

introduction to MAN Quest

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.”

— 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

There is no magic formula for becoming a man. There is no wand to wave or dust to sprinkle. Becoming a man is an individual experience that is not for sale. If they could bottle “manhood,” it’d be worth billions. Why? Because if we’re honest, most of us guys don’t really feel like men. So most males spend their whole lives with a gnawing suspicion that a key piece of their masculinity is missing. As guys, we try all sorts of foolish pursuits to make us feel more manly, only to come up empty.

You don’t become a man when you reach a certain age, buy your first car, develop facial hair, get a tattoo, graduate college, date your first girlfriend, or buy your first house. That’s the amazing part about becoming a man — there’s no *one* experience or accomplishment that gets you there. Only a man who has become a man knows when he’s arrived.

Sadly, most men in today’s American culture have no definition or benchmark for manhood. Try this revealing experiment: Ask any older guy, “What does it mean to be a man and at what point did you become one?” He is likely to be totally baffled. Most guys, regardless if they’re in their twenties, forties or eighties, have no clue on how to answer this all-important question.

When we really get down to it, most guys measure their manhood in one of three ways — financial success, sports accomplishments, or sexual conquests. Every beer commercial on television seems to reinforce one of these shallow goals. No wonder there is a male identity crisis in our country. There has to be something greater to live for than making money, hitting home runs, or getting women. Right? These are *not* the measure of a man.

In their adolescent years, boys are taught that athletic success equals manliness. In their teen years, they’re told that getting girls elevates their status as a man. As an adult, they’re told that the guy with the best job and the biggest paycheck is the man to emulate. The proving grounds for male success are too often the ball field, the bedroom, and the boardroom.¹

Personally, I didn’t know I was a man until I was in my 30s. And let me tell you, I wasn’t much of one even then. Until I gained a clear and compelling definition of manhood, I was clueless. I spent most of my life walking around feeling like a little boy trapped in a man’s body. When conflict occurred, I was either uncertain of what to do or paralyzed with fear. When those I loved turned to me for emotional support, I had nothing to give. What an empty and confusing feeling it was to have nothing to offer. I tried all the things the TV ads

promised would make me feel like a “player,” but their formula for happiness only left me feeling weak and powerless.

Today’s male is born into a system of emotional oppression. The deck is stacked against us from the start as we’re bombarded with messages telling us to choke off our feelings and set our sights on power, prestige and possessions. Because of how we’re wired up, males don’t typically have a strong connection to our inner emotional lives anyway. And the culture makes it worse! No matter how hard a dad may try to offset this trend, his son’s concept of masculinity will be subliminally defined by ESPN, Xbox, Madison Avenue, Hollywood and the music industry. No wonder it’s such an uncertain and dangerous time to be a teenage boy.

As a young adult on the verge of manhood, lots of things are changing. Your body is growing, your perspective on life is evolving, and your hormones are kicking into high gear. This is a great time to start wrestling with the question: “What does it take to be a man?”

If you’re tempted to put it off, remember this — the longer you wait, the harder it gets.

Unlike the voices of pop culture, *Man Quest* provides a trustworthy message and a reliable set of guideposts to help you find authentic manhood. Remember, 99 percent of all men have no guiding definition of what it means to be a man. I believe *Man Quest* could be exactly what you need. Use it well!



This crazy world will send all of us spinning in confusion at times. You will get lost. Hopefully, you can hang onto these Guideposts in the middle of life’s storms. They will serve you well.

Man Quest Guideposts:

- Accept Responsibility
- Lead Courageously
- Pretend About Nothing
- Journey with God
- Protect Your Heart
- Engage in Deep and Meaningful Relationships

These six concepts are pretty weighty and deserve lots of time to think through and discuss. That’s why this workbook is not meant to be done individually — it’s a team exercise.

Ideally, a father and son should work through it together. If a father is not available, find another male role model to fill in. While the manhood journey is ultimately an individual process for a boy, it requires the active involvement of a man leading the way.*

***Note:** The Man Quest is designed to be a father/son or mentor/boy experience. There is great value in sharing the experience with a group, but it's not mandatory. If you choose to share the journey with a group of men and boys, there is helpful material in the Appendix to guide you.

Leading the way

In today's society, the concept of "doing our own thing" is a badge of honor. But for most of history, boys worked alongside their fathers to learn a trade. Father and son sweated together in the fields, worked side by side in the woodshed, or fished together from a boat. Countless life lessons, trade secrets, and male bonding moments were shared as they toiled together.

Today, many men have abdicated their roles as fathers. It's tragic that there is no man present to teach, share or inspire boys in half the homes in America. And if there *is* a male around, he usually settles for passive parenting or "osmosis fathering," where the man simply assumes the son is soaking it all in without any active guidance.

The journey to manhood is not a solo trip. It's meant to be shared with a father or male mentor. Sadly, most men feel ill-equipped to teach boys what it means to be a man — mostly because they don't feel like one themselves. It's hard to give something to your son that your father never gave to you. And very few of us received the gift of masculinity from our dads.

Today's teen watches about 32 hours of TV per week. Add in social networking and smart phones, and it's no wonder we need a whole new language for explaining masculinity — one that connects with the hearts and minds of a new generation. Our boys are crying out for somebody to make sense out of all the chaos and confusion swirling around them. Competing messages from the internet, video games and movies rarely shed any light on true masculinity. Boys need someone who will help them "sift through the rocks to find the rubies."

Our media-savvy, high-tech boys need to realize that there are still such things as true strength, noble virtue, and values worth fighting for. They need to know that having faith doesn't make them soft, but makes them strong — by developing their spiritual muscles. They won't often admit it, but they long for a firm foundation and something or someone to believe in.

To fill this cultural vacuum, teens try to “self-initiate” by risking life and limb in crazy stunts. The reckless stars of movies like *Jackass* and its YouTube copy-cats are the new role models. There’s a reason the Adventure Sports business is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. The instinct for initiation is alive and well in today’s young men, but without the guidance of a reliable mentor, it manifests as risky behavior. Without knowing why, many teens (and immature adults) channel their hunger for legitimate manhood into a macho brand of daredevil adventures.

The most important initiation story of all time is the life of Jesus. Before starting his ministry, God led him into the desert for 40 days. He didn’t just wander out there. He was sent to the desert to be tempted by the devil. Hunger, wild beasts, loneliness and pain were all part of the process. What kept him going? Shortly before he set out on this desert experience, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. As he emerged from the water, he heard his Father say something incredibly important — that he was a “*beloved son*” (Matthew 3:17).

Are there any greater, more empowering words that a man can hear? A trek up the Himalayas or a canoe ride down the Amazon can’t match the thrill of hearing words of affirmation from an adult man who loves us!

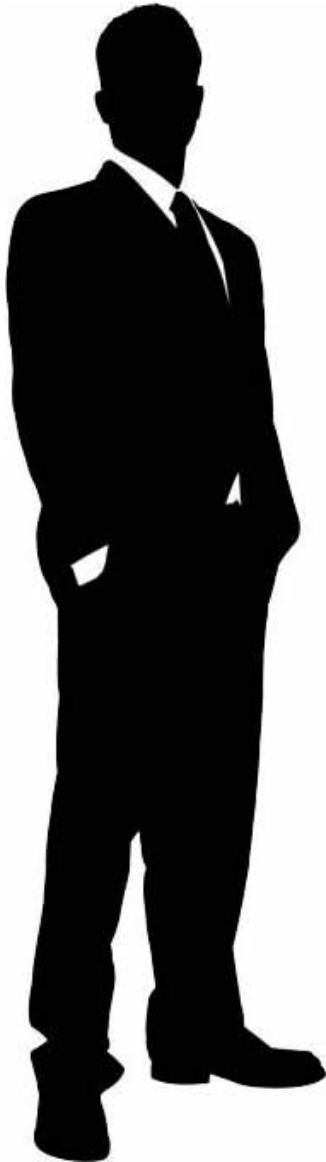
My prayer for *Man Quest* is that men and boys will embrace it, learn from it, and find a way to make it part of their lives. This shared experience will lead a boy toward manhood and a man toward a deeper walk with God. Remember, it’s crucial that an older male (father, grandpa, friend, etc.) commits to teach, guide and bestow his blessing on a boy. With their help, any boy can make it against any odds — and attain the worthy goal of manhood. At the end of the day, real men are *made*, not born.



Estrogen Disclaimer: *Sorry, ladies. The next leg of your son’s journey requires active direction from somebody who’s been down the road he’s getting ready to travel. There are countless coming-of-age stories in literature and movies, tales where the boy sets out on a journey toward manhood. Luke Skywalker, Tom Sawyer, Frodo — of all the boys-to-men stories ever been told, I can’t recall one time where the boy asks his mom to show him the way.*

the portrait of a man

So you want to be a man, huh? These are some pretty sobering statistics about men in America. Without a clear and compelling definition for manhood, most men opt into the culture's program, increasing the likelihood that they will become a statistic.



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90% of men report they do not have a real friend.
.....
- 20% of men have an alcohol problem.
Four times more than women.
.....
- 25% of men cheat on their wives.
.....
- 33% of men have tried an illegal drug.
.....
- 34% of adults have witnessed a man beating his wife or girlfriend.
.....
- 70% of divorces due to workaholism were caused by men.
.....
- 15% of men suffer from depression.
.....
- Men are eight times more likely to commit a violent crime than women.
.....
- 50% of men will be divorced.
.....
- 85% of men are likely to click on Internet sex sites if given the chance.
.....
- 70% of boys raised in the church will abandon their faith in their 20s.
Most never return.
.....
- One out of every 75 U.S. men are in prison.

MAN Quest: the six guideposts



Accept Responsibility

If anything good is going to happen, a man knows it's up to him and he must act. A man doesn't sit around and wait for somebody else to do what needs to be done.



Lead Courageously

There's injustice all around us and a battle to be waged. A man moves into uncomfortable places and uses his strength to bring order and bless others.



Pretend About Nothing

A man lives in truth and requires truth from others.



Journey with God

A man listens closely for God's quiet voice and "picks up his cross daily" to go wherever he leads.



Protect Your Heart

A man fills his mind, body, and spirit with things that are true, noble, pure, lovely, right, admirable, praiseworthy and excellent.



Engage in Deep and Meaningful Relationships

A man doesn't live in emotional isolation. He engages in close relationships and seeks out people to share life with, especially other men.

the story of dad

Every man has a story! It may be a comedy, a tragedy or an epic, but we all have one. There are things we are proud of and chapters we wish we could erase. Either way, they make us who we are. Whether we've sorted through each page and made sense of it all or put it back on the shelf for another day, we still have a story and it impacts who we are and how we live.

Before we talk more specifically about the Guideposts in *Man Quest*, each dad (or male guide) must openly share his life story with his son. Boys crave knowing us and they learn from our experiences. I remember hanging onto every little tidbit my dad would throw out for his boys to gobble up — about his childhood, war years, sports games and glory days.

When a man shares his story, there's a natural tendency to share the good and ignore the bad. Please resist this temptation to gloss over mistakes in favor of sharing only the good. Your boy is becoming a man and needs to know all about you, warts and all. In many ways, your mistakes and embarrassments are probably the most important parts to share. Due to genetics, modeling, or some combination of both, there is a greater likelihood that *our* kids will repeat our mistakes. Keeping our kids in the dark about our struggles doesn't help boys grow into men. Ultimately, sharing the tough stuff lets a boy know he can be trusted with important and confidential info.

Men, telling your story will put a stake in the ground. It will create a natural marker for more and easier dialogue as you discuss the "Quest." As you let him in on who you are, it will draw you closer together. Let him in on what you're thinking and how you're feeling. Teach him that it's manly to open your heart and mind to other men. Vulnerability encourages vulnerability.

Helpful Hints for Telling Your Life Story:

Find a time when you won't be interrupted or rushed. Do something special and memorable. Go to a favorite place or do a special activity beforehand.

Tell your story chronologically to provide some context. Focus time on your childhood and the highlights/disappointments from your youth. What was your father like? School? Choose 4-5 pivotal moments from your life story that have shaped who you are today.

Take some time to think through what you want to say but don't write it all out. It's most important that it's natural and not scripted.

Take about 40-45 minutes, then leave plenty of time for questions.

Decide if there are things that are too sensitive to tell your son at this time. Pray about it.

Don't feel like you have to know everything. It's okay to say "I don't know" or "that's still confusing to me." There are things we are all still trying to figure out in our lives.

Pray beforehand and invite God to be present in the moment with you and your boy.

Relax and have fun!

Life Story Outline

My childhood ▲

My dad ▲

My teenage years ▲

Highlights ▲

Disappointments ▲

Regrets ▲

Significant relationships ▲



guidepost 1

accept responsibility²

If anything good is going to happen...a man knows it's up to him and he must act. A man doesn't sit around and wait for somebody else to do what needs to be done.

key verse

"When someone has been given much, much will be required; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required." — Luke 12:48, Jesus speaking

Show Up, Stand Up, Speak Up.

Back in Genesis, the first man, Adam, was given dominion over the earth and had a special relationship with God. Unfortunately, he decided to go his own way. He ate from the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," even though God told him not to. His sin wasn't simply that he disobeyed God, but that he wanted to be all-knowing like God. When Eve was tempted by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Adam stood by and said nothing.³ When Eve offered him the forbidden fruit to eat, again Adam said nothing. When God asked him and his partner Eve to account for their actions, Adam finally spoke up — but only to blame Eve for deceiving him! He sat passively on the sidelines for a while and then threw his wife under the bus.

A man knows there are times when he needs to cast away his fear and doubts and enter into tough situations. When there's an issue that stirs our heart, or when somebody is being exploited or marginalized in our presence, we must act. In these cases, a man needs to avoid the desire to hide or sneak away to safety (like Adam). First, he needs to make his presence known by simply **showing up** where he is needed. Next, he needs to take the very difficult

step of **standing up** and being seen by all. It's so easy to sit down in our chairs when we need to get up on our feet. Finally, he needs to open his mouth to advocate for what is right and true by **speaking up**.⁴ Yeah, a man runs the risk of saying something embarrassing or confrontational, but silence is not an option when something needs to be said. Often, men don't speak up because we don't really know what we think! Be a man of thought and conviction. Take time to think through your beliefs on key issues like faith, politics, and social issues, then don't be afraid to state your ideas.

When was there a time in your life when you didn't show up, stand up or speak up about something you should have? Did you regret it?

Now, ask your father or guide the same questions.

Your Strength is Needed!

When Jesus started his ministry he chose young men, mostly teenagers, to do his work. Ever wonder why? Young men are full of strength and passion and the promise of things to come. Young men are adventurers and world changers.⁵ That means you! You were made to be a difference-maker in God's big story. He has great plans for you, so buckle your seatbelt.

God gave men physical and emotional strength and it is needed! Three of the greatest lies men believe are: 1) I don't have what it takes to get the job done and will fail, 2) somebody else will take care of it and do a better job, and 3) I don't want to make a fool of myself. Satan is called the "father of lies" and he plants these seeds of doubt in our brains to keep us paralyzed and ineffective in God's Kingdom. He wants us to stay scared, useless, small and self-absorbed.

God has special things that he has mapped out for each of us to accomplish. He wants us to think big, dream big, and do something hard that's out of our comfort zone. Know why? Because when we stay in our "sphere of competence" (doing things that are easy for us), we rely on ourselves and rarely see God work.⁶ When we take a big risk and purposefully step into a new area, we are more reliant on God and that's exactly where he wants us to live. We choose to live in our "little story" instead of the "big story" God has planned for us!⁷ The big story is exciting, fun, and way more adventurous than the safe, little story we've decided to live in. God has something heroic, eternal and momentous for each of us. Our job is to figure out what that is.

When have you left something safe and secure for something new and adventurous? How did it feel?

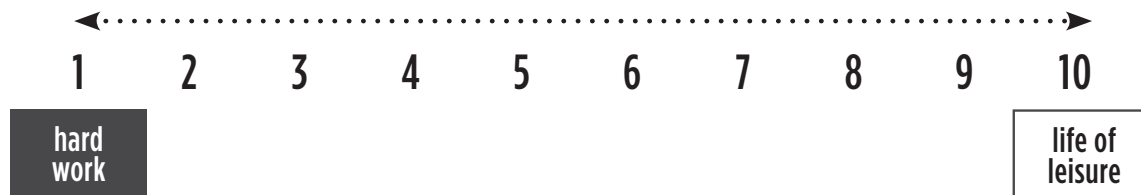
Now ask your dad or guide the same questions.

What do you think it would look like to live in God's Big Story? Is there something in your life God is pointing you towards — urging you to move out of your comfort zone?

Frr-eee-dom!

Wouldn't life be great if you could just sit around and play video games with your friends? Wouldn't it be cool to eat chips, shoot baskets, and not go to school or do chores around the house? Most teenagers would say this sounds like the perfect life!

If you could design your life, where would you fall on the work/fun continuum below?



Does a life of leisure and “takin’ it easy” really provide us with a life of happiness? Do you think playing every day of your life, with no responsibility, would make you happy?

You may have answered the above questions by saying, “Yes, absolutely — I could play every day for the rest of my life and be a happy camper.” If that’s how you answered, then you’re probably just starting out on the road to manhood.

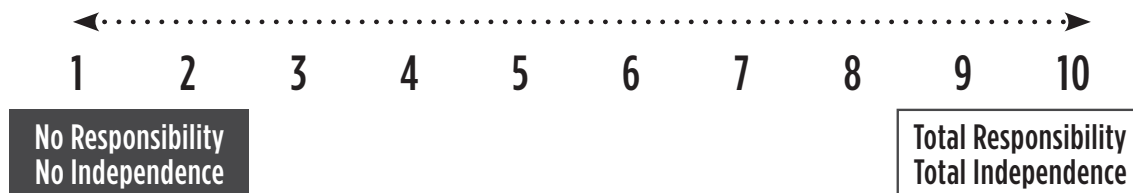
Don’t get me wrong, having fun is an important part of life. In fact, God hard-wired laughter and fun into the DNA of all humans. The problem is, God *also* created us to work and produce and bring good to this world. Remember, Adam’s initial job assignment was to manage the Garden and maintain its order.

As a young man, you are at an important crossroads in life. You are naturally gaining more independence and you’re making more key decisions with regard to your own life. In the coming years, mom and dad will have less and less influence on your choices and you will receive more independence with each passing year.

However, independence doesn’t come for free — it comes with a price. In order to purchase your freedom you usually have to “buy it” from your parents by taking on more responsibility.

Here's an important truth that may be hard to swallow: **The more responsibility you take on, the more trust you earn and the more independence you receive.** When you demonstrate your ability to handle important matters, you earn your parent's trust and they will naturally give you more decision-making authority. This will also happen in your work life someday. When your future boss sees you as competent, you will gain his trust and he will give you less supervision and more freedom. Freedom is great, but it's *earned* not *given*.

Where are you right now on the Independence/Responsibility paradigm? (Circle the number). Where do you want to be? (Put a star by your goal).



Jesus told a parable that relates to the Independence/Responsibility Paradigm:

A man going on a journey called his servants together and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on a journey. The man who received five bags went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

When the master returned, the men who doubled their wealth showed the master who replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servants! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.'

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For those who have will be given more, and they will have an abundance. As for those who do not have, even what they will have will be taken from them.'

—Matthew 25:14-29

Do you think the Independence/Responsibility paradigm is fair? Why or why not? What happened to the servant who didn't want the responsibility of managing the money? Was that fair?

Peter Pan

There's always been the kind of man who spends his time soaking up every bit of fun for himself — slacking around and not contributing anything good to anybody else. Peter Pan never wanted to grow up. He wanted to stay a little boy forever and have no responsibility whatsoever. Today, there are lots of modern-day Peter Pans running around looking for the next new thrill (sports car, adventure trip, beautiful woman, exotic vacation, whatever) to keep them feeling young and alive and free from responsibility.

Let me tell you, there's a huge difference between growing older and growing up. Most American men get older but never mature past a middle school outlook on life. It's sad to say, but for most guys, how they see the world as adults isn't much different from their junior high years. Don't believe it? Visit any class reunion to see it in action!

It's important to remember that the story of Peter Pan is only a fairy tale! In the real world, God is calling all men to live a life of grand adventure, but we must be willing to take on some *responsibility* to get there. It rarely comes easy.

Be a "Yes" Man!

In today's world, we can enjoy many of life's comforts without leaving our house. An unbelievable world of entertainment is available at our fingertips — literally 24 hours a day if we want it. There's hardly any reason to go outside of our homes for fun anymore. Which is one reason it's so easy these days to cocoon indoors and say "no" to new opportunities.

As human beings, we learn by putting ourselves into new experiences. We grow by saying "yes" to new things and trying them on. If they don't fit, we can take them off and move on to something else. Make sure to be a "Yes" Man! Be willing to say "Yes, man, I'll try it" to new experiences. *Warning: Saying "yes" to new experiences just may put you into some difficult and precarious situations* (that's the point). Say "yes" to new risks that will take you out of your comfort zone and challenge you, like taking a mission trip, becoming a camp counselor, working towards your Eagle Scout, trying out for a sport, running for class president, starting a lawn cutting business, etc. The opportunities to be a "yes" man are endless. Go ahead, stretch yourself further than what's comfortable and see what happens.

Sure, you could fail. And yes, you could hate it. It may even feel like a total waste of time. On the other hand, it could be the best thing you ever did! Why not try it? Condition yourself to say "yes" to new things instead of "no." Step up to the plate and take a couple of swings and see what happens. It may not work out. But God may have some totally new and cool adventures for you to discover!

When have you said “no” to something you should have said “yes” to? What did you do instead? Do you regret not being a “yes” man?

Take This Cup

Jesus came to earth for a specific purpose — to be the ultimate sacrifice to atone for man’s sinfulness and restore our broken relationship with God. Because he was “fully God,” he knew in advance that his earthly life would end in torture, agony and execution. Because he was also “fully man,” he was naturally and understandably distressed by the upcoming pain.

On the night before his death, Jesus was with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Knowing Judas was on his way to betray him, he told his companions, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.”* The book of Luke describes the level of his inner torment by saying *“his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.”*

As humans, it’s natural to avoid pain if possible. I’m sure Jesus was experiencing this revulsion as he faced the inevitability of his death. He knew the whole story. He knew that he would be nailed to a cross in less than 24 hours. But he also knew his ultimate purpose; his pivotal, irreplaceable role in the redemption of the world. So while he wasn’t running from his chosen plan of action, he knew it would be excruciatingly painful.

Reflecting both his humanity and his divine nature, Jesus prayed, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...”* Or in other words, *“Is there any other way for this all to happen?”* But at the end of the day he obediently and voluntarily accepted his responsibility and prayed *“...Yet not my will, but yours be done.”* (Luke 22:39-44)

It’s hard to accept responsibility, especially when there’s a strong likelihood of pain. It’s so much easier to run in the other direction. But in the end, there are times when a man knows, in the depth of his soul, that there are things he must do ... and he does them.



A Movie to Watch Together: “The Ultimate Gift”*

Questions for the Group:

Did Jason accept responsibility on his own?

Why did Red make Jason’s inheritance contingent upon his performing certain activities?

Did Jason learn anything from digging fence posts? How did he feel afterwards?

What happened to Jason’s friends when he “lost everything”?

How did he find “true” friendship and love? Was it easy?

Jason said “As long as I can remember all I ever wanted to do was have fun.” What was the key moment when he made the transition toward accepting responsibility?

What did Jason do with the ultimate gift?

*Award-winning inspirational drama, *The Ultimate Gift*, ©2007 20th Century Fox, rated PG

notes:
