

# Family Legacy Institute

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. For the adolescent, sex! 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 manhood.

There are many false vehicles promising to get us to manhood. Some guys define manhood in terms of how many females they can lay. 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 Senior V.P.s are more manly than account execs. Another common vehicle is money. In one way or another, most 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 your plumbing works according to Hoyle, does that mean you're a man? If so, then the feminists' criticism of manhood is justified as they say, "All men carry their brains between their legs." (And we all know some guys who fit that description.)

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.*"<sup>1</sup> If you're a dad and have sons, this book should be at the top of your "must read" list. In part of this book, Lewis articulates three components of manhood that are worth learning and implementing in your life. The components are: 1) *A will to obey*; 2) *A work to do*; and 3) *A woman to love*. We'll use the rest of this booklet to expand on these three thoughts, because better than any other book we've seen, these three thoughts articulate what it means to be a man.

### 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 brat:

*"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 basic questions 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 are just a little more sophisticated as we get older, and that makes them more dangerous. So if a two-year-old boy pulls down his pants and pees on a tree, it's cute, but if a 35-year-old man does the same thing it's gross, he's a flasher and 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's a lecher and 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:

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Regarding truth:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. It is absolute, never changing.</li><li>2. It evolves as culture evolves.</li><li>3. It changes with different circumstances.</li></ol>
Who determines truth?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God.</li><li>2. Culture</li><li>3. Each person determines their own truth.</li></ol>
What is more important?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Knowing and living by truth.</li><li>2. Being tolerant and getting along with each other.</li><li>3. Being a really nice person.</li></ol>
If someone says, "God's Word is truth," they're probably:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A Christian.</li><li>2. A religious zealot.</li><li>3. A right wing radical.</li></ol>
The Bible is:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The written Word of God.</li><li>2. A compilation of writings by very good people.</li><li>3. Just one of many religious books written by men.</li></ol>
The best philosophy to guarantee a highly functional culture is:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Be as closely connected to God as possible.</li><li>2. If it makes you happy it can't be that bad.</li><li>3. Every viewpoint is a viewpoint from a viewpoint.</li></ol>
The highest value in life is:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To obey God in all things.</li><li>2. To avoid harming anyone.</li><li>3. To be the best "you" that you can be.</li></ol>

Add the numbers that you circled. The range of possible scores is 7 – 21. In this quiz if your total adds up to seven, your value system is consistent with that of historic Christianity. If your total adds up to eight or more, you have elements of Post-Modern thinking woven into your world view. The closer your score is to 21, the more you need to ask yourself, "Who is in control?" The higher your score, the more your *answer* will tend to be, "I am."

Post-Modern philosophy teaches that each man himself is the master of his own universe. In 1875 William Ernest Henley wrote a poem titled, "Invictus" expressing this motif:

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

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In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

We wouldn't accept this kind of logic from a three-year-old. For example, if mommy says, "Don't *ever* play out in the street," it means never. It does *not* mean that the child is the ultimate one to determine the value of mommy's "kind advice." If daddy says, "Don't lie to me," he means never. It does *not* mean the child should make up his mind whether to consider daddy's "opinion" as valid. Yet it somehow seems logical for adults to believe this squishy philosophy as it applies to themselves. So, is the issue of control just a function of age – *do we earn the right to become totally self-defined and self-regulated when we pass some magical age and "become a man?"*

At what point did William Henley stand tall and proclaim, "***I*** am the master of my fate. ***I*** am the captain of my soul." Is that level achieved *before* an earthquake destroys one's home, or an assassin takes one's life ~ or *after* ~ and upon whose estimate of authority does one puny man stand with clenched fist pointed toward heaven and shout those words?

Is there something basic ~ something universal that determines right and wrong, good and evil ~ some core element that can provide a higher purpose, consistent meaning and unerring direction as we progress from three years old, to 75? Put in classical terms, is there a circle inside of which is truth, outside of which is non-truth? Is there a Superior Being whose definitions absolutely determine the purposes, meaning and values of life? And how does that question relate to the subject of teaching one's son about what it means to be a man?

Post-Modern thought would respond, "There is no such circle. It's all shades of grey." Yet the ultimate weakness of Post-Modern philosophy is precisely what it considers to be its greatest strength. If each person defines their own "truth," what happens when one person's truth clashes with another person's truth? What if my "highest value" as a male, is rape? (It's not, but for sake of argument, what if it were?)

Post-Modernism's response to the dilemma is "toleration," as when Rodney King said, "Can't we all just get along?" The answer to Rodney's question is, No, we don't seem to be able to all get along, because ultimately the person with the biggest gun us going to use his/her advantage, and "define truth." Because of human weakness, no human being is capable of "determining truth." We all tend to grind our own axes. We're all myopic and self-centered in our own ways.

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The issue of sexuality is perhaps the dominant case-in-point of this culture. If there is no moral compass ~ if we are all on our own and if everything we do is “just fine as long as we don’t hurt anyone,” then things like prostitution, pornography, adult/child sex, bestiality, necromancy, homosexuality, transvestism, sado/masochistic torture and the like are all OK. Whatever turns you on.... We’re actually not far from that perspective right now. On June 18, 2009, Fox News reported a story of a judge who sentenced a *repeat* 55-year-old child-rapist to one month in jail, for the rape of *yet another* child. In the judge’s eyes apparently, the rape of a child is not really a big deal. A true Post-Modern would only complain mildly “if the child didn’t really consent” to the rape.

However, if there is a God, and if what He says provides a universal basis for meaning, regulation of culture and personal happiness, then we created beings would be foolish to ignore Him. Especially in the sexual venue, the big question remains: *Who’s In Control?* In answering this question there are two options: Either God is real, right, and in control ~ or He’s not real, or not right, or not in control. *The person making this decision, is you.* Lest you become confused here, your power is *not* to determine whether or not God exists and offers supreme wisdom.<sup>2</sup> Your power is *only* to decide what you’re going to do about it.

In the sexual arena, the notion of “A Will To Obey” is the most basic of all issues. We will either obey God’s Will, or we will not. Here’s a chart to consider.

Issue	Post-Modern Position	Cultural Results	God’s Will
Sexual before marriage, or outside of marriage	Have a good time	Exponential rise in STDs  50% of American babies born out of wedlock  50% sustained divorce rate  American teens now most sexually active in civilized world  Sexually active kids are more prone to depression and suicide	Keep sex between two married partners ~ one man, one woman, for a lifetime.  Explore all you want to, within marriage ~ have a fun time with sex. It’s wonderful as created by God.
Viewing pornography	Whatever turns you on – it’s a “victimless crime”	Increase in violent crimes against women  Diminishment of respect for women in	Proverbs 4:23 ~ “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

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		pop music (calling them bitches and hos)	Matt 5:28 ~ “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
Prostitution	If that’s where you’re at, fine	Spread of disease and infidelity	Prov 23:27-28 ~ “A prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well. Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men.”
Homosexuality	It’s an “acceptable alternative lifestyle”	Massive spread of AIDS (20% of male bi- and homo-sexuals)  Higher depression, drug abuse, and suicide among gays	Lev 18:22 ~ “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”
Adult/child sexual activity	As long as the kid is into it, it’s OK	Depression, panic disorders, dissociative disorders, and suicidality among victims <sup>3</sup>  Fourfold lifetime risk for psychiatric disorders; threefold risk for substance abuse <sup>4</sup>	Matt 18:5-6 ~ “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”
Beastiality	If you want to get kinky, it’s fine	Degradation of humanity	Lev 18:23 ~ “Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it.”

Our culture is so drugged by sexuality that research by the American Psychological Association estimates kids today receive approximately 14,000 sexual messages per year. The bottom line of sexuality is this: Will you trust and obey God, or are you going to do your own thing? There are consequences either way. Research has found that 68% of teens who were sexual in their youth reported deeply regretting it by the time they reached age 25. And who can be happy about catching Herpes, or HPV, or AIDS, or even some of the curable STDs? You might not be able to envision or articulate the consequences a week or month before they happen, but scripture is very clear as it says, ***A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from***

***that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (Galatians 6:7-8).***

The core issue is “whose Will, will I obey?” Put another way, “Who’s in control?” In regard to our discussion of manhood, the decision of obeying God’s Will is a basic, ground level component. How a man responds to his own sexuality shouts about his character. It is not possible to separate a man’s sexual life from the rest of his moral character. Solomon wisely noted, ***“As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is” (Prov. 23:7 – KJV)***. We’ll talk more about this later.

The first “bottom line” issue of manhood is that of yielding one’s life to God ~ seeking to follow His paths and obey His will. Having ***“A Will To Obey”*** is the first qualifier of manhood. It demonstrates a man who is willing to say, “There is someone bigger in this universe than me, and I choose to submit myself to His Will. This decision is the basic building block of male character.

### **A Work To Do**

As boys mature into men, most begin to understand that it is their responsibility to identify a career and then become a productive member of society. There have always been a few slugs who remain on their parents’ couches long after age 18. Perhaps we have a few more of them in today’s culture than in past generations. But for the most part, most young men “get it,” and get busy with a career.

This is in keeping with the second chapter of Genesis where scripture says, ***“When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens — and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground — the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:4-7 ~ NIV)***. Apparently, for whatever reason, from the very beginning even before the creation of human beings, God intended for men to work.

Without purpose, men tend to fritter away their years in self-absorbed meaningless activity, consume a lot of calories, and die having made no contribution to the human race. God’s purpose for us males, was that we would work. We’re a bit like draft horses whose purpose becomes clear once in harnesses and pulling a hay wagon. This means that winning the lottery so one can do nothing more significant than choose a new restaurant every day and play golf five times a week, is not consistent with God’s plan.

Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget studied and then wrote about the differences in identity formation, between girls and boys. Writing specifically of boys, he observed that when they are children they gain a sense of their identity through playing games. He watched Swiss school boys playing marbles, soccer, and other games. *He observed that boys like “systems” in which there are rules, and in which they can compete with abandon.*



He then observed that when boys mature into men, the tendency toward entering into or creating “systems” remains, the tendency toward these systems having rules remains, and the male tendency to compete with abandon remains. The only thing that changes is that rather than playing marbles or soccer, these boys-now-men do their thing within systems called “corporations” or “universities” or “unions.”

Here’s the point: The way that God wired us, men gain a great portion of their identity through what they do occupationally. This is why, when men lose their jobs, they often struggle emotionally because they are not sure “who they are” any longer. This struggle is a normal piece of manhood. God created men with a purpose.

Some men expend their lives and form their identities around repetitive manual labor. They may work in a manufacturing plant making cars, or in an arboretum trimming trees. Other men seek challenges that forces them outside their comfort zones and demand problem-solving creativity. They seek careers that provide these elements. However a man is wired, at some point in his life he’s almost certainly going to ask himself, “Why am I here on earth? Why did God give me breath, power and intelligence? Do I have a purpose? What will be my legacy?”

Those questions are answered within the second criterion of manhood, “A Work To Do.” God did not create males so they could lay on couches putting salt in their navals to dip celery, and then play video games. It is in the exercise of power and creativity that men find identity and meaning for life. In this aspect of manhood, the Enemy of God whispers, “Make enough money that you can tell “The Man” to kiss your rear. Retire as early as you can so you can focus 100% on yourself.” So it is today that we have millions of men who are dying before their time because they made enough money to define life in terms of their golf handicap and the number of cruises they have taken.

I saw this principle clearly one afternoon as I took a half day off to browse antique shops with my wife. In one shop we ran into a couple we knew. The husband had been a corporate VP with ~ lots of power ~ lots of money ~ a pressure-cooker daily grind. At age 50 he decided to retire and help his wife run her antique shop, which mainly meant dusting depression glass and smiling at customers. I said, “Hey, Joe, how’re you enjoying being out of the grind?” He said, “I feel like I’m losing my mind – I’m not sure who I am anymore.”

God gives each man “A Work To Do.” We are fulfilled and defined as men when we enter into His plan with gusto, using our strength, resources and creativity.

## A Woman To Love

The last qualifier for manhood involves “A Woman To Love.” Sexualization is the area of greatest spiritual attack in this generation. Sex is the hottest topic in the Western world right now, and the Internet is the greatest purveyor of pornography in the history of humanity. Twenty-percent of Internet hits are about sex. In 1997 there were something like 17 million pornographic Web pages. By 2004 there were 372 million.<sup>5</sup> Today we’re told there are over 425 million pages (I don’t know who counts them). Two-and-a-half billion emails per day are pornographic.<sup>6</sup> Sex is the #1 topic searched on the Internet.<sup>7</sup>



By contrast, the “original plan” was for one man and one woman, together in love, for a lifetime. ***Genesis 2:18, 24-25 ~ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.***

The marital bond between man and woman was intended by God to last a lifetime. Some skeptics argue that since human beings now live longer (average 80 – 85 years) than those of previous generations who may have died in their forties or fifties, it is reasonable to divorce and take on a second marriage. This argument impact face when considering that several of the early men and women recorded in scripture, married and lived well into their 900<sup>th</sup> years (see Genesis 5:1-32).

If the marital relationship is basic to humanity, why has it been such an historic target for God’s Enemy, and why in *this* generation is it such a key battleground? That’s a question worth thinking about. Sex has always been an area of challenge for men but today, especially in light of technology it’s an almost infinitely greater challenge.

At least part of the core of this battle involves two words: Male isolation. In American culture, 99% of men are not closely tied to other men, in a manner that they may discuss their deepest issues and pray for one another. Some men have sports buddies (golf, softball, basketball, etc.). Others have high school or college buddies. Some have male church friends, or male office co-workers with whom they are friends. But few men in America have deep, open, honest and trusting male relationships with other men. In fact, most men don’t even have that level of depth with their own wives.

Into the vacuum of male isolation, the Enemy of God throws sexual temptation. Sexual sin is unique in that it accomplishes one thing more than anything else ~ it separates men from the attachment, support, love, encouragement, and help of their wives. In Genesis 2:18 God said, ***“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*** Sex of any kind outside of marriage does damage to God’s initial intent ~ it destroys God’s intended means of caring for both men and women ~ it builds isolation. Affairs damage marriage. Pornography damages marriage. Homosexuality damages marriage. Prostitution damages marriage. Masturbation generally focuses on non-marital partners, thereby taking the mind off of marriage and damaging it. Each of these items leads toward isolation and aloneness.

This is to say, keeping marriage strong is a spiritual issue. Without wanting in any way to overuse the metaphor, it’s a battle. Men need to constantly fight for their marriages. There *is* opposition to our marital success. The opposition uses sex as a barbed lure which when ingested, quickly becomes brutally embedded into our souls. Most men struggle with sexuality. It’s a universal struggle. Because it is universal and so profoundly difficult for most men, it is one of the most singular expressions of manly character.

Let’s change the picture for a moment. The year is 20,000 B.C. Most people live in caves and dinosaurs roam freely. A roaming Tyrannosaurus Rex comes near a cave entrance. The man

living in the cave knows he must protect his wife and children. He has two primary weapons ~ fire, and a couple of crude spears. He pitches fiery pine knots into the Rex's gaping mouth. He hurls his spears into the beast's eyes. The beast withdraws, screaming in pain. The man's family is safe again, for the moment. There will be other daily risks.

Now back to the present. The year is 2009. A man is surfing the web and a monster of a different type stalks. A pop-up says, "Hey big guy – guess what I'll show you." The man's primary weapons in this case are purpose and character. His first weapon, "purpose," equates with "A Will To Obey." He knows that God has a higher purpose for him than to look at the exposed nakedness of another woman. He knows that God has promised, ***"No temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it" (I Cor. 10:13 ~ TLB).*** He prays, "God, please help me ~ I'm under attack."

His second weapon is character ~ after many unsuccessful battles he has developed the intestinal fortitude to control his behavior. He clicks the pop-up "off" and the monster goes away. The man's family is safe again, for the moment. There will be other daily temptations.

Yet each successful resistance builds strength and character. And in the end, character is the truest measure of a man. One aspect of life in which a man's character is most clearly seen, is in his handling of marital fidelity. "A Woman To Love." She'll never be perfect ~ he'll eventually find that out. She'll probably lose her girlish figure along the way. There will always be other options available to him. So why should he tenaciously hold to "vows" he made a decade or two ago? Two reasons: God's purpose, and a man's character.

## Wrap

Having a clear definition of what "manhood" means, provides a man with goals and objectives for maximizing what God has given him. With no definition there can be no success ~ it's like hunting moose with no idea of what a moose is. For all you know your next door neighbor's golden retriever could be a moose ~ or so could your wife's nasty uncle.

The three definitions taught in this booklet help identify success. They are based upon scripture, which means they are based upon universal truth. They apply universally to men. And the more successful a man is in each of the three areas, the more successful the man will be in his entire life.

Final thought, these three concepts need to be taught to our sons. They need to learn that manhood is not about how many girls a boy can lay ~ or how much he can bench press ~ or how many pucks he can shoot into a guarded net ~ or how much money he makes. All of those things will eventually burn anyway.

Rather, THE PRIMARY LESSON we dads need to teach our sons is how to please God. This lesson is easily understood in terms presented within this booklet. Successful male identity and successful manhood, is a product of A Will To Obey, A Work To Do, and A Woman To Love.

## Resources

1. Lewis, R. *Raising a Modern Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood.* (Used with permission.)
2. Some people actually believe that the following items “just appeared” out of nothing: Matter, motion, millions of different forms of life, light, time (which is a function of the speed of light).
3. [http://books.google.com/books?id=vW3KLIf8gUC&pg=PA141&lpg=PA141&dq=adults,+children,+sex,+and+the+Bible&source=bl&ots=Polagh0c3k&sig=ofvu3ZflpYgUN4m5U4dOFXL\\_zpU&hl=en&ei=2wY8SqmYAZPGMuH0kbAO&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4](http://books.google.com/books?id=vW3KLIf8gUC&pg=PA141&lpg=PA141&dq=adults,+children,+sex,+and+the+Bible&source=bl&ots=Polagh0c3k&sig=ofvu3ZflpYgUN4m5U4dOFXL_zpU&hl=en&ei=2wY8SqmYAZPGMuH0kbAO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4)
4. Ibid.
5. *Internet Pornography Statistics.* Internet Filter Review, 2004.
6. Pornography Statistics, 2003, David C. Bissette, Psy.D.; [www.healthymind.com](http://www.healthymind.com), 2004.
7. Hagelin, R. (March, 2004). *Overdosing on Porn.*” [www.worldandi.com](http://www.worldandi.com).