

Author Q & A

Zach Hunter

Chivalry



- Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you became passionate about justice.

When I was twelve years old we were studying the history of slavery in the US. In my mind, slavery is the biggest blemish on the face of American history. There was something about this specific injustice—the fact that people of my race had oppressed others and felt it was okay to own them because they had a different skin color—that really upset me. I had been learning about some of my greatest heroes: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and others who had worked for freedom. I thought that, if I had been alive back then, I would have done something to fight against slavery; but I thought I'd been born years too late. It was then that I learned about the modern-day struggle to end human trafficking and slavery. It angered me to see history repeating itself. But I knew being angry was not enough. God had given me emotions for a reason: to mobilize me into action. At twelve, there wasn't much I could do—but I knew I had to do something.

- You are twenty-one, and this is already your fourth book. How did you start a writing career at such a young age?

*I get this question a lot. I wasn't a child prodigy; I was just a kid with a passion. At that time the film *Amazing Grace* was launching, which told of the life of William Wilberforce, the great British abolitionist. My mom was working on the film, and the producers told her they had heard about a kid who called himself an abolitionist and wondered if he might be interested in helping with the film. Strangely (to me), I was asked to go on the road at age fourteen to help tell the story and invite people to join the effort to start a new abolitionist movement. Zondervan invited me to write a book in conjunction with the film release, and that's where it all began. I love good stories, and I think people learn best through a memorable story. So writing my first book, *Be the Change*, really helped me hone those skills.*

- Tell us about your newest book, *Chivalry*. After your work in global justice, where did you get the inspiration to write a book about personal honor and integrity?

I am so excited about this book. It is very personal to me. I am honest about my own failings and challenges in this book—hoping it will give others the freedom to do the same.

For the past nine years I've been speaking around the world about our responsibility to actively love the poor and oppressed by providing solutions and hope to some of the greatest problems

our generation faces. I've seen students (and adults, for that matter) rally to fight hunger, help those who don't have a home, educate girls in the developing world, rescue people from slavery, dig wells, and improve their communities. It has been amazing. As a person of faith, I felt compelled to see my faith lived out and to encourage others to do that as well.

But I've seen a disturbing thing happening. While we have been demonstrating God's love to others who are far away from home, I have noticed less civility close to home. It might be in the form of rudeness or carelessness with other people's feelings, uncivil and angry spouting off on the Internet, or an inability to peacefully disagree with someone. There seems to be a lot of shouting about how right we are but very little civil discussion on matters of great consequence. I'm concerned that we have become a social justice generation who says we have made compassion our way of life, yet we don't necessarily think that applies to us in our closest relationships. So that's the genesis of this book. Dr. Cornel West has said that justice is what love looks like in public. I'm wondering if chivalry is what justice looks like in our personal lives.

- People often think of chivalry as a list of rules teaching guys how to treat girls. How is the kind of chivalry that you are advocating different?

*I don't see chivalry as a male-dominated, patriarchal way of treating women. I see chivalry as a lifestyle—a commitment to be lived out by **both** men and women. While there were not a lot of female knights, I do believe the principles apply to both genders equally. We should all be challenged to live civilly with integrity and honor.*

- Why does your generation care so much about justice abroad but not about treating people with dignity in their everyday lives?

I'm not sure. But perhaps it's because the massive injustices in the world are in our faces through media, and the stories are told in such compelling and explicit ways that we cannot turn away. I think it's much easier to look "over there" rather than looking "in here"—in our own hearts, minds, and actions.

- What are some specific ways that you see your generation falling short in the area of chivalry? Why is chivalry important?

We fall short in so many ways. Careless words. Quick Facebook posts or tweets criticizing someone. A failure to go directly to others and seek understanding. A lack of really listening to people's views, hearing them out, processing what they say in a way that demonstrates to them that they have dignity, rather than pretending to listen while we build our argument against them. Hurtful and inflammatory name-calling. Demonizing those who are different from us. Objectifying people of the opposite gender. (I see this as much from young women toward men as the other way around.)

I think chivalry—as a journey—could bring some much-needed understanding and compassion to our personal lives. Rather than being prescriptive, I believe it is transformative. Chivalry

deals with our attitudes, our habits, and how our thinking shapes what we do and who we become.

- In *Chivalry*, you draw ten principles from the ancient knight's code of honor. What is one of your favorite elements of the knight's code, and how can readers apply it in a modern context?

I think my favorite is "I Will Fear No Evil." It's really a chapter about fear and evil individually, about how we define good and evil, about not being afraid to face our own doubts, and, ultimately, about love. Through telling a story about a mythical creature, and discussing my own struggles with an anxiety disorder, I expose what everyone is afraid of and what the antidote for fear is: love and understanding. People fear three things: what they do not know, what they know but do not understand, and what they understand to be evil. The point of the chapter is that perfect love, not foolish bravery, casts out all fear and that it is okay to face doubts and fears, as they make us stronger.

- How do faith and Christianity intersect with the principles of the knight's code?

Christianity is about the good news, what we commonly refer to as the "gospel." The good news here is that we can achieve freedom from our own selfishness. Jesus is the great liberator from self-absorption and small, me-centered living. I believe something special happens when you're in the sort of relationship Christianity calls for; you change how you treat others because of who you are inside, not because of a bunch of rules. That's what Chivalry is about. Love God. Honor people. I believe this is living out the two greatest commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's chivalry.

- What lessons or truths do you hope your readers will take away from the pages of *Chivalry*?

I have always said that I want my generation to be written about in the history books as the generation who cared about the poor and oppressed, who made sacrifices to address the wrongs of the world and demonstrated the love of God to those who are hurting. I envision a peace, love, and justice generation—for many of us, motivated by our faith and the example of Jesus. Chivalry is the personal manifestation of this, a quest to discover a personal way of living civilly in an unjust world. I would love for every reader to develop an honest picture of where he or she is internally and make a commitment to seeking spiritual transformation that leads to a life of dignity and honor.