrive. Autonomy is personal freedom, healthy true identity, authenticity, control over your own life, being an individual, and having personal power and influence.

Autonomy is resistance to tyranny, fighting for what you know is right, doing what you want, having your own desires and opinions, being your own person. Autonomy is being a complete, whole person who does not need external validation or control.

Autonomy is differentiation. The concept of differentiation is central here. Differentiation is a high-falutin' word that just means being able to be who you are, know and say what you want and have a plan for where you are going. You remember Pillar 3? It's the five questions you answered. Differentiation is just being able to be you, being able to answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "What do I want?" within a relationship.

Differentiation is opposite of being absorbed or enmeshed into a relational system which operates where the members of that system need to "lose" themselves into the system to keep the system running. For Trekky fans, think the Borg where resistance to being absorbed is futile. For those who have seen their share of chick-flicks, think "you complete me". It would be any situation where you lose your "self".

### → When you lose your "self" you lose it all!

Enmeshment is the same as co-dependency and it is not healthy. If you lose yourself, your sense of identity, your needs and wants, your dreams and purpose for another person or to keep the group happy, you're screwed. You've lost the battle and the war.

As I have already alluded, many of us were raised in enmeshed family systems that required us to be a certain way to be acceptable or to belong. If we made waves or had a differing opinion, we were shut down or even rejected. We had to fly under the radar, be a good kid, don't make waves, keep mom calm, get good grades, win at sports or just blend in to fit in. For those of you who have broken free from these systems, Autonomy has been hard-earned. Most of us have stories of how difficult it has been to break free or how it still haunts us.

Consider your present primary relationship. You've been reading this material because you want life to be different. You want change. But since your relationship was built on your former way of living, i.e. not differentiated, your changes now may not be welcomed. This is part of welcoming tension into your life. You are shaking things up by creating more Autonomy or differentiation in your life.

The hope is that your partner will come along with you, which usually happens especially when you are building differentiation in them as well. But sometimes things fall apart. That's a bummer since you really care for them, but facing that possibility is inevitable if you are to be the person you want to be. As you grow, this could happen with your spouse, friends or your family of origin.

# Autonomy is being who you are, telling your story, and living with authenticity.

As a Cornerstone, Autonomy requires that you gain some very personal internal strength, that's was a big part of Pillar One. If you need a refresher, go back and read Pillar One *Awakening the Internal*. You have been designed to move and live fully from an internal point of reference. Once you have been able to detach from needing others for your sense of self and worth, you will be able to attach in healthy ways.

To become the man you want to be, you must first be Autonomous.

#### The Four Currencies of Masculinity

A "currency" is medium of exchange. You have one thing and you can trade it for another thing that you deem as valuable (or more) as the thing you have exchanged. We do this every day. We will take a dollar bill (deemed as valuable as that day's rate would have it) and exchange it for whatever we might need at that moment.

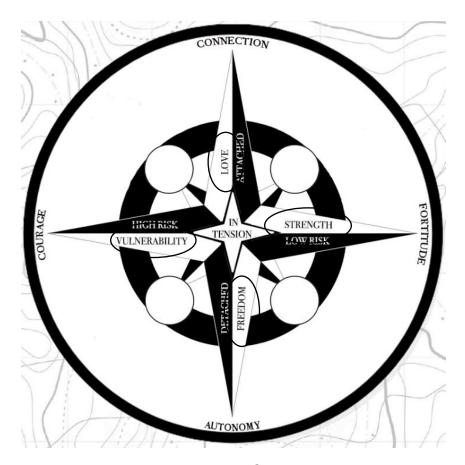
Commodities are similar to currencies. Currencies are a represented item (a dollar has no actual value, except for what it represents). A commodity is the raw material used in exchange for currencies that you can then trade for whatever you see as valuable. I'll use those two terms interchangeably.

If you've ever played a game like Pit or Settlers of Katan, you know what it means to trade commodities to get what you need to win. It's the same in the commodities market where things like corn, ore, wood, or wheat are traded for money, other commodities or something valuable.

Transactions happen in business and relationships all day long. Here it is important to understand and notice what a man has as Commodities (raw materials) that could be traded or exchanged for what he wants or needs to thrive. Understanding the nature of these transactions is necessary so you can achieve your goals and live well.

Initially it is important just to know that as a man you have significant Commodities. The Commodities are those things you are able to give to others or exchange in order to increase your well-being, to experience the fullness of life or to provide for those you love.

The Four Commodities which are in our Masculinity on this map with which we can give, or trade are; Strength, Vulnerability, Freedom and Love.



Four Commodities of Masculinity; Love, Strength, Freedom and Vulnerability

On the Fortitude side of the Risk Paradox is where we find the Commodity of Strength. On the Courage side of the Risk Paradox we find the Commodity of Vulnerability. On the Autonomy side of the Relationship Paradox exists the Commodity of Freedom. On the Connection side of the Relationship Paradox is the Commodity of Love.

# → The Commodities are the currency of the masculine life.

Your personal boundaries will allow you to budget your commodities and use them with wisdom and choice. A man with no boundaries (boundaries reflect your values and moral compass) will spend his currency willy-nilly and be left with nothing in the end.

# • He is a fool who allows others to determine how he spends his resources.

See your Commodities as personal resources. You only have so much bandwidth. You only have so much to spend. Where, when, with whom and why you spend them must be given significant consideration.

Consider that you can only care for only a certain amount of people or causes. Not only is it OK to only care for those closest to you, it is essential. We do not have the bandwidth to care for every problem or for every person. You must be able to accept the fact that you really don't care enough for some things, for some people.

☐ If we really cared about everyone, we would never even register feelings or microaggressions or First World problems because our brains would be blown out from watching Third World ultraviolence. We'd be watching and liking and sharing nonstop videos of prison rapes and basement executions and reading stories about sex slavery and child prostitution. We'd be OUTRAGED at the injustice of it all, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- Jack Donovan

Often you will be drawn into care for some cause or person. This is when you must consider deeply if this is one of the few things you will give your time and energy to. You know the dog commercials which rip your heart out, or the guy at the intersection who looks way down on his luck, or the way that the media will portray some people as victims to try get you to change something about your way of life.

It is ok to say, "I don't care." It's ok to prioritize your values. I do care for those that are very close to me and I will spend my currencies on making sure they are doing well. I will choose a few causes that I will support and some people I will help, but when it comes down to it, for the majority of humanity, I just don't care enough to do something. I CAN'T care for everything. That sounds cold, but it is the only way to roll, since we have limited resources.

Since we only have so much bandwidth, this is how we must use our currencies, with great discernment. I will choose who and what I want to choose to use my valuable currencies on and when I want to use them.

#### Value of the Commodities

One of the greatest stories of commodity is the story of Jacob and Esau. They were twins and Esau had been born first, with Jacob close behind. This meant, as the first-born Esau would receive the whole inheritance from his father Isaac. As was the way it was in those days, he would essentially get everything.

Jacob, who was devious, caught Esau in a moment when he was hungry, very hungry. After Esau had returned from a long hunt, Jacob offered Esau a bowl of red lentil soup. Taking advantage of Esau's hunger, Jacob got Esau to agree to release the inheritance to Jacob, and the soup was traded for it. Esau hunger was satiated, but Jacob (through some other events as well) received the inheritance.

So many of us are like Esau, we will sell off something of exceeding value for something fleeting like food, sex or validation. Most of have done this. When have you sold your soul for something fleeting? I'm sure you have a story about that.

The goal here is that you will not only think twice, but with great consideration only choose to spend your valuable commodity with wisdom. Will you sell your soul for a "bowl of chili", a short-term gain in a long-term game? But she was so hot! or they said it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, or it was the next big thing!

As I outline the four basic commodities, consider how valuable they really are. They are as valuable as an inheritance. Spending your commodities wisely will get you what you want in life. Spending them foolishly has the potential to destroy you.

#### • How you spend your commodities will determine outcomes in your life.

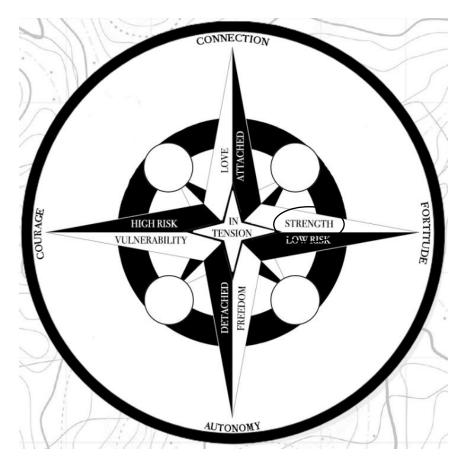
Another question is, "Who will I spend my currency on?". Our choices of who we allow into our lives is important as we move forward as a mature man. There are many people who would just as well use you and abuse you. Some people are like that, but some people are solid gold. You must choose wisely.

Find people with great character, reliability and grace, then make them part of your tribe. Find people that you trust, that you are glad they are on your team and have your back. Innumerable are the men who have chosen the wrong woman because they did not vet out her character and her ability to be held accountable.

These men seem to be strewn all over the landscape, broken and deflated. I have assisted many of these men in reclamation of their lives. Getting life back is possible, but they have paid a difficult price.

→ Your Commodities are way more valuable than you realize.

#### Strength



The Commodity of Strength

Strength is the Commodity at the Low-Risk side of the Risk Paradox. Strength is the right-hand of Fortitude. As Fortitude is the experience and producer of power and safety, Strength is the go-to. Strength is power. Strength is the ability to get things done. Strength is influence and capability.

As with any Commodity, we only have so much strength. We are limited in our musculature, in our skills, in our capacities. Our voice only has so much influence or reach.

Consider your muscles. The physical strength of any person is limited. The strongest man in the world can lift a three-hundred bound dumbbell with one arm only three times. Only three times! Even he is limited! Most men think their strength is found in their muscles. While muscles are a big part of strength, there's much more.

An unfit, flabby man can be beaten by a man with fit muscles. A man with big muscles can be defeated by a man with much skill in martial arts. A man with skill in martial arts can be defeated by a man with a good team.

A man with a good team can be overcome by a man who has inspired a nation with his voice. We must build every aspect of strength. Become stronger with your muscles and endurance. Become strong in your skills. Become strong in your leadership and influence. Build your capabilities and abilities. Become strong in your voice and wisdom. All these areas are areas of strength. Build your power bandwidth. Build your Strength Commodity.

### • Build yourself to have as much strength as possible.

The Strength Commodity is the one you can build most significantly. The others (Vulnerability, Freedom and Love) are more finite, with less growth potential. But Strength can be built, expanded and grown.

The more you build your strength, the more you have to offer. The more you have, the more you have to spend. Or not, you can just hold on to it, so you can spend it if you ever need to. You don't have to spend it, especially not on what you don't want to.

Realize your Strength as a growing capital. As you build your capacity for earning and providing, also build your "social" capital, deepen your relationships and your networks. As a young man, you are just starting to build this as your strength. As you gain experience and wisdom, your capital will expand intentionally.

We spend it when we go to work, because we are taking our capabilities and time, then transferring it into money so we can live. If we have chosen to have a family, we spend our strength on providing. How we spend a commodity depends on what we value. We also spend our Currency of Strength with whomever we choose to protect.

Many men enjoy taking the role or responsibility of being a "White Knight", coming to the rescue of the "virgin" damsel in distress. "I'm here to save the day, m'lady!" Being the white knight is using your strength to protect a woman in order to gain points (maybe get laid, maybe) or to signal your virtue that you are just that type of man who would risk life and limb for some random woman. Regardless of why a man would do this, just know, foolish or not, it is a choice of how to spend Strength.

Do you really want to risk for a woman who is foolish enough to get herself in this kind of dangerous situation, a woman of questionable character who will never give you a second glance when this is done? What's the wise choice? Personally, I think white knighting is foolish, save your Strength for those you really love, for those who really deserve your protection, somebody with good character.

We could spend it on people, we could spend it on experience, or both. It is just a choice. There are many messages in our culture today that says that to be a man you must provide for a woman and sacrifice yourself for her.

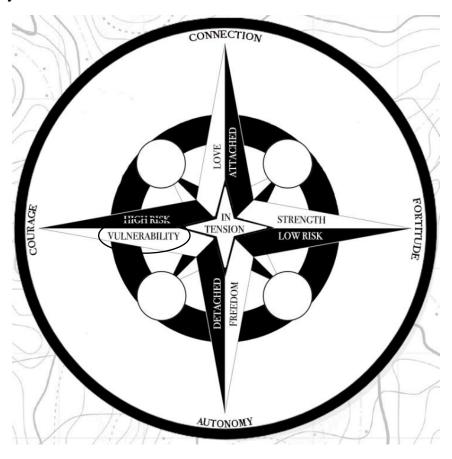
That is just cultural pressure. Here, I am saying a man builds his strength and chooses when, where and with whom he uses that commodity with wisdom as he pleases, not as culture dictates. You have the choice when a with whom or even if you will make sacrifices.

# • Choose where you use your Strength as you see fit.

Your wisdom will help you decide when to spend your Strength. If you choose to spend your Strength with a woman who does not have good character or a good moral compass, you will lose the game of life. Sometimes you'll lose just about everything important to you, maybe even your soul.

If you choose to hold on to your Strength and find a woman with character or a cause with great value to you, spending your Strength generously you will achieve many things that life has to offer. But it must be done with wisdom. Then life is abundant.

#### Vulnerability



The Commodity of Vulnerability

Vulnerability is the Commodity at the High-Risk side of the Risk Paradox. Vulnerability is the right-hand of Courage. As Courage is the experience and producer of openness and facing uncertainty, Vulnerability is the go-to of Courage. Vulnerability is allowing for openness to pain, hurt and potential defeat or failure.

As is risk, Vulnerability is placing yourself in a position of possible bankruptcy or loss. As bad as those definitions sound, Vulnerability is the pathway to so many positive outcomes in life; intimacy, depth of being, success in business, fun times or triumph in endeavors.

# • You must face risk, to move forward in anything.

Every historical event is filled with people who have placed themselves in vulnerable situations. We know the names of the heroes (Columbus, Shackleton, Armstrong), but most were just unnamed individuals who just went on with life, or they died right there in the trench.

We know the names of Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Edison and Zuckerberg, but have never heard names of people whose businesses failed. We know of great champions in all the sports; Gretzky, Brady, Pele, Ruth. But are unfamiliar with those who blew out their knee giving it their all in High School. They gave it their best.

We are aware that our parents had enough Vulnerability to make us when they had sex at least once, but did they have enough to hold it all together? Relationship Vulnerability is one of the most difficult arenas of courage for men. Keeping a relationship going into deeper connection and life requires more Vulnerability than some are willing to give.

# Danger is Vulnerability

One way to put it is that Vulnerability is putting yourself in a dangerous position. Consider any of the potentially dangerous situations in which a man might choose to engage; rock climbing, approaching a woman for her number, taking out a business loan, getting married, interviewing for a higher paying job. Of course, you may not be killed with all of these, but the danger of rejection or loss exists.

# Vulnerability is the willingness to make mistakes.

We are surrounded by those who have given it a go, with all they have. And we are surrounded by those who are scared shitless to even try. Vulnerability is real, and it usually takes balls to engage with it, no matter the context. This is why Vulnerability and Courage are so intertwined.

So how do I spend this Commodity? You only have so much. You can only open yourself up to a very limited group of people. You can only go after so many opportunities. How do you choose? Spending the Commodity of Vulnerability means that you would purposefully place yourself in a position where some of your greatest fears may be realized.

# What you want is just on the other side of your comfort zone. - Robert Allen

We experience Vulnerability the deepest with fear. Two of our deepest fears as humans are the fear of abandonment, rejection or not belonging and the fear of being devoured, absorbed or loss of self. As you consider where and when to spend your Vulnerability, be conscious of what you have been afraid of your entire life.

Which one has it been? Is it abandonment, not fitting in, being outcast or rejected? Or has it been an underlying feeling of being absorbed by darkness, where your sense of self is slowly being lost? Look back into your family of origin to find the clues you need to understand your deepest fears. When you understand your fears, you will understand how to move with Courage.

Courage is required to move into Vulnerability. Wisdom is required to choose how, where and when to place yourself in a vulnerable position. Do I go parachuting, free rock-climbing, ask that woman her name, share something important with a friend? Is it time to explore my father or mother wound? Any of these are choices of Vulnerability.

Each choice places you in a position where you could potentially be rejected, exposed or even die. Sometimes men have a difficult time talking about or expressing emotions. I believe most men actually do share their emotions, it is just how men do emotion is not accepted in today's society.

Since men don't do emotion like women men are often mis-labeled with a concept called Alexithymia. Because we don't express emotion like women, we are seen as flawed, like something is wrong if you are somewhat stoic.

Alexithymia is the inability to identify, express or describe one's feelings. Since we have been told our whole lives to hold back or stuff our emotions, many men do struggle with doing emotion efficiently. To be integrated, a man must be attentive to all his internal processes, including emotion.

We must build awareness of our emotions, build our vocabulary of what is going on inside of us and be able to communicate those emotions, so we can care for ourselves well. Sharing our emotional process is an exercise in Vulnerability.

Expressing our emotion and what we are feeling deeply exposes our inner self to potential scrutiny and criticism. Most of us have experienced ridicule and have been exposed as incompetent in this arena of life. Of course, that is vulnerable. This is why it is important to have strong boundaries around when and with whom we share these deep feelings, that is, who we spend the commodity with.

Men don't share their stuff with just anyone, so when you see a man being stoic, in any situation, know that he is not spending this commodity with you, which is fine

Danger exists in this world. Living in this world requires courage. Courage requires Vulnerability. Getting out of bed is dangerous, driving is dangerous, expressing our sexuality is dangerous, allowing anyone to see our true heart is dangerous, asking for help is dangerous; life is full of danger and vulnerability is placing yourself in any of those situations. How will you spend this valuable commodity?

First you must realize that you must have the Courage to allow Vulnerability into your life. Vulnerability opens you up to so many things in life; tell your story, be who you are, be authentic, feel, experience, let yourself be seen, develop intimacy, play, laugh, ask for help, etc.

#### Don't be closed off all the time in your life, just some of the time.

Second, you must be wise with whom and where you allow your Vulnerability to be expressed. Choose well who you spend your time with, who you give your heart to and what business to start. You only have the bandwidth to give only a few people your deep self. And usually only one person gets the deepest parts of you.

## • Only let the closest people to you see the deepest parts of you.

The action of choosing to open yourself to the potential of harm often seems like a pathway to death, but it actually opens you up to greater things in life. Vulnerability sometimes feels like certain death. Vulnerability feels like death because we think if we are exposed and people see the true "me" then I will possibly be rejected. Your external mask or self-protective walls will be seen for what they are.

Even though this feels tragic, having our method of hiding exposed for what it is, is actually a gift that will open our lives to true living. Once we are able to begin to live from an authentic place, as we allow the truth of who we are to be seen (which is Vulnerability), the opposite of our fears happens. We discover that good people around us actually want to be closer to us and they actually enjoy being around us.

## Vulnerability is the pathway to intimacy.

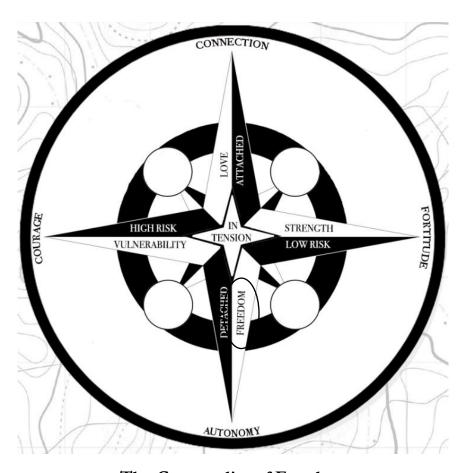
In your closest relationships, allowing yourself to be vulnerable results in relational closeness. Many of us have been closed off our entire lives because of shame and the belief that if I talk about inner struggles and experiences that I will be seen as less than or not enough. This belief has kept us from experiencing the depth that relationships have to offer.

### → Vulnerability is THE antidote to Shame.

Shame is the idea that something is wrong with me or that I am inherently not acceptable. It is the idea that guilt is I made a mistake, but Shame is I AM a mistake. The more we show up in our lives and allow ourselves to be seen, the more we defeat the power that Shame has held over us. We begin to actually see that we will not be rejected, but we will be accepted and loved more than we ever knew possible.

→ Defeating Shame will take courage, and to defeat Shame, you must open yourself up to others, that is, be vulnerable.

#### Freedom



The Commodity of Freedom

Freedom is the Commodity at the Autonomy side of the Relationship Paradox. Freedom is the right-hand of Autonomy. As Autonomy is the experience and producer of differentiation and building integrity, Freedom is the empowerment of our Autonomy.

Freedom has to do with will, choice, accountability and unconstrained agency. It is having the power to pursue and do what you desire. Freedom is associated with Autonomy since Autonomy is a posture of independence, self-governance and freedom from external control.

None of us will ever have complete freedom. We live in society that has laws and ways of doing things. Some societies allow for more Freedom than others. We live out the measure of independence our society allows. Society might have some limitations, but many of us allow ourselves to be enslaved by fear or lies that have their root in our beliefs about life and who we are.

# It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Masculinity thrives in a context with independence and the ability of selfdetermination. Depending on your philosophical stance, true Freedom may or may not exist in varying degrees. However, the masculine will usually push through toward whatever Freedom is available, even (or especially) if there is threat of pain or death.

## The masculine always pushes toward freedom.

There is something inside of a man which has an inherent resistance to tyranny. We strive to achieve in work, we move toward personal goals and we push to gain something better for ourselves and those we love.

# • Freedom is like Power, the ability to do what you want.

Sports is a great example of the desire for Freedom. The strategy and physicality of any sport is to create a moment where the athlete achieves freedom to break free from the opponent and score. Men love sports because we love Freedom, and victory. The struggle to accomplish and win represents more than just a game, it represents the struggle in life. That's one reason sports is such a draw for men.

Understanding our deep desire for Freedom allows a deep understanding of how the masculine moves in relationship with women and the world. Look at Freedom as a Commodity, we only have so much time, energy and capability. Our day is limited by 24 hours. Our energy is limited by how much we can do before we need to rest. We are only capable of so much. Unlike Strength, which we can build, we can't really increase or expand how much time we have in a day. It's limited.

#### Our Freedom is limited.

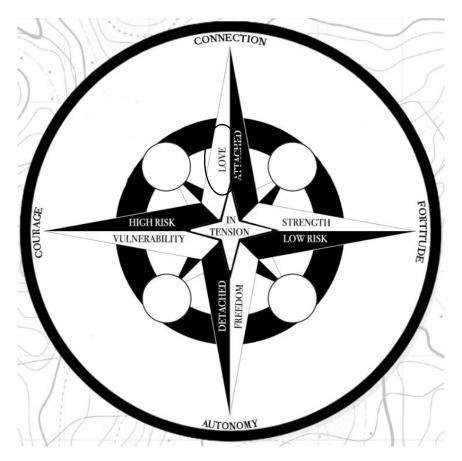
We can make our time more efficient or increase our ability to achieve more in less time. We can eliminate addictions or distractions that keep us from living clean and well which will bring more abundance and sustainability to the time and energy we have. But we are still only working with so much, and all men have a similar amount.

How we choose to spend our time, energy and capabilities is important. Who do I spend time with? What will I do for work? What do I want to accomplish in my day? Why would I want to invest so much time with that certain woman or job? What is holding me back and stealing my precious time?

#### Time is a very precious commodity.

Reclaiming your Masculinity is reclaiming your Freedom. It is becoming a man who is able to do what he sees as necessary and right. It is choosing according to your internal values and moral compass. It is making the decision to thrive. Your Freedom will bring more power into your life and give you more space with which to master your Masculinity.

#### Love



The Commodity of Love

Love is the Commodity at the Connection side of the Relationship Paradox. Love is the right-hand man of Connection. As Connection is the experience and producer of openness and building relationship, Love is the empowerment of Connection.

We have all been flooded with ideas about what Love is. It's a feeling. It's a decision. It's the affectionate feeling you have for your mom. Love is the experience when you have your favorite meal. It is the twitterpation when you fall in Love.

Love is the attraction you have with another human, when you see them. It is the nostalgia when you consider good times in the past. It's the attachment you have for your kids or friends, that transcends reason sometimes.

Love is often described as an action, where you move and give affection, compassion and appreciation. It is when you are loyal to the well-being of another. It is when you express kindness to another being, or a desire for their happiness and thriving.

Love has been described as a virtue, if not THE highest virtue. As a virtue it is goodness, honor, righteousness, dignity, kindness, decency, respectability, and purity.

It is benevolence and care for others. It is generosity of the deepest kind, where you share your soul in connection with another.

Love has been described in categories of unconditional or conditional. I can give it as a choice with complete disregard to any action or way of being, totally unearned. Or it can be transactional, where the other done something to earn it.

It could be that deep understanding you have with others, kind of a settled loyalty between family members, friends or in a band of brothers. Love is also that deep feeling in your groin, when you are horny. It is that passion that moves you to want to have sex, the urge to merge. No wonder Love has been the subject of so many songs and movies, it is in so many parts of life.

#### • Love makes life worthwhile.

All these categories represent the Love that men experience. As far as the exercise in defining Masculinity is concerned, Love is the deep desire for connection (emotional and sexual) and the unselfish, loyal concern for the good of another.

As a Commodity, we need to understand what Love is, our capacity for Love and the ways we spend it. This is where men get really wrapped around the axle. Men through the ages have moved in chivalrous ways to get the hand of the maiden. Which is not a bad endeavor, unless she is your "all in all" or "my world" or "my density", then it is really foolish. If all your Commodity of Love is spent to get her hand, you'll regret it.

# Putting a woman on the pedestal is as foolish as a man can get.

When the woman becomes your purpose, your world shrinks and becomes very small. So, when it comes to Love, don't get caught up with it being centered around just a woman. I am not saying that a relationship with a woman is not important or even primary, which it is on both accounts, but it must only be a part of your experience of life and Love.

## • When the WOMAN is your purpose your world diminishes.

This sounds like I am advocating polyamory or affairs. Not at all. What I am saying is that our expression of Love must expand greatly into our world with your purpose and passion in many other forms. Absolutely save all your sexual energy ("eros" Love) for your woman but expand your passion and excitement for life and living to making as much of a positive impact on your world as possible. She will love you for it, most women don't like being on the pedestal, that creates too much pressure. She might think it's cool for a short time, but then she will resent you for it.

Presently it seems that the expected role for many men is to rescue the single mom and take her children as your own. You must be the "good" man because her ex is a dick. This is where your value is determined by your ability to rescue and to sacrifice yourself. You can do this if you wish, just remember the Commodities you are spending are yours to choose where, when and with whom you will spend them.

You could choose to marry a single mom and adopt her children as your own. It's not a problem if it comes from a noble place of internal choice, not out of neediness or what is expected of you. It could be a beautiful thing for you to bring children under your wing who do not have a father. We chose for 8 years to do foster care and we cared for kids whose parents couldn't do it. We chose to feel real pain and loss when we gave them back after giving them deep connections. That was our chosen sacrifice.

How do you spend your Love? This is answered by where you spend your focus, attention and resources. It is what you place as your highest priorities. Your attention is yours, no one else's. Your choice of priority is yours. As with the other Commodities, you only have so much. Where, with whom, when and why will you spend it?

There are voices which will scream at you to make them a priority and try to capture your attention and focus. Stay strong, my son. Choose ahead of time what and where you'll have as your focus, where you'll spend your passion, where you'll spend your resources.

Many times, your choice will be making a sacrifice. When you spend your currency on someone else or for a cause, you will be sacrificing something very valuable to you. It is a gift that you have to offer. Only give that gift when you want to and to people who will receive it as what it is, a valuable gift.

## → Your focus is a gift of your Love.

You can choose to be a statistic like so many other men who lose their wisdom and choose to give all of this Commodity to a certain woman, with the hopes of gaining her validation. Or you can be wise, hold fast to your integrity and moral compass, then choose well how to move in life with this precious Commodity of Love.

Understanding the four Cornerstones and the four Commodities will help guide you to living out your Masculinity with intent, purpose and wisdom and guide you into deeper understanding of Masculinity. They will help you know the foundations of who you are and how you've been designed to live.

From here we will continue to build our map as we look at the quadrants which will outline the four Benchmarks, eight Muscles and four archetypes of our masculine soul. As the quadrants are explained it will become very clear to you how Masculinity has been designed to engage with our world with Strength, Vulnerability, Freedom and Love.

#### **Group Reflection Questions**

**Cornerstone of Fortitude**; I am a strong fortress, invulnerable, closed and powerful.

Cornerstone of Courage; I face fears, I engage with life, I take risks, I initiate.

Cornerstone of Autonomy; I am myself, I stand on my own feet, I am complete.

**Cornerstone of Connection**; I have my tribe, I build relationships, I pursue intimacy.

In what ways have you been a man of Fortitude where you are strong, walled off, a source of protection and strength for yourself and those you love? How comfortable are you with this idea?

What might have been keeping you from being this kind of man and what have you been told about the kind of man who has this kind of strength?

How have you been a man of Courage, where you have been willing to face risks, initiating things and engaging with life? Or not?

In what ways do you balance the paradox between Fortitude and Courage, being closed off and strong while experiencing openness and risk?

To what degree do you think you have been able to live in Autonomy, where you feel whole and complete, you stand on your own feet without needing others to validate you and you know who you are and what you want?

When it comes to Connection, how have you faltered, what have been difficulties, what makes you hesitate? Or how have you dove in too deep, too needy or too trusting?

When have you had good strong connections where you maintained a good balance of Autonomy and Connection?

Which of these Cornerstones do you want to develop further? (fortitude, courage, connection, autonomy)

For each of those you listed, think of three things you could do to become more confident with that concept. For instance, if you are not very good at Connection, you could; ask your woman on a face to face date and talk about your vision for the future or something that's been on your heart, you could list potential Mt. Rushmore men and make a plan to build those relationships, you could find a meetup group that does something you enjoy doing, you could join a group like a bible study or sports team.

Commodity of Strength; abilities, skills, capital, power, presence and voice.

Commodity of Vulnerability; willingness to live openly, with emotions or adventure.

**Commodity of Freedom**; independence, self-governance and power to choose.

Commodity of Love; passion, benevolence and care for others.

How have you spent your Strength foolishly and how have you built this commodity with intention? Tell the story.

When it comes to being Vulnerable, when have you used it wisely with positive outcomes and when have you opened up too much or at inappropriate times? Tell the story.

How have you allowed yourself to give up your Freedom by getting "enslaved" into situations that then limited your Freedom? What have you done to increase Freedom? Tell the story.

In what ways have you pursued Love in foolish ways and when has it been amazing?

Tell the story.

Which of the Commodities have you built your bandwidth on the best? What could you do to increase them more?
Which of the Commodities do you naturally do better at? Which seem to be difficult?
Which of the Commodities would you want to develop?
(strength, freedom, vulnerability, love)
For each of those you listed, think of three things you could do to become more confident with that concept. For instance, if you are not very good at Vulnerability, you could; allow yourself to feel deeply when you are moved, say the words that need to be said when you think of something you feel about someone you care for, you could let a good friend know something you are struggling with right now or you could go sky-diving.
1.
2.
3.
What other insights or thoughts do you have about this lesson?