



Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

What It Means To Be A Man

By Dr. John P. Splinter

The quest of every boy is to grow to be a man. From a boy's eyes, manhood offers so much ~ things like power, money, independence, control. The 8-year-old dreams of being 15. The 16-year-old dreams of getting out of the house and going to college. The college kid thinks that when he's out of school life will become easier and more manageable.

Along the road to manhood we all have experiences that shape us and, at least for a moment make us feel as if we have reached some higher level. Some of these experiences are so powerful we never forget them ~ moments that said, "Yes ~ you *are* the MAN!" Here are a few "You-'d-man" first time experiences:

- Your first time on the starting roster in a varsity high school sport.
- The first day you wear your letter jacket to high school.
- The first time you have the car by yourself, alone."
- Your first romantic kiss.
- The day you buy your own car.
- Your first big game kill (e.g., deer, elk, moose, whatever).
- Your first climb of a Colorado fourteener.
- The first time you make love.
- The day your wife delivered your first baby.

For most guys those are powerful experiences that implied manhood, at least at the moment. In retrospect a few years later, we look back at these experiences and appreciate the moment, but recognize that these experiences somehow now have less to do with defining manhood.

There are many false vehicles promising to get us to manhood. Some guys define manhood in terms of how many females they can use. Others define it in terms of physical strength, as if manhood may be conferred upon a boy based upon how much he can bench press. Some use sports as their vehicle. Others use education, feeling that perhaps manhood is conferred by achieving a masters or Ph.D. A common "manhood vehicle" is the corporate ladder, as if CEOs or Senior V.P.s are more manly than account execs. Another common vehicle is money. In one way or another, each of these vehicles deal with power. In fact, false definitions of manhood almost always involve some element of personal power.

Obviously, male sexuality is a huge component in defining manhood. But what does it mean, really? All guys know that what goes up, must come down, right? So then what? Just because one's plumbing works according to Hoyle, does that mean he's a man? If so, then the feminists'

criticism of manhood is justified as they say, “All men carry their brains between their legs.” Actually, we all know some guys who fit that description.

A few years ago a pastor/psychologist named Dr. Robert Lewis published a book that really nails manhood. The title of the book is, “*Raising a Modern Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood.*”¹ If you’re a dad and have sons, this book should be at the top of your “must read” list. In one section of this book, Dr. Lewis articulates three definitional pieces of manhood that are worth memorizing and implementing in a man’s life. The components are: 1) *A will to obey*; 2) *A work to do*; and 3) *A woman to love*. The rest of this article will expand on these three thoughts, because better than any other work we’ve seen, these three thoughts articulate what it means to be a man. (Dr. Lewis has given permission for us to use his work in this manner.)

A Will To Obey

One of the basic questions of all children of all time has been, *Who’s In Control?* Here’s how a child’s mind works. Without knowing it, there are hundreds of rebellious little thoughts constantly rummaging around in the mind of even the most lovely little child:

“Are my parents in control, or am I? If I disobey them, what may happen? Will I be punished? If so, how bad will it be? If I scream loud enough will they think it really hurts? What if I pretend I’m really mad and I hate them? What if I lay on the floor and kick and scream? Will they give in to me if I hold my breath until I pass out? What if I embarrass them in public? Do I dare call Child Protective Services if they spank me? What if I break curfew by fifteen minutes? Or an hour? Will they believe me if I say I ran out of gas? And where do they get off telling me what I should or shouldn’t do with my own body?”

One of the core issues of human life is, *Who’s In Control?* It’s not just a kids’ question. Adults have the same rebellious thoughts constantly rummaging around in their minds. The thoughts become a little more sophisticated as we get older, which actually makes them more dangerous. So if a two-year-old boy pulls down his pants on a busy street and pees on a tree, it’s cute, but if a 35-year-old man does the same thing it’s gross and he might be arrested for indecent exposure. If a three-year-old boy lifts up a little girl’s skirt he’s “just curious,” but if a 19-year-old does it he may be arrested for sexual assault. This is to say, *the question of who’s in control becomes far more serious as we grow from childhood into adulthood.*

For this reason it is essential that adults learn to ground themselves upon truth, justice and integrity, because the consequences of making mistakes become increasingly severe as we mature. In today’s Post-Modern culture there is a critical question on the table. This question is basic to virtually all adult attitude, perception and behavior. The question is, “Who, or What, determines truth?” The Post-Modern answer is, “Hey, whatever floats your boat.” Some add a little qualifier, “As long as what you like doesn’t hurt anyone, it’s fine.” So Post-Modern philosophy’s answer to “Who’s In Control?” is **you**. You are in control. You determine truth. You define right and wrong, for yourself at least. Here’s a little Post-Modern quiz. Circle the answer you feel best answers each question: