

# THE MANABOUTS MANUAL

WRITTEN BY STEPHEN L. MEEKS  
WITH NOTES BY CALEB MEEKS



DESIGNING A RITE OF PASSAGE FOR YOUR BOY



Manabouts





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# dedication

Donna and I dedicate this book to our children,

Daniel, Caleb, Hannah, Benjamin, and Joshua, who live as proof that God's ways work... VERY well.

# acknowledgements

I couldn't have done it without my family. What I gained from my Dad was not all I needed, but the little he had, he passed on to me, and -- to me -- it is a treasure. But what has happened from there has been a gift of God. I have concluded that little, if any, of what I've experienced as a father, and share with you in this book, has to do with me or my dad, but much to do with God's generosity. My wife and I both grew up in alcoholic families and the dysfunction that comes with those dynamics. Donna's done much better at learning how to parent, but I have never been very good at reading about parenting. However, by God's grace, even though I did not know or study how to be a father, my children became faith-filled, well adjusted, mature, and balanced people. I could not be more pleased with EACH one of them. So, how did it happen? I could answer, "Well, it was their mother," and I would not be stretching the truth far; but really, even she will admit that there was something more at work. The truth is that God seems to have simply **given** us wisdom, instincts, and a sense of what to do and how to do it. I've decided that in some divine way God looked down and decided, "I have a gift for Stephen." This is why I am so confident that what I'm sharing in the Manabouts Manual is worth using -- it has worked.

Each of you will decide how much or which parts of the material you'll use, and that is perfect. Yet, I must say that all of it has GREAT benefit. So, whether you use it all on your manabout trip, or later as separate items, I hope you'll use everything eventually. In the meantime, pray that God 'gift' you with more than you got from your parents .... and even more than I am sharing here.

Before moving to the book itself, I must repeat that my kids are amazing, not perfect, but exceptional. I can't believe all I see in them (Bunji-cord jumping and para-sailing aside). Christ is alive in them. They walk with God as their god, as their friend, and best of all....as their good, good Father. I give HIM the credit for who they are and for helping me lead them. I (and they) are praying the same for you and the boy you are leading toward his leap into that glorious, frightening yet stirring, thing we call manhood.

# preface

Dear Reader,

Welcome! Before we say another word, we want to express how delighted we are that you are taking this step. Rare is the man willing to invest the energy and care required to pull off a meaningful rite of passage for his son or a boy he mentors. Congratulations, you are one of the few and the best.

For my sons and me, this journey began in 1997 when I invited my oldest son to a fishing trip at the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota. He was thirteen, and I thought that was a timely age to take him on a special 'man trip' and invite him to make a commitment to chastity. The trip was far more successful than I had dreamed, and we gained ground on levels I had not expected. Our communication improved, a man-to-man bond developed, and above all, something happened in his heart that I honestly hadn't planned on... He became a man.

After that first trip, I knew this had to be part of my other three sons' experience. With each trip, the event improved and deepened in meaning and importance. Interestingly, the ones who had gone before experienced a deepening of their own commitment to true manhood as each succeeding brother became a member of the inner-circle that we came to call "The Meeks Men." This trip bonded us as a father and sons and brothers and developed a special connection more easily understood by experience than description.

Honestly, we didn't have everything that took place planned, but we valued those serendipitous learnings so much that we incorporated them as part of the next boy's trip. As a result, when we led a father and his two sons in a trip of their own, we had an arsenal of great ideas and a heap of experience that shortened their learning curve and maximized the potential for their rite of passage experience.

Though we had tossed around the idea of sharing our experience with others, it was not until after that trip with our friend and his sons that we knew we HAD to get it out to other men. Fatherhood is in trouble, and many men just need a starting point. Boys certainly need a marker, a moment, a day to which they can point and say, "That is when I became a man." The event that has evolved over our twenty years, and that we describe in this manual, is a starting place for fathers who want to lead their boys into manhood. It holds the potential to produce that moment that a man will look back upon as "the day I became a man."

Our hope is that dads and mentors everywhere start from here and design even better rites of passage for their sons and boys they mentor. The manabout is our experience and our model, but it is neither perfect nor the best... Yours will be the best, because it will be yours. Bring back to the rest of us what you learn and we will celebrate that with you.



"The Meeks Men"

Stephen, Daniel, Caleb, Benjamin and Joshua



# chapter 1

# LEADING THE LEAP INTO MANHOOD

## A GUIDED TOUR

*"Through imagination, we can visualize the uncreated worlds of potential that lie within us."*<sup>1</sup>

- Stephen R. Covey

We know you are ready to get this thing up and running. We are with you 100% and thought a quick tour would helpful before diving into the details. So, in this chapter, we give you a clear idea of what the end product — the four to five day long father-son event *The Manabouts Manual* will help you create for you son's leap into manhood — might look like. Our walk-through tour will put the material discussed in later chapters into a context that makes the whole process more understandable and easily doable. In this first chapter we step you through the days, discussions, and decisions involved. Now, if a word, phrase, or topic is unfamiliar, just keep reading, it will become clear, and in later chapters we give you definitions, specifics, and how-to's, along with more examples of everything mentioned in the tour. So, to start, just relax and let us share our story with you... It was grand!

### **Day of Departure**

Time is always scarce when you are working a full-time job.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen R. Covey *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, pub Simon and Schuster. New York (1989) page 103.

When my first son turned thirteen, I was working a full-time job as well as several part-time jobs. I was excited for Daniel's rite of passage but hadn't been able to prepare much other than to drag the camping gear out of the shed and ask my wife to pick up some food for five days of camping. She had taken Daniel to shop for us the evening before we left.

When I got home, it was dark and I was exhausted; however, I was looking forward to a few days off and the special trip I'd planned with my boy, who was eager to become a man. A sandwich in one hand, a drink in the other, I went upstairs and stuffed all the clothes and toiletries I thought I needed into a backpack. It took me about 12 minutes. Daniel's stuff was ready. We loaded food, gear, and luggage into our van and tried to catch some sleep before an early departure. A 13-hour drive was ahead, and another 8 the next day. That night I was physically exhausted, the house was quiet, and all was well, but thoughts of giant smallmouth waiting for me in a crystal-clear wilderness lake wouldn't let me sleep. We left at 4 a.m. instead of 5 a.m.

As rushed as those final hours were, I'd pitched this idea over a year before. After his 12th birthday, I had asked Daniel, "I'd like for us to take a fishing trip together, just you and me, next summer after you turn thirteen, to talk about man-stuff. Would you like to do that?" He, of course, jumped on it. This call to manhood was an invitation to begin his life's mission of bearing the image of God on the earth. It turned out to be one of the best things I've ever done as a father.

The evening before his trip, I had overseen a concrete pour until nearly dark. It was a Friday, and I had the weekend plus the whole next week off. A Southern summer spent over drying concrete is draining. I needed the break from it and the odd jobs that typically filled my weekends. But this would be no time of rest, either physically or emotionally.

I tried to conceal my concerns about the trip, like the fact that I didn't know what I was doing! The idea of the man-trip had been the offspring of a hodgepodge of ideas collected from reading and talks with other dads. Yet I knew it was important. Even if it didn't turn out perfect, it would be meaningful and memorable to the both of us. Daniel was so excited that I don't think he noticed the knot in my stomach. I'm not naturally an adventurer, so the unfamiliar makes me uneasy. I prefer the status quo and doing things I've done before. This trip would be neither of those.

It was the era of tape players and Dr. James Dobson's radio ministry "Focus on the

Family.” This was my first time to try leading a boy into manhood, so everything was as much a first for me as it was for Daniel. Donna thankfully suggested that, as we drive, we listen to Dr. Dobson’s tape series<sup>2</sup> on adolescence to break the ice on subjects that were certainly on his mind. The breeze whipping through our lowered windows, the excitement of the open road, time together, and the prospects of wilderness surroundings and muscular bass kept us talking for hours; when we weren’t talking, Dr. Dobson was. Our travel plan was through Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Wisconsin, and then to Northern Minnesota. The farther north we drove, the more unfamiliar the surroundings were.

With every mile, each unfamiliar fast-food chain, and all the noticeable changes in local accents, an “us” was forming. Daniel and I were more and more like one another and less and less like those around us. Distance from the familiar, together with a growing proximity to the unfamiliar, creates disorientation. Disorientation, as uncomfortable as it is, has value. Unfamiliarity sets us in search of the familiar; as we lose our balance we reach for something stable. Daniel was out of his element. I was his constant. With each day, Daniel oriented himself around me... which was exactly the plan.

We landed the last available tent site at a KOA park somewhere near Eau Claire, Wisconsin, putting the rainfly in place holding flashlights in our teeth. The place was packed and LOUD! We didn’t sleep well, but it was good being out for the first night in sleeping bags. Our adventure had launched, and already we were making memories, learning to work together, sharing experiences that belonged exclusively to the two of us. We would arrive at the destination soon enough, but the value of these pre-event memories and experiences was too important to rush.

Our two-day drive was the equivalent of warm-up drills before a football game. Jumping immediately into the core of our manabout would have made it feel strained, stiff — something like an item for me to check off my to-do list rather than the once-in-a-lifetime event it was. It doesn’t take a two-day drive to have an effective manabout, but it does take enough time and effort to show your initiate that you are as excited as he is about the event. I read something recently that shared this sentiment. “The greater the desire and delight of the father is, the greater the influence and learning of the son.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Dobson. *Preparing for Adolescence*, pub. Revell Books (2005).

<sup>3</sup> *The Sefirot* by Nissan Dovid Dubov, p. 6; [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)

My enthusiasm for the trip enhanced Daniel's. If I'd been bothered or irritated by the inconvenience of the trip, he'd have lost enthusiasm as well. Dad, be excited! Remember how things felt for you at that age. What would a week like this have meant? Start talking about the trip during the days leading up to it. Go over the packing list. Ask how he is feeling. Share your feelings. Ask Mom how she feels about it. Without giving away the details of the event, build excitement by simply expressing how excited you are to be with him and for him to soon join you in manhood. Build this up well, and he'll listen to what you say to him on the trip. If you are excited, he can be too. As many hours as I worked that summer, I found time to pull out a map and show him the route we'd drive, to put new line on our fishing gear, to whisper, "I can't wait to get up there and see you latch on to one of those sallies!" It doesn't take much, but what it takes is worth it.

We stopped at a public campsite just a few miles from Ely, Minnesota at the end of our second day of driving. The next morning we'd get up early, drive to the outfitter's, and pick up our canoe, maps, and permits. On the drive, Dr. Dobson's series had opened the lid on a range of topics I wanted to discuss with Daniel. We listened to talks about the physical changes happening in adolescence, about the sexual interests awakening as a result, and many other subjects. These kick started the father-son talks I knew I ought to have, but neither of us seemed to know how to have. I was careful to introduce him to as much information as he wanted, but with tact and with dignity. I told him, "Son, you are going to need to understand these things about anatomy and about women. It isn't shameful or evil. It's good because it is God's design. I want you to know all of this. I don't want you to have to guess or get it from some 15-year-old who doesn't really know what he's talking about. I'm here. If you have questions, you ask me. I won't embarrass you, no matter how silly or insignificant you may think your questions. I'm on your side, and I know what I'm talking about. In our family, we handle these things with dignity, and we Meeks men handle them in-house."

Did you notice how I used my language to pull him toward me? With my words, I created an 'us space.' It is an invitation to and for him to bring ANYTHING on ANY OCCASION or ANY TOPIC to me without fear or concern of embarrassment or belittling. A man once shared with me how his dad totally blew this opportunity by creating an environment of shame that led him to porn. He shared that at about eleven years old, he had woken up from a wet dream. It shocked and frightened him! He didn't know if he was sick or what had happened. Fearful and worried, he mustered up the courage to ask his dad what was going on. Dad was in his workshop sanding a piece of wood.

When the boy told him what had happened, without even lifting his eyes the father replied, "It's nothing. You'll learn to deal with it." The boy felt dumb for having asked, left as much in the dark as when he'd come in... only with less hope of learning what had happened, if it would happen again, or how to deal with it if it did. His primary resource had just brushed him aside as if he were a wood shaving. He never went back to his dad for anything after that. Why would he? The risk of embarrassment was prohibitive. He'd have to look elsewhere for information on 'stuff like that,' and he did.

I don't want my boys to feel unwelcome or unsafe talking to me. You don't want yours surfing the web for 'information' about some of these matters either. That's why we dads need to create the 'us space' early in our manabout by assuring our son that he is safe with us. He has a blank check and 24/7 access to dad on anything 'man' or that he thinks is 'man-stuff.' It is a great relief to the boy, and an initial step in bonding the two.

Notice also that I talked about 'WE Meeks men' and refer to our policy of handling things 'in-house.' That kind of talk drives down stakes and markers and boundaries that are stronger than steel. You are speaking identity into your initiate when you speak of 'we,' and boys buy into it. With my words, I have crafted a world and offered my son the key to entry.

Just before his temptations in the wilderness, Jesus' father affirms him. In essence, he lets Jesus know there is an 'us-identity' between the two of them. He had a place, an identity, a world of his own. Later, when Satan offers him the keys to a different kingdom, Jesus rolls his eyes, "No thanks."<sup>4</sup> Gangs thrive because fathers fail to invite their sons to be part of 'we.' Men vainly search for who they are through achievement, brutality, possessions, bravado, or domination because they are looking for an identity. When I invited my sons to be 'Meeks Men' I built a place of belonging — a place of identity; and I protected them from a host of misbeliefs, opinions, and general tripe out there. I gave my sons peace of mind and security when I did that, and you can just as easily invite yours to be part of who you and your family are. Also, if you are leading a boy who is not part of your family, you can still offer him a powerful invitation. You can invite him to join 'us' like this, "Mike, I'm here to tell you that from now on, you can ask me anything about any topic. I promise to give you the honest facts. There are no questions out of bounds. I want you to be a man. I want you to be one of us."

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:10 (*paraphrase is mine*)

Being invited and included in the world of men provides grounding and stability to a young man wondering, “Do I have what it takes to be a man?” John Eldredge covers this in his book *Wild at Heart* illustrating how the invitation to be a partner in a larger story is important to the discovery of ‘our real name’ and ‘our real place.’<sup>5</sup>

Before we ever stepped into the outfitter’s shop, the basic parts of the manabout were in place. I had my son’s heart. He was ready. He wanted to be a man. He was eager for it, and he trusted me to lead him there. We had a bond, now all I had to do was point him in the right direction. I’d bluffed my calm so far, but there were still challenges directly ahead.

## **Day 1**

The morning came up clear, with only a few scattered clouds and a light breeze, but nothing threatening. We packed the tent, cleared our campsite, and pulled up to the outfitters by 7:00 am. John, the owner, helped with our many questions, acquainted us with our Boundary-Waters map, and then handed us fishing licenses and park permits. Meanwhile, his crew strapped a canoe on top of the van, and within a half-hour, we were driving to our launch site. Now, as fun and carefree as I’m making all of this sound right now, I was scared. Three times in my life I’ve nearly drowned, so water is not my favorite place to play. I tried to appear confident and not alarm Daniel, but he detected the seriousness in my voice when I cautioned, “It is dangerous out on that open water. Don’t shift your weight too quickly. Sit pretty well straight up and still. If I say, ‘Paddle,’ you PADDLE. If I say, ‘Stop,’ you STOP! Daniel, you MUST listen to me.” His expression turned somber (which was my intention), and we stepped into the craft.

That first stretch was nerve-racking. The wind was up a little. The waves were small, but with the waterline only 4 inches from the rim of our canoe, even the slightest shift in weight felt like we were about to capsize. At that time, I didn’t realize how overloaded and in danger we were. We’d tried to pack light, but we were inexperienced and the excess weight had us sitting very low in the water. Our total lack of experience added to the risk.

Reaching the first portage was a milestone. We’d faced the unknown and beat it! High

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<sup>5</sup> *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge, Thomas Nelson Pub. p. 99-104

fives and self-congratulations were our rewards. Half an hour later, we were off on the longer, but calmer, second leg of the day. It was better; we were better. Daniel was listening. The knot in my stomach was relaxing. The boat even seemed more stable. We portaged once more and then continued only a hundred yards to the campsite we'd been targeting since leaving John that morning. We were lucky — the campsite was vacant and suited us perfectly. It was situated across from a small, quite lily pad-covered bay and a waterfall that pumped fresh oxygen into the water. It had everything a fish could hope for!

That evening, our tummies full of smallmouth and northern pike prepared over our first campfire, we lay in our tent and talked. I asked Daniel how he'd felt out on the water. I chuckled when he said, "I'm amazed at how strong you are Dad. I didn't know you had that much strength in you, to portage the canoe and paddle all this way." His response indicated that I was gaining his respect and attention. At this point, he was noticing physical abilities, but his esteem for inner attributes was close behind. The challenges of oaring across open water, lighting a fire with one match, catching and cleaning fish on his own, outrunning a storm, helping pack or set up camp, even finding firewood and cooking our breakfast affirmed in my son that he had what it took to be a man. Not that these activities equal manhood, but they inform the boy that he can overcome obstacles like a man. Knowing, believing, "I have what it takes," is a prophylaxis against the doubt and experimentation that boys tend to fall for when they aren't confident they can be a man. Starting a campfire on his own strikes a flame of confidence in a boy and enlightens his view of himself. That fire, the fish, the bite of the rain and wind are his tangible proof.

Two years after Daniel's trip, my second son and I camped at that same site, across from the bay and the waterfall. Caleb asked if we could fish a little. We had more than an hour before sunset, so we launched the canoe. Keeping mainly near the water's edge, there were no strikes the first half-hour, so we decided to try near the base of the waterfall. I thought we would be fine if we stayed a safe distance, and we would have been except... "Watch it!" In an instant, we had capsized! The intensely cold water paralyzed my lungs; I couldn't breathe. I couldn't call for Caleb! Still underwater, I felt the powerful current pushing us away from the falls. I instinctively reached for Caleb. I could just see his yellow vest. He was close enough that I could grab him with one hand while I held the canoe with the other. Adrenaline rushed, and I literally threw him onto the hull of the canoe. My head then popped up and I gulped for oxygen! The cold was traumatizing! Some of our tackle and the oars were drifting with us toward

a small island. We held to the canoe and kicked toward the island. Once there we flipped the canoe over and drained the water. Shivering violently, I said, "We better get back to camp and dry out or we risk hypothermia." With two of our three oars and our tackle boxes (but not our rods), we hurriedly paddled to camp, put on dry clothes, and zipped into our sleeping bags to get warm. We offered a prayer of thanks for God's saving our lives, because we both were aware that things could have been much worse.

Note: I do not recommend such a near-death experience. However, this has become a shared memory between Caleb and myself. Overcoming this challenge left Caleb with a mountain-sized confidence: "I have what it takes." It seems that the unexpected challenges often become the greatest memories. Last year, we took a dad and his two sons on a manabout. A storm on the last evening prevented us from leaving for two more days than we were prepared for. The weather shut down the fishing and we were running out of rations. Finally, one morning the sun broke and the lake calmed enough. With this window of opportunity, we paddled 13 miles non-stop to outrace the next weather system. Of course, when we look back, it was being land-bound, low on food, and not knowing what was next that most assured us we had what it takes.

Down times, like the drive to and from the event, evenings and mornings around the campfire, hot or lazy afternoons, and meal times are the most valuable opportunities to share and talk. Not every moment on the manabout is busy or eventful, so take advantage of a down time to share your family story. Boys usually love to hear about their dad's growing up years, about his family life, about what Grandfather did for work, what Grandmother was like, and the dynamics of their home. Almost all this information is of interest to the initiate. Tales of your pets, trips you took, your first job, when you were disciplined (good old-fashioned spankings) and WHY. Yes, your boy wants and needs to know you weren't perfect. It is very important, however, not to go so far as to be shocking. There are some things in an adult's past which are not appropriate to share with a child, with an adolescent, or perhaps ever. Check your decision in light of what encourages, teaches, adds to his life; not what might appall, discourage, defame someone else, diminish his esteem for you, or create disgust. For example, it is NOT a good time to break the news to your twelve-year-old son that you have another child out there somewhere. Better to stick with the window you broke when you disobeyed Dad's instructions not to hit the baseball in the backyard. Be discerning. Use wisdom, tact, and discretion. Some things are best for another season.

I told my boys that my dad, my mother, and my brother went to the Block House Tavern for family nights. Dad would shoot pool for quarters, drink beer, smoke, and put money in the juke-box while my mom, my brother, and I sat in a booth sipping cold cokes and munching potato chips. From the sidelines, my brother and I cheered for our daddy! At the Block House, we felt safe, unaware of the dangers of secondhand smoke, or the problems with gambling or drunkenness. It was my life, and my boys want to know all about this because it is also part of their life. My roots are their roots and part of what it means to be a Meeks.

Not every story you share has to be dark or dire. I told my boys about my first go-cart, first job mowing Mr. Arnold's lawn with my tiny 18" push mower, my childhood friends, going on my first squirrel hunt, Buster our pet dog, and I described the houses and circumstances where I lived as a kid. They know the stories surrounding my conversion, like when I overheated running track the week before my baptism, and I was afraid I would die before making it to Sunday services! It's humorous now, but it wasn't when I thought I was dying as I up-chucked my lunch onto the grass beside the track! Tell that stuff to your boys. The same way that 2'x4' boards come together to create the framework of a house, so these random stories are the materials required for your boys to reconstruct their heritage — their home, as it were.

Now, for those who are mentoring boys other than their own, this is more challenging and may require just a little more preparation. Ahead of the manabout, talk to his parent(s), relative(s), a younger sibling or a step-relative. Ask them for stories of his beginnings and the background of his parents. Every piece of his story is important. Again, I stress the practice of wisdom in what is shared and what is not. It isn't your role to reveal what will be detrimental to him or create hurt, or what his family doesn't want to be shared. Clarify with the parent(s) or guardian(s) what can and cannot be told. Take some pictures on your phone of photos his family may have of him with his birth parents, his siblings, anyone from his youth who may be meaningful. All of these weave a story, his story, and give him a reference point. He didn't drop from the sky, he has roots, origins, and that means he is part of a family, which is something everyone needs to know.

That evening after the capsizing incident, Caleb and I put away the dishes, hoisted the food into a tree to keep it from the bears, and put out the fire. The loons were talking to one another across the lake, and the air had cooled. Tired, but nestled in a warm, dry sleeping bag, I was about to fall asleep when Caleb asked, "Dad. Are you awake?"

Only half-awake, I answered, “Yep.” Then he asked what had obviously been on his mind all evening, “Dad. How did you do that? How did you toss me onto the canoe with one hand while treading water?” “I don’t know,” I said, “Just something God must have done.” Crafting men is also something God does.

## **Day 2**

The day woke cool. Cloudless. No wind. Surface as flat as glass, disturbed only by hungry fish breaking the surface chasing breakfast. Glorious!

Eager to experience and tackle the wilds around them, my boys all rose earlier the first morning than they would have at home. “Hey, can I fish?” Daniel asked. My third son, Benjamin, was so excited he didn’t even ask. I just woke shortly after daylight to find him already down on the lake casting. Disorientation was already allowing for the creation of new habits, patterns, and opportunities to change for the better.

I believe boys like a challenge. Perhaps I should say, they NEED a challenge. Without friction, we can’t walk. With no resistance, our muscles wither. Without gravity, we’d float. Challenges offer boys a way to locate themselves. Just as navigation requires reference points, so hurdles, obstacles, challenges provide challenges to guys. Watch boys. They push things, pull things, open things, throw things, and destroy things. They are finding themselves in this — discovering the difference between themselves and their environment. It confirms that they are different and dominant. It also confirms that they are not God, because some things are not possible for them. Between the experiences of “I can do,” and the realization that there are some things “I cannot do,” a boy comes to understand that he has power, but not all power. In other words, this is healthy. In the absence of challenges, a boy becomes selfish, demanding, disrespectful, and increasingly dissatisfied. Boundaries need to be in a boy’s life, and challenges afford boundaries in the most natural ways — especially outdoor challenges, because their limits are consistent and set by God.

Day two for us was a day to rest and reflect. Having traveled several days in a row, we needed to be still, reflect on our surroundings, and absorb what we’d accomplished so far. It also gave us an occasion to reflect. To help my sons slow and assess, I required them to keep a daily journal. They didn’t have to record everything, but at least write a page a day. Their entry could include a story from the day like the capsized boat or our visit to the outfitter’s store. They could press a flower between the pages, or draw

a picture of our campsite, or simply share the details of the day's activities. But beyond the details and facts, I wanted them to write their FEELINGS. That's challenging for boys, but boys need emotional challenges as much as physical ones. I helped them through this if they needed it.

"Caleb, what happened out there?"

"I don't know. We were about to float into that big rock bluff. So, I pushed off the rock with my canoe, felt the canoe jerk, and next thing, we were upside down."

"When the canoe flipped, what was your first thought?"

"I thought we were going to die."

"And what did you feel?"

"Afraid."

"It scared me too. I've never been in a situation like it before. I'm just thankful God helped us."

Expression of emotion, talking about feelings can be a bewildering and draining exercise for boys (and men), but it is vitally important during the manabout to help you and your son share his emotions. Three simple questions will generally move conversations from facts and details to fears and joys. They are:  
What happened?

What did you think?

What did you feel?

Ask them in the order above. The event you are discussing doesn't have to be traumatic, like the canoe accident with Caleb. For example, here is a conversation Benjamin and I had as he fished that early morning from the lake shore.

"Benjamin, how are you doing?"

"Oh. Hi Dad. Just trying to catch breakfast."

"Any luck?"

"A couple of nibbles."

"What have you been thinking about while you are out here?"

"I don't know. Just how to catch a big one."

"It's so exciting to me. So, how does it make you feel?"

"It's so cool. I love it. Just so fresh and free and wild-like. I love it."

"I love it too son, and it does my heart good to be out here in it with you."

If your boy struggles to express his feelings, it is likely because you (or his guardians) do too. Help him by example. Express your feelings as I did in these two examples. It will bond you together at a special level you'll need for the challenges ahead on the trip and in life.

This day is also a good day to catch up on journaling. It is easy to become so busy during the first days of prep and travel that taking time to record what is going on is forgotten or skipped. I STRONGLY encourage journaling. It only takes a minute to explain the difference between journaling and keeping a diary. Whereas a diary is a record of what he did in the day, a journal is a record of what God did in the day. Journaling includes details about events and thoughts the boy may have had, but also includes reflections on God's presence in those events. A boy needs to learn to notice God's activity in his days, just like Jesus did. This journal becomes an heirloom keepsake that he will show his sons when they make their manabout. A completed journal will be one of the most treasured possessions you will ever provide him.

Our boys used inexpensive spiral notebooks as their journals. You may prefer a nicely bound volume, but even loose sheets of printer paper are fine. The primary thing will be what the boy writes (or draws) on those pages are the events of each day, his feelings, and where he sees/saw God in those events. You may need to remind him each evening or morning to record the events of the day, his feelings, and any

way(s) in which he noticed God’s involvement. It may become a treasure he’ll pass to his grandchildren. Over the generations, the collection of these journals will link the family and serve to lock them into the mega-story they are writing.

### Day 3

I broke the forest’s morning chorus with, “It’s time to move.” We packed and paddled for hours. I never told the boys where we were heading or why we needed to leave our comfortable first site. All I communicated was that we needed to cover a lot of ground today to reach our next campsite. The sun hid and the wind fought us on Daniel’s trip, but the air was warm and the lake lay placid nearly 20 years later on Josh’s third day. Both conversation and canoeing were easier today and focused largely on the details of travel. “Son, we want to go between those two islands to your right. Paddle a little more on your left now.” We beached hard, tied off, and ate lunch on a house-sized boulder connected to an unnamed island. Bald eagles flew overhead. Each time the lake erupted in a tiny geyser, it reminded us that beneath the water’s surface monsters patrolled — our hearts raced and imaginations grew with hopes of landing just one. By late afternoon we reached the new campsite. I’d been there with each of the other boys, and rich memories returned. It was here that I would make my men.

Before going further, read Benjamin’s thoughts and feelings about his manabout. Benjamin is my third son and is now 23 years old,

*When I think back on my manabout trip, which is often, the predominant thought is thankfulness. It continues to be a pivotal point in my progress toward God and manhood. It has been huge to have a transition-moment I can look back on — a physical marker of when I consciously chose Godly MANhood. It is the banner I can look to when the battle line seems to be faltering and fear screams to surrender... it is the memory-rich mainstay to my manhood. The manabout is no magic trick, no cultural cure to prolonged boyhood... but I can personally attest to its impact. My manabout wasn’t perfect, because my father isn’t perfect, yet the experience afforded me the firm foundation I needed to make that leap from boyhood to manhood. For this, I am truly thankful!<sup>6</sup>*

Just before the moment when your son will cross into manhood, an important

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<sup>6</sup> Journal entry, Benjamin Meeks.

conversation is needed that we call the “core story.” The core story asks and evaluates a series of questions in light of truth. Falsehoods are unmasked. Belief in them is renounced and the truth is embraced. Satan has one tool — he is the father of lies. Deception, misinformation, false understandings are his weapon. Therefore, the ‘core story’ is chiefly a spiritual event, and it should be covered in prayer (perhaps even prayer with fasting). Back home, have your wife and others praying for you and your son during the time when you will be discussing the core story. In the evening, after mealtime, is an ideal time to talk about the core story. A campfire draws you close, and the night blocks distractions. Here is a fictitious example:

“Josh, I want to ask you three things and get your responses. Just tell me the first thing that comes to mind. These aren’t trick questions.

“Up to this point in your life, what have you learned to do to be safe and secure?”

He thought a bit. “I guess obey my parents. Follow the rules.”

“Good. Now, what have you learned to do to be valued, loved, accepted, esteemed, or included?”

“I knew I was loved, but I guess to be good. Obey the rules.”

“Great. One more question. What have you learned to do to get people to act toward you the way you want?”

He said, “Joke. Laugh.”

“Good, Josh. Now let’s take a look at these. Does obeying parents and following the rules ALWAYS keep you safe and secure?”

“No.”

“Right. Even Scripture says that those who do what is right will suffer, even be hated. Ecclesiastes says, ‘The race does not go to the swift nor the battle to the strong.’<sup>7</sup> Things happen in life that we can’t control, and people don’t always respond as we expect or as they should. So, how can you be safe, Josh? Where does true security come from when life is threatening? Where did Jesus find comfort and security?”

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<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:11 (NIV)

"I guess in God."

"Exactly! Safety and security are found only in God. When things are falling apart, He is not. Trusting Him, living His way, is the place of safety. King David called God a hiding place, a refuge, a strong tower. Even when facing death, David found a safe place in God's way. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Your rod and your staff protect me' (Psalm 23:4).

"Josh, do you see how your old understanding is flawed?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe what David said about God being a safe place?"

"Yes."

"Good, let's look at those other two questions now. For how you keep control or how you get people to act toward you the way you want, you said, 'Joke. Laugh.' Does that sometimes work?"

"Yes."

"When does it NOT work?"

"Well, some people don't think I'm funny. Or sometimes what's going on is not a joking matter."

"Right. So, being funny or joking doesn't ALWAYS let you control how others respond to you?"

"No."

"What can be done to keep control when joking doesn't do it?"

"I don't know."

"Okay, let me help. Can you control anybody?"

"Hmmm, not really."

"Right. Who can you control, who can you make do what you want them to do?"

"I guess, just myself."

"Perfect! Good thinking, Josh. But who is in control of everyone and everything?"

"God."

"Right again. God is in control and He is the one who can cause others to do what they should or do what is best for them if they don't. Let me ask: Do you believe God is bigger than life and the world, or is it bigger than Him?"

"I believe God is bigger."

"So, who you can control is yourself. You can put yourself in His hands and trust Him to take care of things and people and situations beyond your influence or power. 'Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so He can lift you up at the right time. Cast your cares on Him, because He cares for you.'<sup>8</sup> Laughing and joking won't work ALWAYS, will they?"

"Nope. I can decide to follow God's ways even when things and people are not acting toward me the way I want. I can trust that His way will be the best in the long run?"

"That's right, Josh. Do you believe that is the correct and best understanding?"

"I do, now."

"Last, does obeying the rules ALWAYS get people to love or accept you?"

"No, because some people don't accept me when I do what God wants, even if it is a nice thing."

"That's right. So, nothing you can do will make you loved by everyone. When people

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NIV)

don't accept or include or affirm you, what do you do? How do you know you are loved?"

"Because God loves me."

"Exactly!! You and I are not loved because of what we do — good or bad. We are loved because of what God has done. As an example: I love you because you are mine. I loved you before you did anything. And even if I had not shown you love, still, God has loved and cherished you always. You know the verse that tells us this. 'For God so LOVED the world that he gave His only son...' <sup>9</sup> He made you. He loves you. Those are the facts. You can't earn it or destroy them.

"Yep. I get it. I sort of thought it anyway."

"Yes, earlier you told me, 'I knew I was loved.' That's right. You were already getting to the truth about this.

"I want to take you a step farther, Josh. We need to do something about the things you had believed and followed that were untrue. God always has us admit things we have believed and trusted that are false. These are false gods and if we follow them then we need to repent of that and ask God's forgiveness for having trusted them. God then wants us to agree or commit to following what is right or true. You need to do this with these three false beliefs you've followed. Do you agree?"

"Well, I never thought of it that way before, but yea, I see how I was basically following a false belief. I don't want that in my life. I want to follow God's ways."

"Great. Let's tell that to God."

"God, I thought safety came from obeying, that love came from being good, and that being funny would let me keep control of relationships. I see those are all false. I am sorry I haven't been looking to you or following your advice to me in these things. I reject those false beliefs. Please, forgive me. I believe you love me. Thank you. I believe you are my safe place. Thank you. And I submit myself to your control and trust your control of all things. Help me to always do this. Amen."

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<sup>9</sup> *John 3:16 (NIV)*

Allow an hour or more, and find a setting that is comfortable and private for this. This is a one-on-one exercise, so if you are with a group, find a private area where you can easily talk, cry, or express emotion without inhibition. The campfire, a park bench, picnic table, riverbank, or beneath the shade of trees are example locations. Begin with a prayer inviting God to the conversation, then explain the aim of this special time.

“Son, I want us to talk about your thoughts and feelings. This is a time to be honest and open with one another. What we talk about will not be told to anyone else. Everything will be between God and us. Are you okay with that?”

It is important to get his agreement. If he isn’t okay, then simply ask him to share what’s causing him to hesitate. If he can’t or won’t communicate, then don’t push. Affirm him and postpone like this:

“I see you are not ready yet to talk about this. That is okay, it is a challenge for most men to be open about their hearts, but you’ll get there as you mature. There is no rush, we’ll talk later if you’d like to wait.”

The idea is to affirm to him that his struggle to explore or share his feelings is common (therefore he is normal), and that you two can revisit the issue later. This keeps the door open and the question at the end gets him to agree to wait until that time.

At the point the initiate agrees, walk him through his core story. The core story is fundamentally the truths he has come to believe in three areas:

**Security** - What he has come to understand makes him safe and secure.

**Love and Value** - What he has come to understand brings him value, meaning, acceptance, and affirmation.

**Control** - What he has come to understand provides or gets him control when he is with others.

Understandings, assumptions, and beliefs in these three areas are typically formed by most of us by age twelve. However, they are usually flawed understandings, though, they seem to work as a child. Since our conclusions are flawed, they ultimately lead to trouble and failure in adulthood.

For example, a man in his early thirties recently told me he controlled others with rage and withdrawal. After asking him the three questions above, we discovered that the beginnings of these notions were rooted in his childhood ways of screaming at his mother until he got his way, or locking himself in his room if that tactic didn't work. As a kid, it worked, but as an adult, it destroyed his marriage.

Avoiding trauma in adulthood is one major reason detecting and correcting these beliefs is so very important for the initiate. You are literally pulling from Satan's hands the powers and controls he would otherwise use to lead this young man into a host of mistakes and foolishness.

Through these three questions, boys disclose what they have come to believe about safety and security, power and control, love and value. Uncovering the flaws in their understandings and replacing them with truth is the role of the mentor and sets a boy free from what would have otherwise led to a host of failed ways of dealing with life. Now, there is a final and key step. Beneath these three beliefs are his core wound and the core lie. That lie is tied to the boy's feelings about himself. To unwrap it, after getting his responses to the three questions above about safety, control, and love, ask him, "Son if you could put your arm around your twelve-year-old self, what would you say that your twelve-year-old self FEELS about himself?"

His answer is the lie Satan intends to use against him for the rest of his days. Answers may be things like, "I feel like I don't measure up. I'm a failure. I'm ugly. I'm not going to be a man. I feel unlovable, or I feel judged." Trap that thought. Replace it with the CORE TRUTH. What is the core truth? It's the message of the Gospel! It's the central theme of eternity. It's the heart of your, and his, Heavenly Father. The core truth is that He is loved, unconditionally. He doesn't have to measure up to be loved. His failures do not distance him from the love of the Source of Love. He may feel worthless, but Love says he is worth everything...ANY price! He is not worthless; he is priceless. He is not ugly, but precious in the eyes of his Heavenly Father. I think you get the point.

At the end of your discussion, ask that he verbally renounce the conclusion he had drawn, because it is based on a falsehood. In prayer, have him acknowledge and embrace the truth instead:

"Dear God, I have felt like a failure. I have failed at some things, but I'm not worthless. I know that I am important because You paid so much for me. Thank You. I accept

Your love of me. I reject the Devil's idea that I am worthless. I won't live with that belief anymore. I turn it over to You. Amen."

This is the core story — the story that has been driving his behavior and would have wrecked his life, but now you have re-scripted his story — at its core — with truth. Identifying and renouncing Satan's lies places your boy in a position of strength and freedom to approach the pivotal moment of the manabout — "the crossing."

(A "Mentor's Guide on How to Lead the Core Story" is in a Supplement B at the end of *The Manabouts Manual*.)

#### **Day 4**

Today culminates in a major event we call "the crossing." *The Manabouts Manual* opens with my son Daniel's "crossing" as he navigates his way across a raging river away from me. "The crossing" follows five milestone agreements we call "The Keys to Manhood." These are discussed in detail in "Stage Two-5 Milestone Agreements" later in this manual. Briefly, they are:

**Fear of God:** An agreement and trust in the Designer's agape love and a willingness to learn His ways and purposes.

**Honor of Parents:** An agreement to value the experience and learnings of parents and mentors.

**Devotion to Family:** An agreement to serve, protect, and provide for family.

**Kindness to Neighbor:** An agreement to do what is best for neighbor and friend.

**Love of Enemies:** An agreement to do what is best for those who do their worst to them.

While we encourage these five commitments to be made BEFORE "the crossing," they do not all have to be made on the same day. So, though we are introducing these agreements late in this 'walk-through' version of the manabout, these are typically spaced throughout the event. In fact, I typically space them throughout the days leading up to the crossing. For example, at the close of the first day of travel, at the

KOA camp, I ended the day by asking,

“Son, tomorrow we will arrive at Ely. We’ll get our gear and try to reach our first campsite by noon. I want you to know that I am asking God to lead us and help us and protect us. You know how I think about God. Tonight, I want to know what you think about God. Are you also ready to trust that the Designer wants your best? Are you ready to learn and then trust His ways and purposes for your life and the world?”

All my boys have eagerly agreed, and it set the table for everything to follow. Fear (respect and honor) of God was the true beginning of their transformation into men. With a society advocating for surface changes or evidence of manliness, this call to belief and commitment to God is a stark contrast. Suggesting that respect and honor for God is important, let alone core, is incongruent for them. After all, millions of males, who do not hold to this tenant, are working, marrying, and raising families like grown-ups. Yes, there are millions of fully grown males. Yes, they are engaged in adult activities. But being a man is more than growing a beard or being of age to vote! This is what I mean by “surface evidence of manliness.”

Being a man is deeper than skin and more than physical; at its center, it is an approach to life following the original purposes and design set out for him by the Creator. Those who do not commit to that purpose will eventually abdicate their duties (in part or in whole) to family and community. They will make choices selfishly. The flesh will dominate their hearts, and taking will replace giving. Commitment to the ways of God sets the stage for greater, nobler, healthier men and a safer, more secure society. This is why we call our boys to this commitment.

The four remaining milestone agreements can be addressed in any order. The order in which we have introduced them seems logical, but circumstances can dictate a different order. Ideally, each is preceded by some thoughts on them from the mentor, followed by discussion and, eventually, a commitment. We encourage the exchange of meaningful tokens for each or a singular token when all five have been agreed to. I’ll describe this in a scenario below.

For our manabout, I found the best time for these talks was around meals. After breakfast, lunch, or the evening meal are obvious mealtime opportunities, but I also included mid-morning snack times and campfire coffee breaks. I chose these because sharing a meal creates an automatically more intimate environment, in which we could

easily talk to one another and we could focus on our thoughts. These are sobering commitments, and you don't want them to be unclear or insincere. A meal is not completely necessary, but a situation where you can focus and talk easily and candidly is.

"Son, a man is devoted to his family. Do you want a family of your own someday?"

"Sure. I think so. Yes."

"Great! I want you to have a joyful family, and that's why I want to talk with you about what it means for a man to be devoted to his family. It isn't always easy, but it is rewarding.

"First and foremost, a man who is devoted to his family is devoted to God. You and I have already talked about that, and I'm proud of you for making that agreement to fear God. Learning, trusting, and imitating God's ways will show you how to be a devoted husband and father. Do you see that?"

"Yep."

"Good. Well, I want to talk about some things most boys don't realize that they can do for their families even now at your age and years AHEAD of having a wife or family. Most boys your age don't think ahead about these things, but I want you to be ready and have every advantage you can. Leading a family starts before you even have one."

At this point, you have his attention. He is curious and is getting a head start on the other guys his age. You are creating an image of himself that is apart from the crowd and positioning him to think and live differently than others. This is the power of a manabout! It draws a distinct line between the informed and the uninformed. In perception and in reality, it separates the men from the boys.

"Son, God says that men are to control themselves. The great apostle Paul wrote to a young man, Titus, about self-control. 'Encourage young men to be self-controlled,' he said. 'It (God's grace) teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age' (Titus 2). Son, a real man keeps himself under control. This means he does not let his feelings run

his life. He operates off of principle and truth. His fear of God is the guide for his life. Do you understand this?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, then how would this work out with the strong sexual feelings you will have?"

"I guess it means I'll control those feelings like God tells me to?"

"Yes, but how will you control those feelings?"

"I don't really know, except that I will because I want to stay and show control. Also, I respect God and I believe His way of self-control is best for me."

"Exactly. For me, as a young man, it also helped to think about my future wife and your future children. If you are devoted to them, meaning that you consider their best interests and provide for them, then what would you want to bring to your wife? Would you want to bring her your sexual purity, meaning you are a virgin and have saved that part of you just for her, or would you want to give that away to someone else and not bring that to her?"

"I'd want to bring the best I could to my wife. I'd want to treat her the most special of all."

"Perfect! You'll also want to bring a good example to your children. One day they will probably ask you if you were sexually pure before you married their mom. You'll want to let them know that you kept yourself under control just for her. That will be a powerful encouragement to your sons and daughters to wait too. Do you see how sexual self-control until marriage is already practicing devotion to family?"

"Yes, I see it. I hadn't thought of that before."

"So, son, this is a big commitment. It means keeping your eyes off pornography as well as keeping your body virgin. Is that something you are ready to commit to in my presence and before God? Are ready to commit to being sexually pure until marriage?"

"I want to protect my wife and children. I commit to you and to God to being pure sexually until marriage."

Congratulate him! Pray with him and ALLOW HIM to talk to God directly (pray) about his commitment to purity. When the prayer is completed, exchange a token. I gave my sons a token they could carry with them at all times as a constant reminder. I've heard of people exchanging a ring. This 'purity ring' becomes a kind of accountability token reminding them of their pledge. Others give a wristband with the phrase "committed" or "in control" on it. A medallion with words or the manabout's double chevron symbol etched into would also be meaningful. One father gave his sons a very special knife and sheath. Another suggestion is a coin-sized wooden or metal token that can easily be carried in a pocket.

A simple, but VERY meaningful symbol is the notching of a stick. At the outset of the trip, have the boy select a stick he will want to keep for years to come. You might even have one for him. It can be a staff, something the size of a walking cane, or maybe only a stick 6-10 inches long. As each milestone agreement is made, have the boy make a notch on his stick. We suggest he use the double chevron patterns associated with each commitment. This stick becomes a sacred keepsake that he might keep in his room, display in an office or one day show his own son. The chevron patterns follow the 5-Milestone Agreements. (*The Manabouts' Chevron Patterns are explained in full in SUPPLEMENT D: The Double Chevron's Deep Symbolism.*)

- ◀◀ **Fear of God** – Bearing God's image by imitating God's ways.
- ⤴ **Honor of Parents** – Looking up to parents.
- ⤵ **Devotion to Family** – Looking to needs of those under your authority.
- ▶▶ **Kindness to Neighbor** – Bearing God's image to your neighbor.
- ✂ **Love of Enemies** – Bearing God's image to those who oppose you.

Mentors should think ahead about the token or tokens they'll present to their initiates. These tokens hold meaning that is powerful and that will be needed in days ahead to remain true to his agreements when they are challenged.

## The Crossing

The centerpiece event of the manabout is "the crossing." "The crossing" physically

portrays what has been ripening in the initiate's heart throughout the manabout. It is a moment when the boy makes a decision about manhood: "Do you now and forever commit to leave childishness and to become a man?"

Robert Lewis, arguably the man who launched the manhood movement with his book *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, recounts a beautiful example of what we call the crossing. It is such a crisp and powerful sample that I want to share it here, as Robert describes Dale's affirmation of his stepson, Chris, as a man.

*During the four-mile hike to their campsite, the fathers asked their sons to think up a list of all the things children do. They wanted them to visualize the immature behavior of youth.*

*Around the campfire that night, the boys were instructed to write down their lists, place them in an envelope, and throw them into the fire-which they did. This symbolized their break with childhood and their initiation into manhood.*

*The teenagers were then presented with gold "credit cards." Chris found his name printed in the center of the card under the words "Affirmation of Membership in the Legacy of Manhood."*

*.... The card included a reference to 1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things."*

*Later Chris wrote Dale a letter confirming the inner transformation that crossing from boy to man had yielded, "I'll never forget our camping trip to the Ouachita Mountains when you really affirmed me as a son and as a man. Someday, when and if I have a son, we'll go on a camping trip just like that, and then you and I can induct him into our 'Legacy of Manhood.'" <sup>10</sup>*

The crossing is a point of both departure and of entry. It is moving from one identity to another. It is internal, rather than external. So perhaps clarification of some terms will be helpful here. Boys at age 12 or 13 are NOT being asked to give up childhood. Childhood is not bad. Childhood should be enjoyed and lived fully. Baseball games, bike

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndall House, 2007, p. 105

riding, fun in the lake, laughing, and being silly are not evil. They should not be cut short. Childishness is a different animal. Childishness is behavior that is not mature, meaning not in keeping with God's ways and ideals. Childishness is self-centered and self-seeking. Anger is childish. Bullying and laziness are childish. Just as maturity is obedience to God, childishness is disobedience to it. Now knowing more fully what is entailed, "the crossing" is a time for the boy to decide whether he is committed to following God's ways or not. Real men follow God's ways. This is what the son is being called into. He needs to choose.

Fathers are encouraged to be creative in crafting their own unique crossing ceremony. I have already shared some of my son Daniel's crossing. The following scenario, in which a father and son are hiking a stretch of the Appalachian Trail, is another example of "the crossing."

"Son, for the next section of the trail, you will take the lead. I'm giving you the map and compass. I will leave ahead of you. Wait until I've been gone twenty minutes before you follow. That will put me a mile or so away. I'll wait at a point about half-way and then give more instructions when you reach there. Just read the map. Take your time. Remember all you've learned from me and seen me do. You'll be on your own — just you and God for the next several miles. On your way, I want you to think and pray about the things in your life that are hindering you from being a real man, a man who is the image of God, a man completely devoted to following the original design of God."

Here, either the boy is asked to write these obstacles on paper or asked to find a short (12 inch) dead piece of wood from near the trail. "Son, take this stick and cut a small notch for each childish attitude or habit that blocks you from total manhood. Have it with you when you meet me." (Note: This is not the same stick as mentioned in part of the 5 milestone agreements.)

Caution and wisdom should be used in this section. While it should pose a challenge, "the crossing" event should be doable and safe enough or supervised closely enough that the boy is in no great danger — though he may feel uneasy and a little frightened. When he reaches you at the half-way point, have more instructions for him.

"Great! Glad you made it. How did you feel?"

"It was a little scary at times, but I just stuck to the trail. There was one fork I came to that I wasn't sure which was to go, but I remembered what you said and stuck with the map. I prayed and kept telling myself that I'd be okay and that you'd come looking for me if I got lost or something."

"Well done! That was perfect. Good job. Now, do you have that stick I asked you to notch?"

Let him produce the stick or his list to you.

"Take it (stick or list) into the forest here, maybe only about 50-100 steps and leave this stick. When you do, pray like this, "God, I leave behind childishness. The things on this stick are childish. They will keep me from being like you. I'm leaving them here. From today, I want to follow your image of a man. I am following you."

The boy should leave you and toss or bury or hide his stick in a place only he knows and pray there. When he returns to you, congratulate him.

Dad, tell him you are proud of him. Say the words. Show it with your enthusiasm. Your "well done!" should be from the heart. He needs to know that you are delighted to have him now on your side of life. He has crossed over from boy to man and you are rejoicing at being the FIRST to meet him and receive him as a MAN!

"Congratulations, son, for severing ties to childishness and crossing over to manhood! I'm very proud of you."

Then give him his new assignment.

"Now that you're a man, you'll be leading others by your example. On our next section of the trail, you will guide us. The next campsite is over two miles from here. You take the map and go ahead of me. I'll leave about twenty minutes behind you. If you are confused or feel lost, just wait and I'll catch up. We will figure it out together. Otherwise, when you reach the camp, start setting up everything. I'll join you."

This will be the tenor of how you'll continue together for the rest of your trip. It will more and more be the attitude you'll take for the rest of your life. You'll give guidance; he will take more responsibility. He will instinctively turn to you for help when he isn't sure how to deal with a situation. Without this relationship, he'll increasingly turn to

you for a 'bailout' from mistakes and poor choices he'll make. But with a commitment to manhood and open communication lines, he'll move ahead, and you'll celebrate his progress. One day, you'll be the guest at his camp, at his table, in his home. Father and son. Man to man. Harmonious. The image of God on the earth.

## **Day 5**

The final day of the event you may want to pose a special challenge that demands teamwork and communication. It is a sort of 'first run' at this new arrangement of father and son manhood. The last day of our manabout, my son and I canoed the entire length of the lake, 13 miles, in one non-stop marathon! After several days in the wilderness, we are also motivated to get home to Mom's good cooking! This final challenge is further proof that something changed over the past week.

For our final challenge, we switch positions in the canoe. I go to the front and he sits at the rear with the map. The rear position steers and guides and is doubly difficult when working from a map to navigate unfamiliar territory. We study the map together the evening before and review again at daybreak over a final cup of hot tea and piece of cold fish. We launch, and I allow him to guide us through the maze of islands and lakes back to the landing where we launched. Of course, we talk through each turn. If he takes a wrong turn, I have veto power, but only to keep us safe and to help him find his mistake on the map. Childishness would reject input and guidance from those more experienced; maturity listens and makes corrections. I'm training his skills and allowing him to practice being mature.

Let's look at one final example of allowing the boy to demonstrate his new status after making "the crossing." A friend took two of his sons on a trip similar to ours. After making the agreements to manhood, he allowed his sons to take the canoe for an independent time of fishing and exploring. He was not in the boat with them, but simply gave instructions as to how far away they could venture. Within these boundaries, they could roam and fish and explore at will. This communicated a new level of trust and a change in how he viewed them. No longer boys relying on Dad to paddle or navigate, they were now men accountable for their actions, in control of themselves, and exercising independence responsibly. The apron strings had been cut, but the tie that binds was stronger than ever.

My son's and my epic paddle home put meat on the bones of the WE in our relationship,

and from this time forward his view of manhood involves me and will include other mature men who have experience and insight. The influence of boys and childish men is now weak in comparison. He and I have learned to work together; there are no secrets. We share community and a plan for moving forward in the days and years ahead. It is a piece of parental-paradise every dad should work and pray for.

The last evening, before leaving your manabout, ask your initiate to select something from their manabout to serve as a token for the next brother, son, or son-in-law who will be taken on your family manabout. I had Daniel select a fallen piece of birch from a spot near where he made his crossing. This stick is brought home and presented to the next boy in line. Daniel handed his to Caleb, saying, "This is for you. You are next in our family line, and when you are about my age, Dad will take you to the places he took me. Keep this stick. It came from a special place where you will one day go. Take it with you and leave it where I found it. Dad will tell you what to do when you are in that place."

Powerful things are begun in the exchange of this token! It becomes his initial "call to manhood," igniting excitement and anticipation. This exchange casts the next boy's role in the story of our family line and kickstarts the whole process of making a man: but not by me; instead, by this new man. He is not making this invitation as a boy, but as a man in our family. His younger brother now sees him as a man and aspires to join him, and me, in this high and noble realm of manhood. Josh, our most recent family member to complete a manabout, has a piece of birch on his dresser, waiting for the next in our line to travel the boundary waters, visit the campsites, make the commitments, and experience the brilliance of being a man.

### **Day of Return**

After our marathon paddle out of the wilderness, we treated ourselves to hot showers and a night in a nice hotel on a real bed! The following day, eager to get back, we left early and drove all the way home (16+ hours)! Your "Re-entry" is as important as any of the four major stages of the manabout. (These stages are discussed later. We refer to them as the C.O.R.E. Stages.) Our own re-entry was much simpler than what we now recommend. Still, it was effective. Mom and the other children welcomed us with hugs and congratulations. Mom had a feast prepared in honor of the new man. A sign hung over our doorway: "Welcome Home Men!" Brothers and sisters peppered him with questions about the trip. While the new man was careful to keep secrets secret,

still much of the journey was shared. When questions crossed the line into matters we felt should be reserved for the next boy, he simply responded, "Sorry, I can't tell about that part. It's something you'll find out when you take your trip with Dad."

Depending on what seems best for the young man, as well as for your schedule and budget, a more elaborate meal and more guests may be involved. We recommend that parents make the boy's re-entry as big and as elaborate as possible. A full description of all the people, elements, and roles involved, including the very important roles that community, mothers, children, and fathers or mentors fulfill, is given in the "Re-entry" section of this manual.

Some people may consider secret-keeping to be inappropriate; I do not. God keeps secrets. Mystery is a magnet. There is a time for everything under the sun. "In due season" or "in the fullness of time" is a biblically supported concept. You want the next boy to be intrigued, and you want him to want to know the facts, but there is value even in the tension between the two. Withholding the 'secrets' of the manabout enables you to capture that value and deliver it to our sons. Secrets, things known only by 'the men,' are powerful enticements to the younger boys. Use them to his advantage. Secrets aren't all dark, evil, or irreverent, and for us, they should NEVER be. In our case, secrets are merely things not YET known. The knowledge of them should be earned, and the activities required to acquire them make possessing them even more special. Manhood that is earned is treasured. Men who measure up to the requirements of manhood value themselves and have the capacity to value others. Secrets are just things learned and shared on the manabout between those who have experienced them. There are things my sons and I do, tokens we exchange, commitments we make, places we visit, and ceremonies each boy has gone through that make our manabout unique to us. Secrets bond my sons and me. I have told you a good deal about our personal trips, but I've purposely NOT shared many of our 'Meeks men' secrets in this manual, because they belong only to those of us who have shared in them. They link me to my sons, and in generations to come, they will tie my great, great, great grandchildren to their father, and their grandfather, and back to me. The shared experiences, symbols, milestone agreements, visited sites, and secrets will set us apart and give us an increasingly unique and clear identity as 'Meeks men' — a family of men who bear the image of God on the earth.

## chapter 2

# A RITE OF PASSAGE

## WHAT EVERY BOY NEEDS TO EXPERIENCE

*I have tried here to assemble all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another. Because of the importance of these transitions, I think it legitimate to single out rites of passage as a special category.* <sup>11</sup>

- Arnold van Gennep.

*And too many men today have no idea that their job is to save the boys.* <sup>12</sup>

- John Eldredge

Navigating the boundary waters of northern Minnesota, my son and I had faced many obstacles and overcome each. But what we encountered at the actual boundary between our country and Canada was unlike any of those, and neither of us had seen it coming. Since leaving home five days before, there had been anxious moments, uncomfortable moments, and even awkward moments, but this moment rivaled them all, collectively, as my thirteen-year-old walked away from me into unknown territory. For a control-freak like me, letting go is daunting, gut-wrenching, and terribly frightening. His next

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage (1908)*, Chapter 1. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Farrar, *Point Man*. Multnomah Publishers (1990), pg. 32.

steps into manhood would be a test of his inner stuff, and I had anticipated that. Yet I was not prepared for the challenge it would be to me, personally. Even now, almost twenty years later, it is difficult to express all that rushed through me at that moment, holding my breath, allowing him to navigate his way through those ripping currents. Carrying my son to the Canadian border and witnessing him leave boyhood cut a tie that had secured him to his mother and myself until now. His solo journey severed a kind of umbilical cord to us and to childhood. Describing what happened in those few moments seems an odd comparison coming from a man, but honestly, what I experienced was a soul-level birth pain - I was giving birth to a man.

Allowing Daniel to navigate the slippery, irregular-shaped boulders scattered across the source of the wilderness lake was risky. Where we stood, the river feeding the lake forced itself through a narrow opening, roaring and foaming with spit and spray; in clear revolt, it raged against the boulders blocking its entry. The river's power was palpable and the motion of the current forcing itself between the boulders was dizzying. Into the madness of this river's frenzied rush, I had sent my son. The thunder of the stampede was deafening. Carefully, through a maze of scattered stones rising just inches above the tumult, Daniel made his way toward the opposite shore. It was dangerous. Panic rose in my chest, and I almost called him back. But he needed this - every boy does.

I yelled to be heard above the cacophony. "Daniel! Think ahead three or four steps before you take one. Try to find places where the stone is dry. Take your time. When you reach the middle, stop and look back at me." His first steps were cautious and unsteady, but self-confidence grew as he advanced - each step distancing him from me, closer to manhood. We had rehearsed this before he left me, so he knew how my speech ended. "Once you are half-way, stand there and reflect on where you are. Soak in the elements. Let yourself be fully in that place." I wanted him to lock into, and capture, that transformational moment. I wanted him to fully absorb all that was happening around him, and especially what was happening IN him. After a few moments at the center, he looked back at me. I cupped my hands around my mouth to project above the roar: "Now, plan your way to the other side. Be careful. Take your time. When you get to that shore look back at me." He looked at me, reading me, willing, but clearly nervous. His eyes and face telegraphed his thoughts, "Dad, are you serious? Is it safe? Are you sure I can do this?" This was a challenge, indeed; but I would be watching him. Until this moment, I had provided him with protection, food, clothing, discipline, and instruction, but this moment was unexplored territory

for us both. Here I could go no further on his behalf. I could not do this for him. Oh, I could have walked out to him and directed his steps across those boulders, but I could never have walked into manhood for him. His gain, his reward, his benefit was to be won by him alone and only on his own. I wanted him to have it. I wanted him to know he could and would become a man. "Yes, son," I assured him, "you can do it." And so, he believed me. With caution, he chose his path across the boulders, motivated by the promise I'd made before he left my side, "Daniel, I'm not coming with you, but I'm not going to leave you."

Reaching the opposite shore, he turned, smiling. The sun broke radiant; the air warmed as the umbilical was cut and a new and stronger tie was formed between men. His relief was palpable and the person who turned and walked back to me that day was not the boy who had left me. A confident young man faced me from that far bank between the US and Canada. Like the uterine waters of birth, broken at delivery, so the rushing waters beneath our feet had ushered a boy into the world of manhood. Looking across that raging river at one another, it was man to man. This was where manhood was born in him and a bridge of trust between us constructed. Both would be vital and necessary for the years ahead.

A world away, in the Australian Outback, boys become men in a waterless place. The "walkabout" is a well-known Aboriginal rite of passage in which indigenous male Australians undergo a journey, typically between ages ten and sixteen. Living in the wilderness for a period as long as six months is part of a spiritual and traditional transition into adulthood. These walkabouts are a boy's first steps into maturity, independence, and identity. Enlightenment and spiritual awakening are essential elements of these solemn rituals.

The French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep coined the phrase "rite of passage" to describe the metamorphic movement between childhood and adulthood. Gennep defined it as a celebration of the passage which occurs when an individual leaves one group to enter another. It involves a significant change of status in society. Western society actually practices several rites of passage. The graduation ceremony is one of the more familiar. Students (initiates) who have completed a pre-determined curriculum of classes and events (challenges and obstacles) are recognized by their professors (mentors), family, and peers at a special event (ceremony) where they wear robes and caps (special clothing) and exchange a diploma (token of transition). From that time forward, they are no longer called students, but graduates (recognition

of their new status in the society). Graduation is important psychologically to students and teachers. Wedding ceremonies and burial services are important as well.

Gennep goes on to suggest two universal ideas that all cultures' rites of passage share, namely, "the sexual separation between men and women, and the magio-religious separation between the profane and the sacred." Other experts on rite of entry into adulthood identify three common stages or steps: separation, transition, and inclusion. My sons and I see a vitally important and necessary fourth stage we call "ethos," and refer to our Christ-centered western rite of passage as a "manabout."

With today's young men in crisis, the rite of passage offers a path back to male psychological health and societal healing. However, despite the West's many advances, great learning, and vast experiences, our society has failed to develop a sound equivalent to the simple Aboriginal walkabout. Western Culture's omission of the important transition from boy to man is a perplexing mystery. The West struggles to measure the transition of a boy into adulthood using an incoherent patchwork of markers such as getting his driver's license, graduating from high school, losing his virginity, or getting married. Yet none of these provides our boys a fraction of what the ancient walkabout delivers to its sons. Boys stuck in childhood, caught in this limbo, face greater risks than any my son faced when surrounded by that powerful, rushing current.

Throughout America's history, the defining images or expressions of what makes 'a real man' have waffled between the rough-n-rugged mountain man and the suave, sophisticated man-about-town. It has bounced back and forth from the hard-working blue-collar Joe relaxing to Budweiser and football to the corporate mogul atop his empire. This revamping and redefining of manhood continue to the present. The West's definitions of what constitutes a man are now unclear, in flux, and polarizing.

Our markers are all over the map. Some say a male is a man when he turns sixteen, or eighteen, or twenty-one. Others propose that manhood is achieved when a male can hold down alcohol, or when he graduates from college. Locker room wisdom claims the key factor is rooted in sexual experience. Many ideas are being offered as the measure of manhood; however, they collectively fail because they are little more than arbitrary guesses, and they fall short because they take a surface view of manhood. In reality, each is as ludicrous as the next! It is easy to argue that many of these notions actually provide strong evidence of a failure to achieve manhood! Quaffing alcohol

to the point of intoxication communicates more about a boy's lack of control than it does his maturity, and sexual encounters are, to put it bluntly, more a sign of a child-like need for attention than evidence of any noble character trait. Mannishness is not equivalent to manliness. Manliness is a matter of heart; mannishness is everything else, and western civilization has opted almost entirely for mannishness.

Our latest debate over matters as elementary and foundational as what is male and what is female add more confusion to our chaos. This ambivalence is a very real and present danger to those in the process of forming their identity. We straddle a quaking fault-line as western culture pulls away from its ancient roots and truths about manhood. This tectonic shifting of the societal plates is traumatizing every structure on the social landscape. Like dust exploding from pressurized rock, the West is witnessing an increase in male loss of esteem, a pornography epidemic, widespread gender confusion, and a staggering degree of prolonged adolescence.

Only a clear vision, deeply rooted in the ancient bedrock of what it means to be a man, will enable us to stand firm in the days ahead. Every boy living today needs the help of his father or a male mentor to prepare him for the societal San Andreas poised to reshape western civilization. Every boy needs a rite of passage.

What happens to boys who don't have a firm marker for their manhood? In short, disaster! Dr. Ame Rubinstein states, "There is a strong belief that much of the risk-taking behavior displayed by teenage boys is, in fact, their attempts at self-initiation. Fast cars, binge drinking, fighting in the street and drug usage are just a few examples of ways that boys try to prove their manliness. Unfortunately, the result can be disastrous and have long-term consequences. Simply put, a man cannot lead a healthy and fulfilling life if he is still functioning at the level of boy psychology, and his community will suffer, as he will not provide a positive contribution." The setbacks for the uninitiated male, and eventually for his family and community, are clear.

Dr. Rubinstein continues by compiling two lists, differentiating what he calls "Boy Psychology" from "Healthy Man Psychology":<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ame Rubinstein, "Modern Day Rites of Passage for Boys/Men - The Ultimate Form of Preventative Medicine." [www.Schooloflostborders.org](http://www.Schooloflostborders.org). April 2007.

<b>Boy Psychology</b>	<b>Healthy Man Psychology</b>
I seek acknowledgment.	I seek that which I believe.
I want it all for me.	I share with my community.
Power is for my benefit.	Power is for the good of all.
I am the center of the universe.	I am just part of the universe.
I believe I am immortal.	I know I am mortal.
I take no responsibility for my actions.	I take full responsibility for my actions.
I want a mother.	I want a relationship with a woman.

Boys are male, but being a man is much more than being male. Reaching a certain age or physical ability don't make a man either. Manhood is a matter of the heart. It resides within and roots itself in the unseen soul. Being a man is always a matter of what is inside. A birthday or a possession does not inform us of the heart within. In fact, a male who might hold out either of these as evidence of his manhood reveals his own immature understanding of it.

Cultures have preserved manhood and societal health through challenging journeys like the Aborigines' venture into the outback for generations. These events have supplied an essential vehicle for young men to prepare themselves mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for adulthood and community membership. The difference between boys and men is one of heart and thought, and these challenging sojourns to face danger from without and fear from within play a vital role in a male's identity formation. The mystery of what it means to be a man is decoded and transferred during the days and weeks of passage. Males flounder through adulthood without them.

To help its boys, western society needs its own rite. Unlike our current anything-goes approach, this new marker cannot be a collage of the collective guesses plucked from politically-correct air. It must have its roots in the bedrock of the original design, be founded on time-proven truths, be immune to fads and trends, and draw from the deepest, strongest, and purest elements of what a male was intended by his Creator to become to the planet, to his community, and in his spirit. It is time that a brave

many men sever the umbilical cord of societal dictates, renounce the childish fads of western culture, and reject the crowd's silly, chaotic clamoring. It's time to recapture that ancient Spirit residing within every male and empower it to be experienced and lived fully by our sons. Why would an apple tree apologize for being an apple tree, or a tulip for being a tulip? A male who pursues his divine design will never need to apologize for his maleness or his manhood. It's time we stop feeling hesitant or embarrassed for being male and get back to the business of being men.

Do you want your son to become a man of character, committed in his deepest soul to the highest order of his divinely appointed nature? Would you prefer your son stand his ground against societal bullying, or mindlessly follow the generic life of the community around him? In a few years, when he is old enough to drive or is away at college, to avoid lying awake worrying and unsure of his trustworthiness, you'll need to invest in him now. If you want to trust him, and for him to trust you; if you prefer he come to you for answers rather than the neighbor kids, the school counselor, or gang leaders, then the peace of mind you desire as a father, that strength of character you wish for your son, and that necessary manly confidence he will need in life can be given a strong and powerful start through a manabout rite of passage.

*The Manabouts Manual: A Mentor's Guide to Leading a Boy's Rite of Passage into Manhood* provides guidance to fathers and mentors in the development of a meaningful rite of passage for their son or the boy they mentor. Rites of passage involve ceremonial leaders and move through multiple stages. Each stage weaves together content, milestones, symbols, secrets, and covenants that challenge and advance boys toward manhood. The manabouts twin red chevron logo symbolizes this relationship of one man or generation guiding the one coming behind. Manabout leaders are to be men of influence in the young initiate's life. Fathers are strongly encouraged to lead their sons, but mentors may substitute when a boy's father is not available. I, as a father, want all fathers to experience the deep satisfaction, open lines of communication, and strengthened connection that I and my sons enjoyed during and since their manabout.

Without a clear point of reference, boys foolishly attempt to prove their manhood by running full speed at risk. But foolhardiness doesn't create or demonstrate true manliness. I want my sons to know they are men, and I want the works of their hands, the attitudes in their hearts, and the flint in their gut to evidence the goodness and maturity in them. It isn't what is outside a man that proves him one, it's what

is inside him that shows it. Without guidance and assurance from patriarchs (and matriarchs), boys devise their own measures of manhood, which unfortunately take them down dangerous paths.

In summary, with manhood being defined in ways that destroy men's lives, our sons and boys are fair game for deception and exploitation. The urgency for men to lead boys can hardly be exaggerated. Without a healthy connection to men who know true manhood, the days ahead for western civilization will be increasingly dark and difficult. To protect our sons and theirs, we want to equip every father and mentor to lead every boy to be a man of God.



## chapter 3

# A BLUEPRINT OVERVIEW

*I want to suggest some of the things that should begin your life's blueprint. Number one... should be a deep belief in your own dignity. Your worth and your own somebodiness... that your life has ultimate significance.* <sup>14</sup>

- Martin Luther King Jr.

*But for many, many men their souls still hang in the balance because no one, no one has ever invited them to be dangerous, to know their own strength, to discover that they have what it takes.* <sup>15</sup>

- John Eldredge

If you are excited at this point, then GREAT! You should be charged up and eager to take your boy on his trip. Hey, it's going to be phenomenal! If you are also feeling a little intimidated, that's normal too. Admittedly, this material is challenging, but men meet challenges! For now, all you need to do is keep reading.

Because most of us need a visual aid, or an example, we started with the walk-through in an attempt to let you look

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<sup>14</sup> From Speech delivered Oct 26, 1967 at Barrett Jr. High School, Philadelphia.

<sup>15</sup> John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*. Thomas Nelson, Nashville (2001), pg. 79.

over our shoulder and observe my sons and me on our trips. We felt it was the closest thing to being there, listening in on our conversations, and seeing us in action. Like most things, once you've been through all the material for yourself, it won't be so intimidating. However, because we realize that it may at first appear daunting, we've tried to do a lot of the thinking for you and provide you with examples and suggestions. The learning curve, the effort, even the stress it may bring will bond you both, because they bring such an enormously high value to your son or the boy you are mentoring.

Now we want to further simplify the event by borrowing from construction language and viewing the manabout in blueprint form. Having just walked you through the manabout "house," we want to step with you into the drawing room and have a look at a blueprint you can use to design and construct your own manabout. This blueprint gives an outline of the structure of a rite of passage and a basic materials list by introducing the four stages of the manabout and then highlighting the major components in them. As for the paint, trim, and furnishings, the other chapters in *The Manabouts Manual* are your reference book for deciding the details and "how to's" of each stage. Simply follow the blueprint, and use the corresponding chapters to craft your own unique rite of passage, which your boy (and his) will one day call the birthplace of their manhood.

Now, let's get to work. In simplest form, the manabout can be broken down into 4 stages. The 4 C.O.R.E. stages of a manabout are outlined below. Under each stage, the primary components in each stage, as well as the role the components play in the major events, are also identified and summarized.

### **THE 4 STAGES OF A MANABOUT: C.O.R.E.**

**1. CALLING** – The time of stepping away from the old, from what has been before. This sometimes includes even physical separation from our old lives. This is all done BEFORE leaving for the manabout.

**A Father** (Mentor) invites a boy on a special trip to talk about his becoming a man. The invitation should contain the following:

**A Vision Statement** "You are becoming a man. I believe you can be a great man."

**Contagious Enthusiasm** — “I want to lead you into manhood on an amazing five-day journey where I’ll tell you what it means to be a man.”

**His Best Interest in Mind** — “I don’t want you to learn about it from boys or have to guess at what being a man means.”

**Introduce the Manabout** — “When you are thirteen, I will take you on a special trip. It’ll be just you and me. We’ll take a few days to be together to talk and work on helping you make the first steps into being a man.”

**Allow Him to Wait** — “Just think about my invitation. We’ll talk about it again.” The anticipation is good. It builds character that he will need.

**2. ORIENTATION** — Leaving behind the familiar and entering fully into the unfamiliar begins disorientation. This leads to a new orientation. Challenges arise naturally based on the activities of the manabout and the environment in which it is held.

**Challenges** put the boy in a dependency situation, but not a dangerous one. These create a situation where the initiate must look to and rely upon the father or mentor for guidance. A number of means are discussed in the chapter “Orientation.” The aim is to teach the boy to listen and trust.

**His Story** is revealed on three levels. Around the campfire or a private place, the details of his family lineage are shared. At this time, or later on the journey, the three core understandings he has come to believe are discovered and righted if they are incorrect. An hour minimum should be allowed for discovery of his core story. (The evening of Day 3 is usually the best time to talk about the Core Story. “How to Lead the Core Story” is provided in this manual to help guides lead this discussion.)

Near the end of the manabout, after the crossing, a mega-story vision is cast by passing the duty of carrying forward the manabout. “Son, you are now a Meeks-man. You’ll bring your son here so he may carry these truths to his.”

**Feelings** are drawn out along the way by simply asking, “How are you feeling?” or “What did it feel like today out there?” These preliminary discussions are to cultivate a safe environment for approaching...

**The Five Milestone Agreements** — Discussions on the trip begin on the way to the event and continue through out. These talks or discussions are often held around meals. They are centered around the making of 5 key agreements (these are covered in detail in chapter 6). For each one, a verbal agreement is sought. Tokens, prepared by the guide, are prepared to commemorate individual commitments or the collective whole of them. The five agreements are:

- « **Fear of God:** An agreement and trust in the Designer’s agape love and a willingness to learn His ways and purposes.
- ⤴ **Honor of Parents:** An agreement to value the experience and learnings of parents and mentors.
- ⤵ **Devotion to Family:** An agreement to serve, protect, and provide for family.
- » **Kindness to Neighbor:** An agreement to do what is best for neighbor and friend.
- × **Love of Enemies:** An agreement to do what is best for those who do their worst to them.

**Leaving Childishness** is putting aside selfishness and deciding to embrace original Adam’s design as God’s image. It is a call to leave childishness and move into manhood on a heart level. A decision to leave childishness is typically made just ahead of the crossing event/moment. The notching and leaving behind of a stick symbolized this spiritual transformation in *The Manabout Manual’s* example.

## THE CROSSING

This is THE CENTRAL EVENT of the Manabout! Day 4 is usually the best day for the cross over. The crossing event/moment visibly portrays all that has been happening inwardly in the initiate over the past few days. It is the time when the boy physically and actually steps into the leader’s role and can be considered a man. Allowing him to lead, to go on his own, or to make decisions for the two of you can demonstrate this. The crossing of the border between the US and Canada and the solo canoe trip of the two brothers are examples provided in *The Manabout Manual*.

**3. RE-ENTRY** — With commitments to manhood made, freedom found in forgiveness, and crippling wounds healed, boys are ready to reenter the family and community they left. A celebration that rivals any they have had, or will ever have, should await them. The food should be good and plentiful. Also, the reentry ceremony should involve as many significant people as possible, including:

**Family** - Welcome kin and neighbor. Invite the preacher and even the mayor!

**Friends** - Yes! Their buddies and younger boys NEED to see this guy, to behold the hoopla being made about him. The attention, excitement, and mystery is intoxicating to them. It will stir their thoughts and desires to become a man too!

**Mothers and Sisters** - The women bless the new man by singing, speaking, and praying over him.

**Fathers and Brothers** - The older men receive a verbal and public pledge from the young man. His father speaks a blessing over him and an important token is exchanged. Celebration continues!

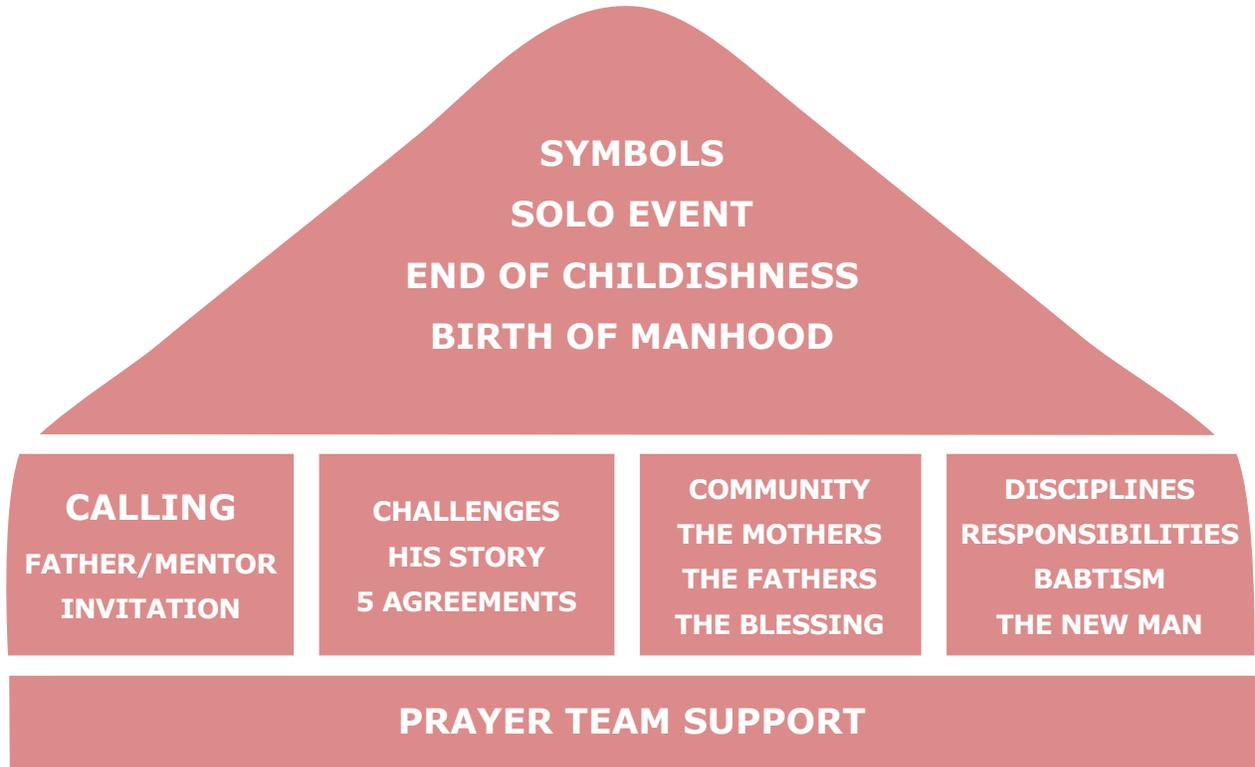
**4. ETHOS** — Stages 1-3 occur in a few hours or a few days, but ethos is lifelong. Where stages 1, 2, and 3 launch manhood, ethos applies it. Ethos occurs AFTER the Manabout event.

**The New Man** — Baptism as described in Romans 6, as well as new spiritual habits and other routines, quickly becomes part of the young man's experience, life, and schedule. Working with parents, the major portions of his schedule and new habits are discussed and implemented soon after re-entry. Resources and ideas are being cached and developed at manabouts.com. The 60-day discipleship workbook *D60: Transformation Through Discipleship*<sup>16</sup> is suggested as a practical guide for both father, mother, and son to do together as a means of establishing daily spiritual habits from the very start of the new man's journey.

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen L. Meeks *D60:Transformation Through Discipleship*, published GSMi Press (2016).

## The Manabout Blueprint





## chapter 4

# THE FIVE PRIMARY COMPONENTS

*...all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.<sup>17</sup>*

- Winston Churchill (May 11, 1940)

*Begin with the end in mind.<sup>18</sup>*

- Stephen R. Covey

You have been uniquely positioned and equipped for leading your boy through this momentous event in his life. You may not feel like it, but you are 'Da Man' and you can do it. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People lists seven practices common to highly successful people. The second habit is to begin with the end in mind. You are the guy to do this, but it is important you understand the ultimate destination of the rite of passage you are designing and how this manual will help you get there.

This manual is a guide intended to help you design your own personal rite of passage for your son or the boy you mentor. Don't try to do all we suggest or attempt to replicate our event. Use the components we introduce and modify or incorporate

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<sup>17</sup> From Churchill's writings after WWII.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Covey *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, pub. Simon and Schuster New York (1989) page 97.

them to fit you and your context. We are handing you a trustworthy outline, but we encourage you to develop your own specifics. Though we cherish our experience, we don't want to give the notion that it was perfect. Rather, this manual places into your hands suggestions, examples, encouragement, and a broad outline for developing your own family rite of passage. We've borrowed from others and drawn upon our own trial-by-error learning to shortcut the learning curve for you. *The Manabouts Manual* is our attempt at packaging it all into one reference manual.

With that understood, we are uncompromising on our goal — a heart pledged to follow the will and ways of God. Does a manabout achieve that goal? Caleb, my second son, reflecting on his manabout, shared,

*Looking back I see my adolescence hinged on my manabout. It remains, for me, a banner declaring the direction I must always strive; a trail-marker of the soul. It flies upon the summit of my boyhood heart. That first journey with Dad taught me how to journey and planted in me the seed of transformation that God has continued to cultivate. It was a rare gift.<sup>19</sup>*

My youngest, Josh, said,

*After my manabout, I felt like I had been called to a higher standard, like I had been given more responsibility for myself and my actions. I also felt as if I had been raised to a more respectable level of manhood. This especially hit home when we came back from the Boundary Waters and Mom greeted me like I was a man. I felt more grown up and trusted; I felt honored. I also understood that more would be expected of me. I felt I had come to a spot in my life where I had to make more mature decisions.<sup>20</sup>*

Every father hopes he can influence his son to make more mature decisions. I believe most of us also expect to be the ones calling our boys to this higher standard, making sure their hearts are pledged to the will and ways of God; but we have only a narrow window. My oldest, Daniel, wrote,

*If my Dad had neglected to take me on a manabout, I would not have the direction and purpose that I have for my life and my family.<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Caleb Meeks- reflections at age 30.

<sup>20</sup> Joshua Meeks- reflections at age 16.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Meeks -reflections at age 33.

When your son dreams of manhood, what is his vision? Does he have one? Are you sure he is dreaming for himself all the things you know are vital? A manabout is your opportunity to craft a vision and bring forth a dream for his life by making sure the central elements of manhood are in his mind and heart.

So, what defines a man, and when do we know we've attained it? This is the question Steven Covey would have us ask. We believe the answer is knowable, and it isn't up to guess-work or the whims of opinion. What defines a man has been clear since the beginning and is revealed in the original words of the Creator.

*Let's make man in our image, in our likeness, and let him rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.<sup>22</sup>*

Adam was the original male, the first man, and designed by God to illustrate our primal role and purposes. In him, we find the root and core of what it means to be a man, and at that root is this simple, but profound, revelation: a man is to be the image of God on the earth.

This means we are to exemplify the thinking and being of God to everything else in creation. This high and lofty, broad and ranging commission informs us of our position and responsibilities to toward everything else in creation. It tells us we are to care for the seas, the birds, the land, the animals, and people.

Like God, the true Adam is master of two worlds: the visible and the invisible. He not only subdues and attends to the visible world around him but also controls and nurtures the inner world. A male who tames a tiger, but not himself fails to project the divine shadow on the earth. A manabout addresses these divinely assigned duties of man through discussion, interaction, instruction, and experiences planned and serendipitous. The outcome is a male living committed to God's primal mandate for him. This is the end in mind for every manabout — a heart pledged to follow the will and ways of God.

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<sup>22</sup> Genesis 1:26 (NIV)

## **THE 5 PRIMARY COMPONENTS OF A MANABOUT**

Manabouts require five components necessary to help a boy get his bearings and navigate his course in life. They facilitate his transition by leading him, showing him his place, his power, his potential, his purposes, his path, and his destiny. These five components are:

- **A Father (Mentor)**
- **Challenges**
- **His Story**
- **His Family (Community)**
- **The Man**

### **The Father**

Father, not Mother, understands life at a level to which a boy aspires. Ideally, a boy's biological father takes this role. However, due to many possible factors, including abandonment and death, some boys do not have this option. Male mentors must step into the father role and serve as guides and confidantes for these initiates. Mentors are ideally someone the boy trusts and respects, since this role requires not only knowledge of life, but also knowledge and insight into the initiate himself. The father element is critical, because he leads the initiate through the external steps to ensure physical safety and encouragement. He also grasps the principles, concepts, values, beliefs, and commitments involved in each stage of the four stages of the manabout.

When I took my boys on their manabout, it involved days of canoeing across unfamiliar waters. I positioned them in the front of the canoe while I sat at the rear with the map. Because they were unfamiliar with both canoeing and map reading, I had to be physically present to paddle and to navigate. I held the map and I knew the destination. Mentors and fathers must know what they are doing and where everything is leading. Trust, communication, and respect are being developed between initiates and guides throughout the process. Leaders must be worthy of being followed. This manual helps fathers with this so that all boys need to hear from their fathers is, "Son, listen to me. We'll be fine. Trust me." This simple instruction will lay the groundwork for all that follows.

That first night around the campfire, I asked Daniel his FEELINGS while out on the water that day.

“Son, how did you FEEL out there today?”

“I was excited, but a little nervous too. I didn’t get too worried, though, because I figured you knew where we were and how to get there,” he said.

He felt nervous. He felt excited. Yet he felt okay. Isn’t it how you’d want him to react to those encounters? Wouldn’t you want him to be looking to you for guidance? After a day of him trusting me, I had my son’s ear and the chance to equip him for those coming challenges. I continued our conversation.

“Daniel, you will face scary and nerve-wracking stuff in the years ahead. Can you see how you handled those today?”

“Well, I just did what you said. I trusted that you knew what was going on and that we’d be okay,” he responded.

“Exactly! I’m proud of you for seeing that! In life, you’ll face tough and unfamiliar situations; when you do, come talk to me. If I know how to help, I’ll tell you. You trust that, don’t you?”

“Sure I do,” he said. That was the ‘buy-in’ I was looking for. It was a VOCAL step into a position of humility and wisdom critical to every man that will bear the image of God.

“Okay, then, for the rest of our trip, listen for my voice. I’m on your side. I know what’s going on and how to do things out here. You just need to listen and obey. Okay?”

In that conversation, the principles of trust, listening, and obeying, as well as accomplishment through applying these principles, were imprinted into the mind and heart of my son. Under my guidance and instruction, the challenges of the manabout went on to easily translate into discussions about trusting the Heavenly Father, listening for His voice, and obeying His instructions.

Every young man needs a leader, a mentor, a wise father, an ally, who knows what’s ahead and is ready to aid him along a proven and safe path. The hoped-for outcome is

a trusting and open relationship between the young man and his dad, which will serve them both in years ahead through the challenges he will face.

## Challenges

Life comes with challenges. As surely as there is an ally in our Heavenly Father, there is an archenemy, an opponent, a challenger to our success. The manabout simulates this counter-puncher through planned or inherent challenges. While these tests are designed to provide a degree of resistance, difficulty, and trial to the initiate, they should be within his grasp. In other words, they should be doable or attainable with reasonable effort on the initiate's part, aided by the help of a mentor's encouraging guidance.

At the annual Calling of Men in Nashville<sup>23</sup>, one of the speeches is "A Man and Courage." After this lecture, the initiates are escorted by the "older men" to a zip-line attached to a 40-foot tower. From the ground, it doesn't look all that intimidating, but from the top, it is quite a different story! Knees knock and hearts race. The younger men are tested, but they are expected to push through their inhibitions. From below, the older men encourage, "You'll be fine. You can make it." They chant, "Do it! Do it! Do it!" Of course, trained experts are at the top, clipping on harnesses and double-checking ropes and knots. There isn't any true risk, but initiates FEEL danger. They IMAGINE that they may die! However, the instant after they zip down that 300-yard cable they laugh and leap from the rush of it and the joy of relief. During those few seconds of descent, something at the epicenter of their being changes and they see themselves in a new light. Newly birthed confidence is visible in their posture and in their stride. Fear is gone; fearlessness has taken its place. Given a second chance, they'd not hesitate to ride again. By leaping into thin air, they have leaped onto a far shore and joined the older men who have taken the same risk before them. Sharing that experience is a new connection between the initiates and the older men that has inched them away from what characterized them as a "boy" and toward what it means to be a "man."

These rite of passage challenges are strong affirmations to a young man that he is capable of conquering fear, facing risk, and overcoming his misgivings. They create a personal confidence that he can do whatever a man is required to do, which is, of

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23 [www.thecallingofmen.org](http://www.thecallingofmen.org)

course, the desired outcome. A boy needs to know that he has what it takes, and to have this confirmed by older men. The manabout's challenges do exactly this. They are powerful tools in the hands of wise guides and are unmatched in their ability to establish a new identity in the wet cement of a boy's heart.

Some secular organizations suggest that parents are NOT the best to lead initiates into these challenges; we disagree STRONGLY. The channels of communication opened, the bond of trust formed, and the interdependence developed between initiates and fathers or mentors is EXACTLY what boys desperately need. Fathers and mentors are necessary and are the BEST persons to plan these safe hurdles, supply needed skills, give instruction, encourage self-reliance, and lead the beneficial follow-up reflections and discussions which clarify learnings and allow for life applications. The bond that is established between father and son is a lifeline in years ahead.

A year ago, two of my sons and I led another father and his two sons on a manabout into the wilderness area along the border between the US and Canada. Fear and doubt wielded an intimidating blade from the very first hours, and they came close to turning back. Whether it is a zip-line forty feet above the earth or the threat of a bear in the thousand acres around you, the challenges and risks faced on a manabout are real, and facing them changes a young man deeply. This change can go one of two ways: either he will face his fears and overcome, or he will succumb to them in defeat. Encouraging, supportive, patient fathers and mentors are the difference makers who can help young men successfully overcome the challenges in their manabout and, more importantly, in life.

In East Africa, male circumcision is a transformational event in many tribal rites of passage. One tribe performs the circumcision publicly. Hundreds of villagers may be gathered as a group of 3 to 5 initiates stride into the center of a frantically singing, dancing, and chanting community. For the last 36 hours, the boys have been cold, hungry, harassed, lashed with stinging nettle, and intimidated. And now, as they enter, they are caked from head to toe only in cold, white mud. Throughout these pre-circumcision preparations, they've been warned repeatedly that if they flinch at the moment of circumcision, they'll never be allowed to marry, own property, or be respected within the community. Standing spread eagle, hands gripping a stick laid across their shoulders, and chins up, a small wood chip is pasted across the bridge of their nose with a dab of mud. If that chip falls during the cutting, they'll never be treated as men.

I attended one of these events in my early years as a missionary and witnessed with amazement as three boys in their early to mid-teens stood like stone through out the ordeal. It was later that I learned that the purpose of the fatigue, the coaching, and the bath in cold river mud had been to ensure the boys' success. Even the stinging nettle was a means of diverting the pain of the cutting. The village had turned out en masse to chant, sing, and cheer them to victory as they crossed from boy to man.

Though we are certainly not suggesting anything like this African example, it is essential that doable challenges and community encouragement be a part of the manabout. These challenges are bricks in the construction of the new man. They are essential times, in which the boy begins to step aside and the man begins to replace him.

For my sons, there were several of these interwoven throughout our week of canoeing and camping. Some were physical, like when we raced ahead of an approaching storm to reach our next campsite. Some were emotional, like the two days we were stranded by high winds, running low on food and had to set aside our fears and hunger in order to make decisions based on conditions and reason rather than running risks because we were afraid. Some were spiritual, involving uncomfortable discussions, honesty, and confession. The one which brought them all together was described earlier in Daniel's heart-racing solo journey across those wet stones to the far bank of that raging river. We call this "the crossing." The reason the crossing was the pivotal moment in Daniel's manabout and the most difficult of the challenges he faced was that he faced it completely alone. As he physically and psychologically experienced his last steps as a child, he took the first steps of his journey into manhood. At that moment, there was a mental and emotional, soul-level shifting of the tectonic plates in him and in our relationship. He was metaphysically transformed by that act in combination with the specific commitments made leading up to it. His turn from the opposite bank marked the exact instant he became a man. Years later, my sons can all recall the emotions, the decisions, and the challenges associated with their coming of age. It cost them something... and they chose to pay that price. They merited manhood. They own it. It is them. They are, from that day forward, without doubt or hesitation, men.

I heard a Maasai warrior talking about killing a lion. A part of manhood for the Maasai is killing a lion, so this was a powerfully symbolic act for him. After killing his first, he said, "For me, killing a lion is easier than taking a sip of tea." I'd say that guy has no doubt or hesitation, but rather, a rock-solid confidence in his manhood! Overcoming

obstacles during his rite of passage obstacles chiseled that into him. I don't want my sons to have any less confidence.

## **His Story**

Life is a story with chapters closing and new pages being written daily. We are all participating in the grand drama of life, and a manabout serves as the opening lines of a new movement in it. Drama is more than simple action. It also involves characters, plot, setting, and symbolism. Emotional elements are also involved, like conflict, tension, suspense, uncertainty, and fear. A rite of passage involves those greater components within the context of action — just like life itself. By designing a manabout for your initiate, you are not only writing his next chapter but also setting the stage for his story. His story consists of three parts: his family story, his core story, and his mega-story.

Manabout challenges are woven into a story. Whether your manabout is in the context of a four-day canoe trip into the wilderness, a week on the Appalachian Trail, or kayak trip along a section of the Cumberland River, it is designed to craft character and competence. Strong character traits like perseverance, persistence, courage, self-reliance, gratitude, humility, selflessness, and responsibility, along with competence in life-skills such as problem-solving, listening, following instructions, weighing outcomes, resourcefulness, and teamwork, are expected outcomes of a well-crafted and executed manabout. Of course, these are desirable and vital components in a man who will express the image of God to the world in balanced and mature ways. Character, well-crafted, is the rebar in the concrete of a man's nature — his mettle. Manly character isn't something that can be taught in a classroom or contracted by proximity to other men. Men are made on the stage of life, and the manabout event provides the initial debut upon that stage.

The contexts for every manabout story are limitless, and they need to be because every man is unique. We actually look forward to learning of the diverse expressions of this fundamental blueprint we are introducing in The Manabout Manual. Many variables, like finances, time available, physical capacities of father or son, and creativity, will shape the look of each manabout. But we believe anyone, with any schedule, or any limitation, can help his initiate reach and accomplish their own "crossing" into manhood.

In a manabout, initiates experience “story” on three levels: family story, core story, and mega-story.

**Family Story** — Every story needs context. Family is a person’s most natural place of belonging. In the family story, initiates are told the family facts; the who-begat-who sorts of information. The family story provides a general timeline and historical view of the chain of events leading to and surrounding their existence. Boys need to know their family story to find their place in it and understand how they fit into the overall picture and stream of life and history. Who was your grandfather? What did he do for work? Where did he and your grandmother live? How did your parents meet? What happened the day you were born? Knowing this information is vital because it enables us to place ourselves into some meaningful drama, to belong.

It matters, of course, whether our story is full of shame or something we can take pride in. But even a less than stellar heritage helps a young boy know where he is on the high seas of his manhood journey. His family, sordid or not, is his family, and he needs to know as much about them as can be known. Cloaked in the dark stillness of the vast oceans, or lost in a wilderness, the canvass of a twinkling ceiling can lead us out. Likewise, every boy’s family story holds unique reference points and markers for moving ahead.

My own story doesn’t go very far back. I only know of my grandfather on my dad’s side and only a few names beyond that on my mother’s side. Our history hasn’t been very glamorous. In fact, it’s been more infamous than famous. But there were bright stars like Grandma Brackeen. I never knew her. She actually isn’t my grandmother, but something like a great-great aunt to me. Yet, everyone on my mother’s side traces the birth of Christian faith in our family to her. My Aunt Florine — and I’m not even completely sure if that was her actual name or a nickname — made an impression on me one day when she rubbed my nine-year-old head and said, “You’re gonna make a preacher.” Ironically, no one in my immediate family was following Christ at that time. Yet, her words buried deep in my heart and set the course for me, and now my children, and theirs. My kids need to know about these seeds of faith planted on my mother’s side by Grandma Brackeen and Aunt Florine because they lay out a family map leading directly to them.

On my dad’s side, there is chaos and brokenness. Alcoholism, abuse, gambling, and male chauvinism are the fruit on that branch of the family tree, but my children need

to know this too. When I tell them how my grandmother, my dad, and his siblings hid in the woods at night until my Grandfather Meeks fell asleep in a drunken stupor, it gives them a perspective and an appreciation for how God worked in my life, despite those awful beginnings, to render faith in me and now in them.

They also need to hear personal stories from their father's childhood. Trust me, boys lean in to listen when a father or mentor shares his personal boyhood history. Sometimes, these personal accounts can be difficult to share; no one wants to disclose their moral failings or hidden flaws, but some are important for your initiate to know, because he needs to see that there is hope for him. He knows he is limited, flawed, a sinner. For that reason, he needs to know that you are too. No one is perfect; don't pretend you are. (Note: This is NOT a time to shock with graphic detail, or to impress with it either. A mature balance must be struck.)

Mentors leading boys who are not their own need to gather details ahead of the manabout about the initiate's family of origin. Of course, permission should be obtained from parents or guardians about what details can and cannot be shared with the initiate. The recorded interview of a relative, or a written letter from one, can be shared and bring helpful insight and meaning. As a mentor, you aren't trying to surprise the initiate with unknown family secrets, but to help him put together the pieces of his history and his place in it. In the end, the story isn't really about the ancestors or the parents, but about how God has worked and is working in and through the initiate's life to bring him to where he is now. It's about offering hope, clarifying questions about his past, and creating a level field for him by being honest, open, and humble with him. This open honesty makes it possible for him to navigate his way back to you one day when he needs guidance or forgiveness for failure, and it blows wind in his sails to move ahead from where he is today, now that he knows his position in the story.

Around the campfire, on the drive to the event, hiking trails, or paddling the stream are opportunities to share this very important element. It can begin as simply as, "Son, let me tell you about when I was a boy and about my parents, where we lived, what Dad did for work, what our house looked like...." His questions will keep the conversation alive.

**Core Story** — Having found his coordinates on the genealogical map of his family story, we map again on a relational/emotional level. On this second level, behaviors,

feelings, and attitudes are charted. Thus, the core story maps the initiate's view or experience of life and family.

Whereas the first level of story is revealed by the father or mentor, the core story is discovered by the initiate. The manabout leader leads this discovery process by asking specific questions and then charting them. I like to begin with grandparents and include aunts, uncles, and parents. The result is a pictorial version of the familial behaviors and emotional connections over three generations. We call this story the core story because it actually reveals the core beliefs, values, and attitudes which a boy has assimilated over the course of his life. Almost always, there is MUCH more going on here than is at first clear.

The role and value of the core story cannot be overemphasized. We are simplifying it here, but provide a full version for fathers, mentors, and initiates 18 or older in "How to Lead the Core Story" later in this manual, and in even greater detail in a bonus video accompanying the Manabouts Video Course. the appendix of this manual. You cannot lead where you have not gone, so fathers and mentors are STRONGLY encouraged to complete the exercise for themselves before attempting to lead any boy through his core story.

Allow an hour or more and find a setting that is comfortable and private. This is a one-on-one exercise. Select a setting where you can easily talk, cry, or express emotion without inhibition. Around the campfire, on a park bench, at a picnic table, by the river bank, or beneath the shade of trees are some example locations. Begin with a prayer inviting God to the conversation and then asking Him to lead it.

"Son, I want us to talk about your thoughts and feelings. This is a time to be honest and open with one another. What we talk about will not be told to anyone else. Everything will be between us and God. Are you okay with that?"

It is important to get his agreement. If he isn't okay, then simply ask him to share what's causing him to hesitate. If he can't or won't communicate, then don't push. Affirm him and postpone like this:

"I see you are not ready yet to talk about this. It is okay, it is a challenge for most men to be open about their hearts, but you'll get there as you mature. There is no rush, we'll talk later if you'd like to wait."

The idea is to affirm to him that his struggle is normal for men (therefore he is normal), and that it will be revisited later. This keeps the door from being closed forever; the question at the end gets him to agree to wait until that time.

Once the initiate has agreed, walk him through his core story. The core story is fundamentally the truths he has come to believe in three areas.

**Security** — What he has come to understand makes him safe and secure.

**Love and Value** — What he has come to understand brings him value, meaning, acceptance, and affirmation.

**Control** — What he has come to understand provides him control with others.

Understandings, assumptions, and beliefs are typically formed in these three areas by age twelve. Though they are usually flawed understandings, they seem to work as a child, and become the default in the years ahead, and lead to trouble and failure.

A man in his early thirties told me he controlled others through rage and withdrawal. After discussion, he saw that the beginnings of these notions were rooted in his childhood ways of screaming at his mother until he got his way, or locking himself in his room if that tactic didn't work. As a kid, it worked; as an adult, it destroyed his marriage.

This is why drawing out these beliefs at this point, near the inception of these notions, and correcting them is so very important for the initiate. You are literally pulling from Satan's hands the powers and controls he would otherwise use to lead this young man into a host of mistakes and foolishness.

Through a series of questions, boys disclose what they have come to believe in these areas. Noting the flaws in their understandings and replacing them with truth is the role of the mentor. This discussion sets a boy free from what would have otherwise led to a host of failed ways of dealing with life.

Again, fathers and mentors are encouraged, in the strongest way, to walk through their own core story before leading an initiate. A man living out of flawed assumptions about his security, value, or control, even unknowingly, cannot lead a boy into freedom from

his own misunderstandings. Details on how to conduct this core story interview are given in “How to Lead the Core Story” in the appendix at the back of The Manabouts Manual.

**Mega Story** — The manabout creates a third and larger story — the mega-story. Though my childhood did not include a rite of passage, as an adult, I learned of the concept and knew I must create one for my sons. Daniel was my guinea pig. After him, each succeeding boy followed in his steps to the same places, using the same outfitter, camping at the same campsites, covering the same physical and spiritual ground. I exchanged the same tokens as they made the same commitments. This mega-story now connects the Meeks men across the generations. We are eager for when the next male in our family — one of my grandsons, or perhaps a son-in-law — will be taken on his manabout along these exact paths. This journey has become a cable stronger than steel, connecting us to one another across time, and creating a powerful generational legacy of what it means to be Meeks. This is safe and sacred ground. All our men — born to us, adopted, or married in — will revisit these sacred events and places with their sons, and they with theirs. Each of you can create your own rituals and paths for your boys and those who will follow them.

### **His Family/Community**

Men are made for community. We aren’t to be hermits or recluses but to engage and be engaged in relationships. Therefore, every manabout returns to the arms of family and friends. We call this “The Reception.”

**The Reception** — This element of passage is often overlooked or undervalued, when in fact it is perhaps the most significant element of the entire process. Here a boy is re-assimilated into the extended community, not as a boy, but as a man: as a contributing member of and to that society or family. He departed a dependent but has returned ready to play his role and add to the whole. To put it another way, he left a child but returns with the heart of a man, seeking humbly to grow into his position of provider and protector of the community.

Of course, the community consists of men and women, adults and children, old and young. He has bonded with men, but returns as a member of the group. This fourth component of the manabout involves the women of the family, and the children, as well as important influencers within his familial community. It is a time of joyful

celebration and of spoken blessing. For my sons, this came in the form of two events. The first was immediately upon return from the rite of passage trip, when Mom and the siblings welcomed us back with a special meal, hugs, smiles, interest in our stories, and handmade signs and banners. This very special time of reunion is the perfect opportunity to celebrate and the opportunity for family members to verbally address the boy in some way that shows they too recognize him as having gone through a change of status. My wife exuberantly and perfectly expressed to us, "I'm so glad to have my MEN home!"

The boy's siblings, without their knowledge, underscored the change in their brother. Their curiosity and many excited questions elicited epic as well as humorous stories. Details were shared for most of these, but some events and activities were not told, in order to benefit the next boy on the list by building anticipation and suspense. Surprise is a hugely valuable element in a manabout. There is a way in which knowing and protecting the 'secrets' is part of no longer being on the outside of manhood. The secrets are markers; a kind of proof that the initiate has moved from outsider to insider. Knowing and holding the secrets puts him in the company with the rest of "us men."

**The Blessing** — The blessing is an important part of the "Family" component that should be a part of the public reception but may be repeated years later. We chose to organize a special blessing ceremony around the graduation of our sons from high school, just before they left home for college. The blessing, like the reception, was a festive event, with lots of food, friends, mentors, women, and children. There were speeches, letters, and mementos to mark the occasion as our sons moved through another phase of growth toward full independent manhood.

The chapter "Stage Three: Re-entry" later in this manual goes into more details about the reception and the blessing. It will help you design your own.

## **The Man**

Obviously, the thirteen-year-old or twenty-year-old returning from a manabout event is still, in body, unchanged. Though the seed of manhood has sprouted within his heart, he is years away from maturity. The boy is declared to be 'a man' or 'one of the men,' yet he remains a youth, and inexperienced in many ways. Therefore, it is important to understand what should be expected and what remains to be done

between the manabout rite of passage and actual adult independence.

When I lived in East Africa among a particular tribe, initiates returned with the clear understanding that they were no longer boys. During their initiation rite, they had enjoyed their final romp with playing childish games and were now prepared to view life from a manly perspective. This included all facets of how they were expected to participate in society, impacting how they viewed women and children, how they greeted others, how they interacted with their mothers, and even which foods they ate. What I saw was that these men, still in boys' bodies, carried themselves and behaved very differently than before their passage event. For instance, these African graduates build themselves a small hut of their own — no longer sleeping under the same roof as their parents. They will no longer sit on their mother's bed. They take new names, and their childhood names are dropped. Initiates even greet one another in special ways, using different terms.

The question is, "How does life after a manabout look different than before?" Of course, unless he grew a beard on the trip, your boy will not sprout one his first day back home. He won't physically look much more like a man. My boys were still just thirteen, complete with cracking voices and slender builds. The real changes on a manabout are made in a boy's heart and mind. That's where you should expect to see the differences — in his attitudes and behaviors. You'll need to give him guidance on what those behaviors might look like and give him time to adjust to them. For example, as a good starting place, he should go through his room, his phone, and his computer and get rid of any music, videos, images, or associations that are not in keeping with the commitments he made on his trip. If he has any question about some that may seem borderline, let him know he can ask your opinion on it. Just as on the trip, you'll be working WITH him to develop his manhood into its mature adult image.

Another area in which he needs to adjust to manhood is in his daily routines. Ask him to come up with a plan of how and when he will daily spend time with God. Ask him to think through it enough to give some very practical details of what he'll do during those times. Goals are to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timed (SMART), or else they aren't goals, they are wishes. The SMART goal-setting method is free and described online. Don't set for them for him; rather, help him set his own goals and times related to his daily growth in his relationship with God. Set your own, if you haven't, and share them with each other, because accountability is

key and vitally necessary to turning his goals, or as Covey said, “the end in mind,” into reality.<sup>24</sup>

More on how to develop the “new man” is covered in the chapter titled “Ethos.”

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<sup>24</sup> Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

## chapter 5

# THE CALLING

## A PERSONAL INVITATION TO MANHOOD

*When I saw the nobility in real men, I wanted to emulate that.*<sup>25</sup>

- Joshua Meeks

*Our purpose, then, is to lure others to the light in all that we do.*<sup>26</sup>

- Erick Erickson

I asked my youngest son, Josh, “Before your manabout, when or how did you know you wanted to be a man?” He answered, with no hesitation, “I saw the nobility in real men and I wanted to emulate that.”

A boy who witnesses the lives of men of character wants to become like them. Nobility in a man is an irresistible magnet to the mettle in a boy. The living witness of a good man is a spark that ignites the fire of manhood in a youngster. Notice to what lengths a boy will drive his body to impress or please a coach or his father. Boys naturally aspire to become like the men they admire. Gatorade took advantage of this powerful truth when then launched their famous marketing campaign, “Be Like Mike!” The notion that a kid could be as athletic, cool, and

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<sup>25</sup> Joshua Meeks, from a conversation with his father.

<sup>26</sup> Erick Erickson, *Before You Wake: Lessons from a Father to His Children*. Hatchette Books, New York (2017), pg.116.

famous as Michael Jordan if he drank Gatorade was so attractive that it made Mike and Gatorade millions upon millions of dollars. Boys wanted to be like him, because being like Mike was a slam dunk for success.

Fathers and mentors can use this same power to attract boys to become men of character. How? It is simple: invite them. I began sowing my invitation several years ahead of Daniel's actual manabout. It isn't necessary to begin that far in advance, but it is good. More important is the excitement behind the invitation. It must be compelling. What makes it compelling is also simple: you have to buy into it yourself. Enthusiasm is contagious. I wanted my sons to become men. In fact, I was maybe even more excited than they were (and probably more nervous) about them launching their journey into manhood. My excitement roused theirs.

My son Benjamin, now 22 years old, recently shared reflections he'd written about his trip. An excerpt from a personal journal entry, made eight days before our departure, exposes the building anticipation. Note the curiosity and excitement in his boy-heart.

*Excitement rippled through the air as I carefully packed what would be my lifeline for a week; to think that my turn had finally come – to think that thirteen years had come and passed. I thought this day would never arrive. It is a tradition in my family for Dad to take each of us boys on a father-son MAN-trip to the Minnesotan Boundary Waters touching Canada and canoe across the international border. My two oldest brothers had already gone, and now it was my turn. After checking and re-checking our packing lists, Dad and I made our rounds to each member of the family. I remember Mom having an almost sad yet elated countenance that day. Looking back, I understand she was grieving the loss of her son, yet also rejoicing in my eventual manhood. During the seemingly endless drive to "The Basswoods" as we called it (referring to our Canadian destination), Dad and I talked less than I had thought we would. From the crumbs of evidence I gathered here and there, I knew this was going to be more than a simple camping/canoeing trip. I knew it was a pivotal point and a life-changing occasion. Behind the excitement loomed a slight and almost invisible fear of what Dad might have planned; a fear of what he might ask or say. Finally, after two long days of driving, we found ourselves at the water's edge.<sup>27</sup>*

I chose to initiate my boys into manhood when they reached about thirteen-years

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<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Meeks, Journal entry.

old but began talking about it a couple of years before. With my words, I actually crafted their heart and will by speaking of their successful steps into manhood as accomplished fact. Literally, I said what I wanted to happen as if it had happened.

“Josh, we’re going to have a great time. I’ll let you in on what I’ve already told your brothers. Then you’ll know what they know, and when you get home, you’ll be like the rest of us Meeks-men.”

You can do this also and with little effort. The spoken word of a father or admired mentor is powerful. Words can literally shape a boy’s future. Dr. Meg Meeker, author of *Boys Should Be Boys* and *Hero: Being the Strong Father Your Children Need*, says every child needs to hear 3 things about themselves from their parents:

1. What the parent believes about them.
2. How the parent feels about them.
3. What the parent hopes for them.<sup>28</sup>

For each of my sons, it was as simple as, “Son. One day you’ll be a man.” I believed they’d make it. I felt confident in them. Being a man was my aspiration for them. My short statement cast a vision and created instant reality in the minds of my boys. Tell your initiate he will be a man, and follow it up with your heart, your commitment, and your expectations: “You can do it. I will help you get there. I want to lead you to succeed, because I want you to become a great man. You just need to let me show you what I know and help you along that path.” Those few lines communicated my confidence in him, my hope for his best, and vision for him. They told him I could and would help him and lead him along those lines. It stated the necessary requirement of his permission, though it did not require an immediate response. I invited him, but I did not ask him to buy in yet, because at this point, I was not looking for a response. I was planting seeds of possibility and setting expectations. His imagination needed to feed them. They needed time to grow. Early vision-casting is like sowing seed and allowing it to develop beneath the soil. These thoughts need time to take root in a boy’s heart. The formal invitation is best made nearer the time of the manabout. That is when you ask for his acceptance.

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<sup>28</sup> Dr. Meg Meeker, *Boys Should Be Boys and Hero: Being the Strong Father Your Children Need*, Regnery Publishing (May 15, 2017)

When the manabout is presented, do so in only in general terms. “When you are thirteen, I will take you on a special trip. It’ll be just you and me. We’ll take a few days to be together to talk and work on helping you make the first steps to being a man. After our trip, you’ll be more like me, a man, than a child like your little brothers and sister. I’ll need you to help me bring your brothers along one day too.” Again, I stated my vision as an accomplished fact. I gave him enough of a description to whet his appetite, stir his imagination, and excite him to want more. “I’ll need you to help me...” gave him an example of how he would be more man than boy after our journey. Honestly, if you make this invitation right, he will have a hard time sleeping that night due to the excitement. Almost like waiting for Christmas, the next few years or months before the manabout journey will seem an eternity, but is a good and productive wait.

The boys are curious and may press for more details, but don’t give them any. Keeping the secrets secret is integral to the success of their manabout. Waiting is a trait men must develop to be mature. Make him wait! It’s good for him. Actually, this waiting is already preparing him for manhood, and you can say so. “Son. I will tell you everything once we are on the trip, but for now, you must wait. Waiting is a manly trait; it shows self-control. You’ll be told everything at the right time. For now, learning to be a man means learning to wait.” He may not like waiting, but knowing it’s a manly thing to do will give him good reason and purpose for his patience. Assuring him that nothing will be held from him at the right time provides a degree of satisfaction until the trip.

After this initial seed sowing, repeat it maybe once a year. His birthday is a good time. This reminder is simple. “Son. You are growing up and moving toward manhood (a vision statement as if it were fact). I’m looking forward to our manabout journey. It’s going to be great (another vision statement).” Every situation is different. Your son may still be years away from his manabout, or you may have only a few weeks until he is ready. An invitation to manhood is still helpful and needed regardless his age. I recently extended this invitation to a young man in our community whose father is not present in his life. Our family has been getting to know him over the last several years. As he’s played sports with my son, he’s been in our home often, and we’ve included him in activities here at home. We’ve intentionally built a relationship with him. Now that this relationship is in place and he is 15 years old, I said, “Jason (not his name), you are becoming a man. I believe you can be a great man. When my sons reached their teen years, I helped them enter the world of manhood by taking them on an amazing five-day journey where I revealed to them what it means to be a man. I didn’t want them to learn about manhood from boys or have to guess at what being

a man means, and I don't think you should have to either. I want to introduce you to manhood as I did my sons. I want you to think about letting us lead you on a trip like the ones we've taken before. There is no need to respond just now, but think about it. We'll talk again."

All the invitation elements are again present:

**A Model of Manhood** - Your relationship with the boy developed over time through association.

**A Vision Statement** - "You are becoming a man. I believe you can be a great man."

**Contagious Enthusiasm** - "When my sons reached their teen years, I helped them enter the world of manhood by taking them on an amazing five-day journey where I revealed to them what it means to be a man."

**His Best Interest in Mind** - "I don't think you should have to learn about manhood from boys or have to guess at what being a man means."

**Introduce the Manabout** - "I want to introduce you to manhood as I did my sons. I want you to think about letting us lead you on a trip like the ones we've taken before."

**Allow Him to Wait** - "There is no need to respond just now, but think about it. We'll talk again."

Of course, your invitation doesn't need to follow mine word-for-word, but it should convey similar sentiments and expectations.

A call to manhood is a crucial element in a rite of passage. Think of other meaningful events to which we are invited - marriage, for example. What bride prefers a parental arrangement over being asked for her hand? Even in grade school recess, wasn't it better to be chosen by a team than assigned to one? Inviting a boy into manhood tells him that he is special. Designing a meaningful rite of passage for him creates an environment rich with potential and is a way of selecting him to be on your team. Your offer separates him from the crowd and welcomes his membership in a unique and intimate community. With membership comes responsibility, and responsibility provides a sense of importance, value, and meaning.

As the time approaches for the actual manabout event, a verbal buy-in is required. He needs to accept your invitation with his own mouth. "Daniel, I'm ready to lead you into manhood, but you'll have to decide if you are ready. It means you are trusting me and allowing me to guide you into manhood. I will keep you safe. I will do what I believe to be in your best interest. I will be honest with you and expect the same from you. If you have any questions, you can ask them. I won't judge you. But if you are ready to move into manhood, just say so."

If he has questions or asks for more time, allow that. If he agrees, celebrate his wise choice. If he rejects the invitation, make an end run. Here is one...

"I'd like you to have a strong foundation for your adulthood, and it begins with the things we would cover on the manabout. Son, I had hoped to take you on this journey, but I know there is a time and place for all things. Think about this another year. I will respect your decision to wait. Men can wait. I will wait as you think it over during the next months and we'll talk again later. I don't mind waiting with you."

Again, those are my words, and not the speech you have to make. But the ideas are important, and you should include them in your response. The goal of the response is to keep the option open for a later revisit. To do so:

**Acknowledge that his decision has merit** - "I know there is a time and place for all things."

**Keep the offer standing** - "I will wait as you think it over during the next months." "I don't mind waiting with you." (Not waiting ON, but WITH.)

**Show him respect** - "I respect your decision to wait."

**Recommit to your interest in his good and best** - "I'd like you to have a strong foundation for your adulthood, and it begins with the things we would cover on the manabout..."

When the day comes that he accepts, celebrate! Congratulate him on making a wise decision. "Good job, son! I'm very proud of you for choosing to grow up. I can't wait to tell you everything. It's going to be amazing. We'll start making plans soon. I'm just proud of you; let's go tell your mom!"

A good way to remember those is:

**Celebrate** - "Good job, son!"

**Congratulate** - "I'm very proud of you for choosing to grow up."

**Circulate** - "Let's go tell Mom!"

Once the invitation has been made and accepted, move to stage two - Orientation.

# chapter 6

## ORIENTATION

### LEAVING THE OLD AND STARTING NEW

*True manhood calls for discipline of character, strong determination to set a course of action, and courage to stay at a task. But brutality? Vulgarly? Lack of courtesy? Hardly.<sup>29</sup>*

- Chuck Swindoll

*If I could offer a single prescription for the survival of America... it would be to restore the family. And if you asked me how to do it, my answer - doubtlessly oversimplified - would be: save the boys.<sup>30</sup>*

- William Raspberry

My eyes opened. It was light outside as I came to consciousness. The twenty hours of driving and the first day of paddling had physically drained me. I was stiff, and the ground was hard, but lying there in the tent, a loon calling across the lake, I still felt good, too good to roll out of my warm sleeping bag. But something wasn't right. Daniel was gone.

I reached to feel, and his sleeping bag was empty but still warm. Thankfully, before I could begin to really worry, I heard

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<sup>29</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Man to Man*. Zondervan Publishing Grand Rapids (1996) pg. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family*. Multnomah Publishing (1990) pg. 32; A quote from William, Raspberry, "Save the Boys," *The Washington Post*, 18, July 1989.

him just outside the tent. "You okay?" I asked. "Oh, hi, Dad. Yep, I'm fine. Just drank too much water last night." His words triggered the same urge in me. Within fifteen minutes, I was teaching him how to select the various sized dry twigs and sticks and arrange them for our breakfast fire. I challenged him to get things perfectly ordered so he could start the fire without paper and with only one match. "This is great, Dad," Daniel offered. He struck his match, and the spark caught. "One match!" I cheered. He beamed. His manhood had been ignited.

### **Disorientation — Losing Your Bearings to Opening Your Hearing**

The goal of a manabout is the formation of a new identity — a man. What we mean is that we want boys to see themselves moving toward adulthood and away from childhood. Said another way, we want them to gain a new orientation for their lives and navigate life from the perspective of a man, not a kid. To accomplish this, your boy must begin listening, learning to trust, and getting his signals from you. He will need to be watching you, listening to you, and imitating you in years to come. But orientation begins with disorientation. Childishness must be extracted as maturity is added. Disorientation is helpful to this process of extraction and speeds the creation and opening of lines of communication and trust. Every branch of our military follows this pattern with new recruits — they break them down in order to rebuild them. Likewise, Dads must place initiates in situations in which they will need to receive counsel, direction, and instruction from them. Selecting an environment that is safe but unfamiliar is important. The more unfamiliar, the less your initiate will rely on himself and the more he will look to you for answers and direction. The unfamiliar opens a boy's mind to possibilities not likely to be considered otherwise. Disorientation gives mentors a cleared slate on which to write a new script in a boy's life.

Since they are still boys and are inexperienced in much of life, disorientation is usually not too difficult to arrange. Any number of scenarios exist or can be designed in order to disorient your boy. After a crash course in orienteering with a map and a compass, one church sends a group of young boys into a national forest with a map, a compass, and two young men who were initiates the year before. The experienced guides are silent and hands-off except in the event of a medical emergency. It is the groups' responsibility to move from the drop-off spot to a marked destination on the map. The map contains just those two marks: the drop off point and the destination. The unfamiliar creates disorientation and forces them to work in a new environment, find their bearings, and make decisions. These boys emerge with a new image of

themselves and acquire a confidence impossible to gain as quickly or as deeply in familiar contexts.

The Tugen of Kenya initiate their boys in small groups of 3-5. Men, who have experienced their rite of passage years before, become the new initiate's guides. These guides instruct the new initiates with a single phrase, "Tiech ole katiech." It means, "Step where I step." Likewise, your boys' simple instruction can be, "Watch me and do exactly as I say." In our case, being far from home, in an untamed environment, with no electricity, and dependent on ourselves for food preparation, created the disorientation necessary for rebuilding to take place.

My third son, Benjamin, is admittedly our most natural outdoorsman. From about the time he could walk he was stalking lizards, catching turtles, and collecting bugs. If we fish, Benjamin will catch the first, the most, and often the biggest. He even catches trout with his bare hands! As a four-year-old, while we were on a trip in West Africa, Benjamin discovered a baby gazelle hidden under a bush. A few years later a fawn almost ran over him rounding the corner of our house where he was standing. As a teen, he stalked a full-grown whitetail buck and came within twenty feet as it lay in its bed, completely unaware of his presence. Benjamin is at home in the outdoors, yet even he was off balance as I led him into the wilderness of the Boundary Waters along the border between the US and Canada. The map, the destination, and the pre-planned camping sites were all in my possession. It was forced, but he had to lean on me, look to me, and listen to me.

Again, I'll borrow from Benjamin's notes as a real example of what goes on in a boy's heart:

*Fear. Fear envelopes my whole being. Our aluminum canoe, that had previously seemed so steady and safe, now rocks with each battering of dark green waves. The last remnant of warm sunshine speedily disappears from view as the skies are overwhelmed by a shadowy, rolling blanket of black. Dad points out that our next landing site is in view, but from the way the clouds look, we may not be able to see more than 30 feet ahead as soon as the driving torrents decide to fall. The wind is picking up, and so are the waves. Before I realize it, my whole body is shaking from the frigid Canadian water that seems to be alive all around me. It leaps ever higher, as if reaching for something it cannot obtain. My white-knuckled hands tightly grip the paddle. My muscles strain against these waves. Yet progress remains slow. Behind*

*me, Dad's voice rises, with effort, above the wind, "Son, we've got to get to the landing site! Keep paddling! Don't let up! Give it all you've got, son!" Although I sense concern in Dad's voice, I know it is for me - not him, and my fear is replaced with strong resolve. I take his words to mind and paddle with everything in me. Soon my arms are burning with exhaustion, but I can't stop - I can't give up - I can't surrender. Before I fully realize it, the tip of the canoe abruptly grinds to a halt on a small, rock-strewn beach.<sup>31</sup>*

We briefly discussed "The Calling of Men" event in chapter four. After a presentation on the topic "A Man and Courage," the guys are divided into two groups. One group is taken on a canoe trip down a nearby river, while the other faces a daunting climb up a 40' tower, where they are snapped onto a quarter-mile zip-line! From the top, the 40' looks like 200'! Knees knock, and palms sweat. A healthy fear levels the field, and husky athletic types are often just as anxious as the rest of us. The bravest person to have taken the leap, however, was perhaps the least likely to succeed. Kevin had cerebral palsy. Physically unable to operate even his wheelchair, he allowed the other guys to strap him into the harness, carry him up the tower, and then launch him down the zip-line. He was frightened, certainly, but he swallowed hard and listened to his mentors. Exchanging his fear for trust in the guys, he experienced the exhilaration of sailing through the air and exponentially increased his confidence.

You may have noticed the examples I've been using have been on a lake or river, in a forest, or at a wooded retreat. I believe the wild provides the ideal context. However, I realize that it isn't possible for everyone to reach a forest or wilderness area. I've tried to envision a scenario for the city-bound manabout. Near most cities, there are camps, parks, or even indoor businesses with rock climbing walls, zip lines, trust falls, or ropes course elements. These are safe but challenging, and these settings could likely provide a degree of disorientation sufficient to cause an initiate to lean on and look to a mentor.

If I were guiding a young initiate at an indoor rock climbing wall, I might get his attention this way: "Ray, listen to me. When we are at the wall, pay attention to everything the instructor tells you. Listen to him and do exactly what he says." This is very much like the East African leaders' "Step where I step." Opening with "listen to me" gives the initiate the right reference point for his life to come; the follow-up,

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Meeks, Journal entry.

"listen to him [the instructor]" is simply your first directive to the initiate. This same pattern of getting the initiate's attention and then directing him to follow the surrogate mentor is used in the Gospels when the Heavenly Father's voice breaks from the skies at Jesus' baptism and then directs the witnesses to Jesus: "listen to Him."

Gaining the ear of your son is critical to his future on both the temporal level and the eternal. The manabout is a two-dimensional event. The mentor or father-figure is an example of how a man should behave on the earth, but also a template for understanding of God as Father, Leader, and Lord. Experiencing what happens when a man listens, follows, and trusts a guide prepares his heart for God's later call on the initiate's life, to "Come follow Me."

It is fundamental and essential that the initiate have an open mind and listening ear to you and your leadership. If he doesn't trust you or is unwilling to listen to your guidance, then you can't lead him. Thus, the goal of disorientation is an open ear and mind; to force the initiate to listen to, to rely on, and to trust in those who are about to lead him into a whole new world of challenge and wonder. The Tugen of Kenya lead boys away from village life and norms into a secluded area in the jungle to force the initiates into disorientation and dependence for a time. On our canoe trip, I held the map; I knew the destination; I had the plan. Placing your initiate in new circumstances and removing him from what is familiar forces him to consider new options, and you will be his best one.

In addition to your choice of location, there are other things you can do that will provide layers of disorientation. The military collects recruits' civilian possessions and removes all connection with the past; even their hair (a form of identity and orientation) is taken. The army calls the shots now. At "The Calling of Men," a bus driven by one of the staff whisks the boys away from Nashville to the camp, which is in an unfamiliar location. But first, initiates' cell phones are collected, only their clothes and bedding are taken to camp with them. On our canoe trip, I held the map; I knew the destination; I had the plan.

Renaming is another tactic. For instance, the British call their military trainees "squaddies." In the US, fresh army trainees are called "cadets." Marine candidates are renamed "grunts" (GRound units UNTrained). The US military also refers to new recruits by rank or rank and last name instead of first name or full name. Private or Private Jones is used instead of Mike or Mike Jones, for example. During pledge-week,

my college fraternity, Knights, referred to us as “pledges” as “squires.” One Nilotic tribe uses this tool in their rite of passage. They refer to the group of initiates using the generic title, “Bagulei,” meaning “bowl mate,” because throughout their rite of passage, the boys eat from a communal dish (baguliit). Upon successful completion of their initiation rites, they are given new names which thereafter legally trump those on their birth certificates.

On my trips with my sons, when we left our house for the 20+ hour drive to northern Minnesota, I too used language to craft a new identity for the boys. As we pulled out of the driveway, waving goodbye to Mom and the other siblings, I said to Daniel, “Now, it’s just the boys!” He immediately knew what I meant. It was a compelling invitation, a pull toward me, toward maleness, and into “our” circle. I was saying, “You and I share a common created role.” Including my son in this club, for which he was designed and created, disrupted his previous identity as “a little boy” or “one of the children” and created an opportunity for a new identity, not only in name but in character.

I enjoy how John Eldredge discusses the journey of manhood in his book *Wild at Heart*. About this part of the initiation of a boy into manhood, he wrote, “The history of man’s relationship with God is the story of how God calls him out, takes him on a journey, and gives him his true name.”<sup>32</sup> During your manabout, you will call your son to manhood, you will take him on a journey, and you will give him his true name. Eldredge is exactly right.

### **Re-Orientation — Finding Your Way in the New World**

Reference points are required for navigation. Inexperienced explorers stumble, move in circles, become fearful, stay lost and never emerge without the aid of navigational tools. The New World of Manhood is not something boys can safely jump into. Without a compass or map, inexperienced land navigators who run into the forest will not find their waypoint; without guidance, boys become lost in the world of manhood. Left to their own devices, they fail to navigate adolescence, to emerge without wounds and scars, or to fully develop many aspects of true manhood. This cycle perpetuates itself in subsequent generations, just as a blind man and those following him will unfailingly land in the same pit.

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<sup>32</sup> Eldredge, John. *Wild At Heart*. Published by Thomas Nelson (2001). pg 103.

It occurs altogether too often. I'm not talking in theory. I've seen many teen boys in over their heads in the dense jungle of what it means to be a man. In their frantic attempts to prove to others (and themselves) that they are grown up or that they are adults, they fall into traps and follow stumble towards dead ends. They accept and follow narratives about manhood that are flawed, that don't deliver what they promise, that change with the winds of fad or opinion. Boys attempting to discover love, prove their manliness, and find fulfillment are often diverted down the dead end road of sexual gratification, only to learn that they are inept at long-term, meaningful relationships. As soon as the passion fades, they learn just what impotent failures they are at winning and keeping a woman's heart. Living and expressing true love is much more demanding than succumbing to mere passion. Mature, manly love is an entirely selfless expression of value toward a woman. Without guidance, boys remain in the jungle of hedonistic wanderings. Boys need guidance. They must be led by experienced, wise men who know the path to the high-ground of agape love.

Many boys, believing that sexual prowess equates to manhood, fear rejection. These fall easily to pornography. Porn allows boys (and adult males) to fantasize their manhood — to create a pretend world and faux manhood in which they need not fear rejection. Ironically, scientific research is finding that addiction to porn damages males. Psychologist Syrus Derksen found there is now research showing that pornography users have more difficulty with attention and working memory.<sup>33</sup> Increasingly, healthy men, even in their early 20's, are experiencing sexual difficulties due to heavy and prolonged porn usage.

Boys need to be warned of the damaging effects porn will have on their sexual experience as an adult. As far back as 2011, "Psychology Today" found that "after being exposed to so many lurid images in films, men have become desensitized and are increasingly unable to become excited by ordinary sexual encounters. Pornography is creating a generation of young men who are hopeless in the bedroom, the report concluded."<sup>34</sup>

Fathers and mentors need to get out in front on this and guide young boys down better paths. During the manabout, this concern is specifically addressed through one

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<sup>33</sup> Internet Study and Article: "Top Five Negative Effects of Pornography" by Dr. Syrus Derksen. <http://www.drstrasderksen.com/blog/effects-of-pornography#sthash.qoV5Z8ua.dpbs>

<sup>34</sup> Article in UK Daily Mail "Revealed...How Watching Porn Really Affects Your Brain" by Madlen Davies. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3196809/It-induces-addiction-makes-men-hopeless-bed-discover-porn-affect-BRAIN.html>

of five important milestone agreements that serve as navigational beacons marking safe passage through the jungle of manhood confusion and into the realm of Men.

## 5 Milestone Agreements — The Keys to Manhood

At sixteen, I got my driving license, and that same day my dad tossed me a set of car keys and said, "Here. You can use this car so long as you are home by 10 pm and you always let me know where you are. The fuel and insurance costs are up to you, but I'll take care of everything else. That a deal?" Of course, I agreed!

The five fundamental agreements the mentor will seek from the initiate during his manabout toss him the keys of manhood. These five milestone agreements lay a foundation for biblical manliness. They are sure footings for a young man to build his faith, life, family, and career upon that will not disappoint or fail him. These are interstate highways, not dead ends, because they spring from the central teachings of Jesus to love God and love neighbor as one's self.

Here again are the Five Milestone Agreements:

- ◀◀ **Fear of God:** An agreement to trust in the Designer's agape love and learn His ways and purposes.
- ⤴ **Honor of Parents:** An agreement to value the experience and learnings of parents and mentors.
- ⤵ **Devotion to Family:** An agreement to serve, protect, and provide for family.
- ▶▶ **Kindness to Neighbor:** An agreement to do what is best for neighbor and friend.
- ✕ **Love of Enemies:** An agreement to do what is best for those who do their worst to them.

Let's take a look at each of them in some detail and provide examples.

### Fear of God

Solomon said, "The fear of God is the beginning..." A respect and trust of God is essential and primary to a man's life because, without it, he lacks the powerful motivation required by the other four major agreements. In God, men find their perfect role model. His devotion, protection, forgiveness, mercy, and grace are expressed toward his children. We learn from God's example and we are motivated by it. His commitment to His bride and thoughtfulness toward her are seen in a variety of contexts and situations. An empty cup cannot fill even a thimble; so a man void of selfless agape love from God has nothing to give his family when selflessness is needed. We are all called to know and trust the love God has for us, and a boy's first glimpse of this selfless love is best caught through a father's or a mentor's example.

I counsel men regularly and notice a consistent pattern. With the exception of a situation where a father has died, I find that men who never knew their father, were mistreated by a father, or were neglected by a father struggle to trust or understand a Heavenly Father who says, "I love you. I will not leave you. Trust me." Their template is broken. Mentors or stepfathers can experience difficulty in gaining the trust of their young initiate due to these hurdles these boys may have in their heart. Take this into consideration if your initiate isn't able to trust you completely or doesn't yet agree that God is trustworthy. It isn't a reason to panic. Creating a new mold is challenging. For now, don't force the issue. Better to allow them to go as far they can go and applaud them for reaching that point. If an initiate doesn't believe in God, or doesn't want to follow your guidance, and says so, then let that be his starting point. "I'm glad you are being honest with me, Dave. Honesty is a godly trait, and I respect that. We'll talk about all of this again one day, maybe, when it'll be easier for us to discuss." Honesty about how he truly feels is a win. Let the initiate know you are proud of him for his honesty. Point out to him that honesty is a trait of God's. Drawing attention to the commonality they already share with God may encourage them to begin pursuing Him in years ahead.

Your hope during the manabout is to initiate a journey of trusting God. This trust will mature in years to come, but during the manabout, it should begin, or increase if it already exists. The more a man knows God, the more he brings to his family, to his community, and even to his enemies. Your job is to point out the right path and gently nudge him down it.

Clearly, this stage assumes the father or mentor is living in a trusting relationship with God himself. If he is not, then the mentor should offer to join the initiate in learning

to trust God. In fact, every leader is inviting his initiate to follow Christ ALONG with him. "Son," I said, "you know how your mother and I live. We trust God and we have seen that His ways work. He has never let us down. I've encouraged your brothers and sister to trust God like this, and now I'm inviting you to think about your life and your own trust in God. Would you like to join us on our journey of trust in Him and His ways of living?"

This is a sample invitation. It could be done any number of other ways, but this direct verbal offer is inviting and yet personal. Being a part of our families' collective commitment is appealing to a young boy who needs to belong. If your initiate is not part of your family, you can still create this appealing offer.

"Dave, my family and I live according to the teachings of Jesus. We believe they are true and that they give us a trustworthy pattern for how to make decisions in our lives. We think God can be trusted, and we want to invite you to come with us on this journey of trust. We want to teach you His ways and let you test them in your life. Would you like to join us? Would you accept our invitation?"

If the boy accepts your invitation, celebrate! Offer a prayer of thanksgiving, and have the boy verbally state to God his willingness to learn the ways of God or his desire for God's guidance in his life. He may only agree to continue to learn under your guidance. Still, celebrate! Take this to God, and set an example for the boy by giving thanks in prayer. Afterwards, you may want to physically mark the occasion in some way. This may include the exchange of a token or some symbol of this event. It can be something as simple as a notching a stick (may be only a foot in length, or a walking stick several feet long) that you have carved or purchased for him. With each commitment he will make, he will add a notch, or perhaps the manabouts symbols (5 in total). This token will be a reminder of his 5 Milestone Agreements and an item to cherish throughout his life.

An optional (or additional) marker of these decisions may be to record them in a bound journal. Some boys find writing helpful. If prose is difficult, encourage drawing. Sketching the place where each of the five discussions was held is a starter. He can move on to draw more or to combine his drawings with short paragraphs recording the exact agreements made, as well as his feelings throughout the discussion. Assure him that this is private stuff, and you aren't going (nor will he be required) to share it back home. Confidentiality allows for and encourages honesty. This journal will also

become a prized keepsake and reminder in his years ahead.

Sophocles said, "Of all things, if a man begin it well, 'tis like the end will be the same." A good start bodes a good ending, and a boy's buy-in to sincerely consider and explore the ways of God points him in a direction that will empower him to fulfill the remaining four areas of agreement he will be invited to consider.

### **Honor of Parents**

We first learn to obey our parents because we are forced. Infants have no option but to trust their mothers' and fathers' care. This was even true of Jesus! On the cross, He referenced Psalm 22, which contains the statement, "You made me trust in You even at my mother's breast. From birth, I was cast upon You." A forced dependence on parents is God's design; it has value. On our trips to the Boundary Waters, my sons had to trust me. I held the map. I knew the destination. The master plan was tucked away securely in my mind. In almost all rites of passage, initiates are kept in the dark and left to rely on their mentors or guides for everything from directions to food and shelter. On your manabout, when climbing to the mountain's peak, warming around a campfire, or tenting under the canopy of a starry night, it is important to assure your initiate that you'll be with him for the entire event though you'll only reveal the details of the event as needed and not in advance. All he needs to do is listen and obey. Keeping him off balance creates an opportunity for him to trust that you know what is going on and that if he will just follow you, he will be fine. This not only assures a successful manabout for him but more importantly, it sets him up for a trusting relationship with you throughout his life — one he will increasingly need in coming years.

By heavenly design, parents play the role of first responders. Being the primary caregivers and protectors of our children, it is critical that parents have their ear and their trust. We all agree that is terribly risky and difficult to protect or guide a rebellious child. I can't keep my kids safe if they fight against me, pull from my grasp and fling themselves into traffic. An obedient heart means life and safety for the child who listens to the instruction of a parent. I want my sons to have life, so I invite them to accept my offer to protect and guide them, even when they don't agree with me. I'm asking them to trust that I will do only what is best for them, that I have experience beyond their own, and that I am learning from God. This net of safety and security is theirs if they'll agree to let me apply it.

From a young person's perspective, it is not easy to trust a parent who has been untrustworthy. A chronically absent father will find it difficult to convince his son that he is suddenly worthy of the boy's respect and confidence. A boy will naturally hesitate to sign on with a mentor he does not know well - especially if the boy has experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of adult authority figures before. Still, the invitation must be extended with the hope that the boy will allow you, the father or mentor, to guide and advise him from the wealth of experience and knowledge you have gained over your many years of life, relationships, and faith. It is a call for him to trust your insights. A child who trusts his parent's insights is honoring his parents.

Even if you have done your best job as a parent, this is still a one-of-a-kind opportunity for deep healing and bridge building to take place in the areas in which you have hurt or failed your son. Yes, I wrote that correctly. The odds are HIGH you have hurt or failed your son in ways you do not know. Those unknown hurts, along with the known ones, need to be resolved. The very good news is that, on the manabout, you have the potential to reset it all. The things to do are listen, apologize, repent, and ask for forgiveness. This works with God, and it is the best option you have with your son. It is simple but must be sincere.

"Son, I have been doing some thinking and I want us to have a strong relationship as you move into manhood. I've made mistakes, and I may have made some that I don't know of. Son, would you think a minute, and could you tell me.... Is there any time or way that I've ever hurt you that you need me to know about and apologize for?"

Give him time. It isn't easy, and it may not feel safe, for a boy to open up so candidly. You have to assure him that 'anything goes' and not to hold back because you REALLY want to know, because you REALLY want to apologize and make things new. This, of course, is a great example of genuine manhood. Humility is one of the chief virtues of godly manhood, and your approach to him now exemplifies it.

If he shares something, begin by thanking him for letting you know, and then apologize. DO NOT make any excuses. DO NOT explain why you did or did not do XYZ. Just apologize and express regret that your actions or words hurt him. Then, ask if there are more instances. Often there are others. Boys tend to share the 'safest' ones, not the most painful ones, first. So handle each one with gratitude and humility. When he has told all he wants, you need to ask for his forgiveness. This sample puts it all together. "Son, I am so very sorry I failed you in these ways. I can tell it hurt, and I

wish I had not caused you to hurt like that. I don't want to. I ask for your forgiveness if you can give it."

If he isn't able to respond at that moment, do not demand it from him. He needs time. The wounds were deep. He feels unsafe. This is not something he is prepared for. Allow him time and space. "Son, you don't need to say anything right now. It is okay. I just want you to know that I apologize for the problems I have caused you, and I want you to know that from today on, I want us to be closer and to work together like men."

If he offers forgiveness, then THANK him. The two of you go to God and pray for God's forgiveness and for unity between you, and especially, ask God to heal the wound in your son's heart. Invite the boy to pray as well. If your son does not offer you forgiveness, you should still pray with him. In your prayer, ask God to forgive you and to heal the wound in your son's heart. If he isn't yet able to forgive you, ask God to help your son work through the forgiveness you are seeking from him.

These conversations dive into deep waters and may require a second or third visit before he is comfortable fully revealing his heart to you. Give him space. The longer it takes, the greater and deeper the wound. You are saving a life.

Now, in the event that the boy you are with is not your son, there are steps that you need to take with him which are just as critical as those of a father for his biological son. You can serve as a surrogate for the boy's biological dad. The way you do it is simple.

"Dave, I know that your father is not here today to lead you through this. That is probably hurtful to you because a boy's dad should care enough for him to be with him. What I want to do now is to ask you what he should have been asking you if he were here. Is that okay?"

You MUST have the boy's agreement. It is vital. So, ask for it before going forward. If he is not ready, as you did in earlier conversations, assure him it is okay and that you two can revisit the subject at a later time. This keeps the door open but relieves pressure for the moment. However, once he agrees, proceed.

"Dave, can you share with me a time or times when your dad failed you, disappointed you, or did something that really hurt your feelings?"

Allow him to respond. If he shares, thank him. If not, then assure him it is okay and that the door is open to talking about it when he is ready. If he does share, move ahead to apologize and ask forgiveness before praying together.

“Dave, that sounds painful. I can see how that would hurt you deeply. I know your dad isn’t here, but I’d like to say, ‘I am sorry that it happened. I’m so sorry that you have been mistreated and hurt at those times.’ God says, ‘Vengeance is mine. I will repay.’<sup>35</sup> God keeps His word. Your dad hurt you. He made his mistakes. There are no perfect fathers. You’ll make your mistakes too. Can you possibly forgive your dad for those things and trust God to take care of whatever is required to make things right? Can you decide to move on in your life with the help and love of God, your Heavenly Father?

This is huge; don’t rush. Give him the time he needs. Let him be quiet. Resist filling the awkward silence with words. The silence is not useless. He is processing. Years and layers of defense and self-protection are being challenged. Those walls don’t fall easily. Just be there for him. Silently pray for him. Allow him to process and help him work through it. It may take some time, even weeks or months, but by opening the door, you’ve provided him a path to healing.

Let me say it again: if there is silence, don’t fill it with your words. Just sit there. Be there with him. Allow him to feel his anger, his pain, his loss. Create a safe space for him to be honest with you and with himself, as his own father should have, but did not. Your presence and silence is a healing ointment. Tears are good, but not required. When he speaks it will likely be little or slow in beginning. Don’t jump in too quickly. The pace often quickens once he starts to open up. If he agrees to let go, then lead in prayer.

“God, Dave has told me of times when he was hurt by his father’s failures. No parent is perfect. Dave knows that, but these wounds are real and deep. Yet he is willing to forgive and leave them to You. Father, please receive them from him. Take the pain, and take his dad into Your hands. You take care of what needs to be done there. And now, take Dave into Your personal care. Here, Father, is Your son. Son, here is Your Heavenly Father.

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<sup>35</sup> Romans 12:19 (NIV).

This conversation about forgiveness is the first in many which will create a new narrative between you. You are becoming his role model, his spiritual guide, his recognized leader. Clearing the slate is just the first step. In some situations, there will need to be more familiarity and experience to bring the boy to a level of trust where he can risk opening his heart to forgive and then to follow your lead. If there has been a history of broken promises or a lack of involved presence in his life trust will come slowly and need to be built up over a period of time. You want and you need to have his commitment to trusting and following you in other areas over the years ahead of you both.

For now, it is important to officially offer your assistance and support to him, and to seek a verbal commitment from him.

“Dave, I want to offer you all I’ve learned over my life. I want you to benefit from the good and avoid the mistakes I’ve made, but I can’t unless you agree to allow me. Will you let me guide you? Will you follow me?” If he agrees, congratulate him and perhaps

You aren’t asking to be his boss, but his guide. He is not giving up his personhood, but offering to direct it with your help. In other words, he is committing to choose the best for himself by following a safe, wise, and loving leader. You aren’t saying to him, or fooling yourself, that you are perfect — no parent is — but it is an offer to share what you do know that will help him. His acceptance means he has agreed that you have more information than he does and that he sees potential value in listening when you offer direction and seeking your insights in matters related to his life. This is humility and wise, which is both godly and manly.

When he accepts your offer, congratulate him and perhaps physically commemorate it with a token, or if he is carving notches as markers, he should now carve his second notch into his walking stick, and you should carve one beside it to symbolize his commitment to you and yours to him. If he is journaling, allow him some time and space to record his feelings and thoughts and to describe all he has just experienced.

Once the initiate has agreed to follow your lead, you’ll be free enter discussions on about any topic you choose. There are many that can be selected, but I chose only a few to focus on with my boys. The manabout is creating a communication pipeline. If I do a good job with that pipeline on our trip, it will remain open for years to come. In other words, we can talk about any subject in years to come, so I don’t try to cover

everything on this short trip. One topic I do discuss, and I suggest that others include as well, is one most boys want to talk about but may feel a little awkward initiating - sex.

### **Devotion to Family**

I DO NOT suggest that a man open this topic without discernment, and certainly never with a boy to whom he is not biologically or legally related unless the boy's parent(s) or legal guardians have provided written permission to discuss this subject with him. I am not a legal expert on this matter, so my strong recommendation is that mentors investigate the legalities and follow them keeping mind that because laws may vary from state to state, those peculiar to your state (and the state of the boy, if different) should be acquired. Legal parameters should be known even in the case of boys who are legally considered adults. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is the old saying. Do your homework to avoid any legal issues.

Boys want and need to know about sex, but this teaching needs to be delivered by the right person(s), and only to the level appropriate for that boy and in a context that is safe for him. For example, I would not discuss this subject with a youth who is not my biological child without another witness present. Perhaps a group of three men with three initiates would be a good idea. Two of my sons and I are planning to mentor a boy on a trip next summer. We will be going with one of my adult sons and one of my sons who is an age-mate of the initiate but has been through a manabout. I have already spoken with and received permission from his mother. A general guideline is that any person(s) accompanying you should also be approved by the parents or guardians. I personally require that their permission be in writing. Again, I strongly encourage you to know your legal requirements in these matters.

In whatever way a leader chooses to approach this subject, it must be done with discernment, wisdom, and high moral dignity. There are a number of great resources available today. Audio books and podcasts are accessible and open the topic in a helpful way. For example, I broke the ice with my sons by listening to a recorded message by Dr. James Dobson on adolescence as we drove to the Boundary Waters. I let the boys know we'd talk about his messages and about sexuality later in our trip, but I encouraged them to keep up with any questions or topics that developed until we were on the water. This set the stage for discussions about sex. There are a number of great resources available today. Audio books and podcasts are accessible and open

the topic in a helpful way. Check also [www.manabouts.com](http://www.manabouts.com) for the resources we recommend and have produced for these purposes.

It was the third evening around our campfire that I reopened the sexuality discussion. "Son, you know we listened to Dr. Dobson on the way down. I'm sure that you have a lot of questions about all of that. I did when I was your age. Actually, I'd say that all boys do, or will, by the time they reach your age. Now, that we're out here and discussing manhood, I want you to know everything you need to know about sex and answer all your questions. Nothing you are going to ask is out of bounds. I'm sure you've heard some things at school or from friends that make you curious. At your age, curiosity about these things is normal and healthy, and I want you to understand everything about sexuality. Even when questions come up after we're home you have an open invitation to come talk to me. I'll make you three promises:

I won't embarrass you.

I will tell you the truth.

I will find the answer if I don't have it.

Now, remember I told you we would talk about any of your questions; but maybe it will be best just to start with the one you feel most shy or embarrassed about and we'll go from there. Remember, I'm not going to embarrass you, son. I'm here to help you through this and keep you from being embarrassed in front of friends or girls."

You might expect a barrage of questions, but don't be surprised if there are only one or two (or none). If there are none, to get the ball rolling, have one or two of your own questions ready (probably the ones you had as a boy). "Well, that's okay if you don't have any right now, so let me tell you one I had at your age and what I've learned since." I've been consistently amazed at just how few questions my boys had, but this is not a problem. The purpose of this portion of the manabout is to open the lines of communication. Just getting the word "sex" out into the open between the two of you is a big step in the right direction. Your initiation of the discussion and opening the door is also good because he doesn't have to hide his curiosity from you or feel the need to seek advice elsewhere - he knows where to go, and you've made it easy for him to come to you. By promising to handle his questions (whatever they may be) seriously and without embarrassing him, you've made it safe for him to bring up the

subject at any time.

Here, let me offer a caveat - keep it age appropriate. Adults nowadays know much more about all sorts of twists on sexuality, and these may best be reserved for a later date. Use discernment on the graphic details shared with a boy. A certain level of revelation is appropriate, but some things are better handled as a boy gets older. This isn't to renege on your promise to answer ANY question, but to answer it at a time that is best for the boy. "Son, I think that's a great question, and I will answer it, but I think it is best for you if we wait to talk more about it until you are a little older. Are you willing to trust me and wait a bit?"

Keep the language and tone mature. This isn't a time for you to revert to the fifth grade! Be serious-minded and dignified in discussing sex, and you'll raise your boy's view of it as well. Demonstrate the value of women by how you discuss the very sensitive subject that will subsequently affect them. A good rule of thumb is to talk to your son about topics of sex and women with the dignity you'd want your daughter's future husband to be taught about them.

If the initiate has lots of questions, take the time that is needed. Answer them all with age-appropriate detail. Listen and handle each with maturity and seriousness. NEVER EMBARRASS HIM for a question. Some may be silly, but they are serious to him, so show seriousness. NEVER EMBARRASS HIM in regards to anything related to sexuality. If you don't know an answer, agree to find out for him while protecting his confidentiality. In fact, let him know that your discussions are totally confidential - not even Mom will know what you guys discuss. But, again, if he has none at that moment, just assure him you are ready any time he has one. Check in with him a day or two later to see if any questions have come to his mind. A hope for the manabout event is to create a trusting relationship and open lines of communication between the two of you for the years ahead. You should keep this discussion alive during the rest of the manabout by opening the door this way, "Son, you can ask me other questions that might come to your mind any time on our trip. This isn't the only time we can talk about this."

Before leaving this discussion, there is a commitment you'll ask your initiate to make. We can't overemphasize how important this commitment is to any young man. It is a VITAL step in his advance toward true manhood. Many boys are left open to the depravity of sexual immorality simply because they were never invited by their father

to anything more lofty or virtuous. This is your opportunity to ensure your boy DOES receive that invitation to virtue. It is his chance to commit himself to sexual self-control.

I invited my sons to this special commitment after giving them several compelling reasons to keep their eyes from pornography and to wait for sex until marriage. My conversation went something like the following.

“Son, I want you to be a great man. I want you to be a great husband and dad. Someday, you’ll fall in love with a woman, a good woman who loves God with her whole heart. Ask yourself: when that happens, how would you like her to be? Would you prefer she be sexually pure, having reserved her body and affections just for you and you alone? Sure you would. So, what do you expect she would hope for from you? Shouldn’t you bring the same purity and preservation of your best to her? If she asks if you are a virgin and have saved yourself for her, how differently would you feel answering her question with a “yes” than if you had to admit you had not?

“And also, son, think about what it will mean to your children, for you to be able to tell your sons, ‘It is difficult, but you can control yourself and you can wait. I know, because I did.’ On the other hand, think of what your kids will feel if they ask — and they probably will — ‘What about you, Dad? Were you pure when you married Mom?’ Son, you have a chance, just one, to be strong, to wait, to think ahead and think of your family. You have a chance to set an example that your sons and theirs will want to follow. You can bring a gift to your wife that she will cherish her whole life. God says there is blessing in following His ways, and sexual purity brings a life of benefit beyond what you can even imagine, just as sexual impurity carries a very heavy load of sorrows and regrets.

“So, son, will you commit, now, before me and before God, to reserve your best for your wife and to be able to say to your children someday, ‘You can do it, I did?’ You won’t be alone. I will help you on this journey. You have my commitment to listen any time, answer your questions, pray with you in times when you struggle, and keep you accountable. You can keep me accountable too. If you are in, I’m in with you. Join me, son. Let’s build our family name to be one that practices the highest in all that is honorable and upholds integrity. Are you ready, at this time, to make this strong step toward God’s kind of manhood?”

Some of the initiates will already have lost their virginity. It is still possible for your son or initiate to make this vital agreement. If the boy admits there has already been a failure, they can still bring a precious gift to their future wife and children. Ask him, "Son, will you commit to pursue and practice sexual self-control from this moment forward? Wouldn't you like to one day tell your future wife, 'I was called to be a man on a manabout trip with my dad. There I learned that being a true man meant sexual self-control and on that trip, I committed myself to practice sexual self-control. Since that time, I have been self-controlled and kept myself only and purely for the woman who would one day be my wife. This is a gift I have wanted I bring to you.'"

You can also help your son understand he will be able to bring this same message and example to his children, "Boys, from the day that I understood that a true man is sexually self-controlled, I committed myself to, and have practiced, sexual purity. It is difficult, but I know you can do it, because I did."

Now, this exact speech will not be possible for some mentors or dads who were not sexually self-controlled until marriage. So, let me offer a word of encouragement if this describes you, because it is possible that your boys will inquire about your track record in this area and you want to have a good answer for him. First, do not offer that you've failed unless he asks and do not go into details if he does ask. It is sufficient to tell him that you were not under control as a young man. The reason may be that you were told it was normal or even beneficial for boys to engage in sexual activity. Maybe you were never called to make a commitment to self-control. There are many possible reasons, but that doesn't mean you can't still hold up the highest ideals for him. Spirit-controlled sexual behavior since your youth or since your conversion can provide him with a powerful example and supply him hope for himself. If, however, you are still not sexually controlled even up to now (pornography included), then it is time to find help in order to rescue not only yourself, but your boy too.

The Scriptures warn that the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children. That is NOT to say the kids will be charged as guilty for their dad's misbehaviors, but it IS to say that dad's behaviors have consequences in their children's lives. Iniquity, the twists in a person's life move from generation to generation. Your bent toward sexual impropriety will surface in your offspring. Bottom line – getting help for yourself is going to be help for your children (boys and girls).

Sexual sin is the first in almost every list of sins (Galatians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 6:18;

2 Corinthians 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8) associated with the carnal man, or the unspiritual man. This is quite intentional. Sexual sin heads the fall into every kind of division and strife-filled relationship that can exist between humans. Sex, which is meant to be the closest of contact with others, becomes the slippery slope toward alienation. When man's hope for love is based strictly on the externals, it wrecks on the rocks of loneliness. However, living surrendered to God's design rectifies this scenario. In fact, love — the sought but lost prize of the sexually controlled man — crowns the list of the blessings enjoyed by the man controlled by the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

For those who feel trapped in sexual sin, I encourage you that you aren't hopelessly doomed to it. There is hope and men can be free, but not without action. You must do whatever it takes to get yourself (and thus your children) free. The book *Surfing for God* by John Cusick is a good starting place. It is also a strong move to find and attend a Celebrate Recovery group designed for men struggling with this vice. At a minimum, seek advice from your pastor or a professional Christian counselor. This is no frivolous matter. Sexual addiction will lead to greater problems in your marriage, spiritual walk, and in the lives of your children. Take action now. It is difficult, but it is important, and men take action, even when it is tough, and especially when it is important.

To give you encouragement, you should know that the humility you exemplify by seeking help to gain self-control in this area is honorable role modeling. And your example creates a platform from which you may legitimately hold up the ideal of sexual self-control for your boy. Your struggle, the private disappointment with yourself, and the remorse you have in not having more to offer him can be redeemed as you take the tough but powerful steps necessary to overcome the grip of immorality. Your stress and shame ignite a great desire in him to avoid the same troubles. We all sin, but we don't all repent of our sin. If we fail to change course, we pass along our iniquity. But you can put up a roadblock against immorality in his life by taking the actions you need to in your own.

Great dads aren't perfect keepers of the highest ideals; however, they are persistent in the pursuit of those ideals. Your son needs you... even with your imperfections. He needs you to show up and show him that men, even when they fail, do not give up or give in. They stand up, step up, and move ahead. Paul said, "Not that I have already attained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that

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<sup>36</sup> Galatians 5:22 (NIV)

for which Christ Jesus took hold of me".<sup>37</sup> Do not avoid this conversation or back away from the goal of virginity until marriage. Hold those ideals firm before him. Encourage him to keep even his eyes under control. He needs you to point him in the right direction, expect him to embrace the best, and tell him that you hope he'll be the first (or next) in your family to do even better (in this area and others) than you've done. I think most dads share the hope that their sons will do better in life than they've done.

Be sure the initiate makes a verbal pledge not just to you but also to God. Ask him to repeat these words, "Before God, I (his full name) choose self-control and the practice of sexual purity with my eyes, mind, and body for the sake of my wife, my children, and myself in keeping with the original design of God for every man."

The boy can now add a third notch to the walking stick or record an entry in his journal commemorating his commitment. Because this is such an intensely personal and difficult commitment to keep, I would also encourage that a second token be exchanged to mark the vow. It is very important that the initiate have a tangible reminder of this verbal commitment. I've heard of men who exchanged a specially crafted medallion, or a knife, or a ring. Put some thought into the symbol you'll use, and load it with meaning. For example, the ring, being circular, symbolized an unending commitment. The medallion had the head of a lion on it and symbolized a commitment to 'stand by the lion of Judah,' which had been a theme of the group that went through an event together. The knife symbolized a severing of oneself from the ways and values of the world. The symbol you choose should be something worth keeping as a family heirloom, or perhaps a plaque commemorating the event that might be displayed in the boy's home or office as an adult. In fact, it is hoped that one day the boy you hand it to will pass it on to his son when he makes the same commitment.

I think it is powerful for every father or mentor, failed or not, to recommit himself to continued sexual purity on the manabout. This commitment should be made in a spirit of solidarity with that of his initiate, "I too commit my eyes and mind and body to sexual self-control and the pure ways of God. I'm in this with you and I join you in also committing myself to this level of bold and strong manhood."

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37 Philippians 3:12 (NIV)

## **Kindness to Neighbor**

Though it isn't solely the property of males, kindness to neighbor certainly should be on our "must-do" list.

*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

- *Words of Jesus*

*To Protect and Serve*

- *Motto of LAPD*

*To help other people at all times*

- *Boy Scout Law*

Men have practiced and promoted this time-honored code for millennia. Of course, the second greatest commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself." Adam, as a true representative of God, was designed to excel at treating others with kindness, gentleness, and compassion. But a problem arises when people don't realize who their neighbor is. Boys often miss the opportunities to serve because they don't see the needs or know their role. Dads and mentors can close the gap on this one.

In order to teach my oldest two sons to help others, when they were young I took them to a place where lots of people were in need of kindness. We lived in East Africa at that time, and the hospitals were terrible. Several people shared one bed. Smells were strong. It was a depressing place. So, I thought, "The boys and I will bring some cheer." Daniel and Caleb were young (8 and 6), so I had to consider both safety and their abilities. Because they did not understand the local languages, I also had to make an activity that didn't require verbal communication. The idea that day was for the boys to give fresh fruit to a few of the patients.

The boys were shy at first, understandably, but the smiles that stretched the somber faces of the patients communicated that they had nothing to fear. The recipients were clearly grateful, and I translated their words to the boys. "Asante sana, Toto," grandmothers offered: "Thank you, sweet child." The oranges and bananas provided a healthy boost to an otherwise drab diet, but the novelty of two little American children cheered them most. The entire thing took maybe 20 minutes before we'd given away all our fruit. On the short drive home I talked the boys through the experience.

“How did it feel when you first went into the hospital?”

“Scary,” said one. “Yucky and stinky,” said the other. We all laughed in agreement.

“Which person did you notice the most?”

They each remembered a person either by how friendly they were or by how sick they were.

“What did making them smile cause you to feel?” I asked.

“I liked it!” They both agreed.

That was it. Mission accomplished. I had hooked them on the satisfaction of a healthy dose of doing good. To this day, Daniel and Caleb both enjoy doing small but kind favors for others. The manabout commitment is to show kindness toward our neighbor, but we go farther by asking our boys to serve primarily in OBSCURE ways. The Lord encouraged giving in secret. The true test of a man’s heart is what he does when no one is looking. Therefore, giving and serving in unseen, anonymous ways is the commitment that we’re looking for in the manabout. Living out this commitment can come at a cost. The test of manhood is whether or not he will pay that price.

When I was in college, we had fraternity and sorority banquets or parties around the Christmas holidays. One year, while waiting for the girl I really liked to ask me to her sorority’s banquet, another girl jumped the gun (about 3 weeks ahead of most people on the campus) and asked me to hers. I did not want to go. Why? Well, the girl — we’ll call her Betty — was one of those socially awkward folks everyone avoided. Her hair was not kept well, she was too loud, she was not attractive, and well... she was weird. Well, in spite of everything in me screaming, “RUN!”... I accepted her invitation with a polite smile and a somewhat — no, totally — forced, “Thank you!”

Betty was a friendly, nice person. But the reason I accepted was completely based on a commitment I was following to do whatever I thought Jesus would do. I’d been watching Jesus in the Gospels and observing how he dealt with socially rejected women. Those stories, like the woman at the well, the woman washing his feet, and the woman caught in adultery, left me no option but to accept Betty’s invitation.

Well, believe me, I am not exaggerating when I tell you that no sooner had I left her and entered the school cafeteria than the girl who I had really wanted to ask me to her banquet, did ask me! And, yep, her banquet was the same date as Betty's. I couldn't attend both, so I felt obligated to attend Betty's, and I did. It was kind to befriend Betty, and I think it was, in this instance, what Jesus would have done. But it was a challenge to my ego, and of course, I was feeling uneasy about what others might be thinking and saying. But that was the price of kindness to neighbor. I chose to pay it. Godly men pay attention to those in need. We rise to protect. We sacrifice our image; we lay down our plans and our preferences; we do the difficult things, even when society thumbs its nose at us. We simply put our neighbor's needs ahead of our own. This is biblical manhood. This is what we invite our boys to enter.

"Son, I want to ask you to consider another manly commitment: to do what is best for those around you. Men put themselves last, just like Jesus. Men think of the needy, the weak, the unprotected, and the innocent. We step up to care for them, no matter what others around us think of us for doing it. Are you ready to love your neighbor? Can you stand against the tide? Will you be brave even if you are the only one who will be brave?"

Take time to talk with him about this discussing who his 'neighbors' are and scenarios in which he might show them kindness. When he accepts, pray with him. Have him carve a new notch on his walking stick or make a journal entry, or exchange a token symbolic of his commitment.

### **Love of Enemies**

Here the mark of manhood takes a giant leap. The fifth agreement moves him nearest the true and perfect version of Adam -- Jesus. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-44). Love for those who treat us wrongly, responding with kindness and value when treated with disrespect, giving ourselves for those who don't value it, is perhaps the highest expression of manhood. Very seldom would one give his life for a good person, but Jesus died for those who were against Him — He washed the feet of Judas. Forgiveness and love separate the mature males (men) from the immature ones (boys)! In a time and age when we increasingly see retaliation, division, and retribution, this divine trait will cause those in darkness to take notice. It is a trait

birthed on the manabout and then cultivated in life.

Doing what is best (not always easiest) to those who misuse or abuse us takes strength of character. A man with a poor self-image, low esteem, or overgrown ego will not respond to his persecutor with love. Either he will cower or he will control for his own best interests. He has no higher motivation than self, and this is where real manhood differs. Real men are not self-seekers; they are givers. Anatomically and spiritually, men are givers. Jesus was Deity but didn't think being God was a right that He should wave in the face of His persecutors (Philippians 2:5ff). He didn't retaliate (1 Peter 2:3). He humbled Himself and gave. Boys take. Boys expect to be served. Boys, like all children, put themselves at the center of the universe, but men step outside that circle and realize they are the protectors of those circles, giving even their own lives in service to them.

Some initiates will need to look only as far as their failed fathers for those they must love in spite of their failures. Forgiveness is the baseline act of love for those opposed to us. It is the only remedy for the distance between us and our enemies. Forgiveness means not counting another person's mistakes or evil actions against them; it means doing what is best for them instead of retaliating. Real men have the ability to endure unjust persecution without being embittered by it. Pride will always blame and demand justice. Humility based on the knowledge that we are flawed and failed men enables us to forgive and give space. Love of enemies, like all the other manly traits, is practiced first in the home.

I Peter 2:13 - 4:6 is a great section of scripture dealing with how to respond in a variety of unjust scenarios. The Jews were occupied by Rome and it was resented by the local citizens. Slaves were often mistreated by their masters. Jesus was insulted and tortured without cause. Wives can be unappreciated by unbelieving husbands, and husbands may not be respected by their wives. In every scenario, the response is to reject retaliation and to lavish love. How? How did Jesus do it and how did Paul teach the early Christians to turn the dial from hate to help?

"Instead, He (Jesus) entrusted himself to Him (God) who judges justly" (3:23).

"By doing good you should silence the talk of foolish men (Romans)" (2:15).

“If a man (slave) bears up under unjust suffering because he is conscious of God” (2:19).

“Wives... the holy women... put their trust in God” (3:5).

“Husbands... similarly treat them... as heirs of the gift of life” (3:7).

“If you suffer for what is right... set apart Christ as Lord” (3:14-15).

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves with the same attitude” (4:1).

What is the common denominator among these various situations? How did they love their enemies? They trusted God. Making the decision to focus on living our life for “the will of God” (4:2) is how we endure malignment and malevolence with dignity and not defense. Complete confidence that God is in control can restrain a man from self-will. As a man becomes more and more attuned to the thinking of God, he finds himself able to discipline himself, give of himself, and restrain himself.

Around the campfire or by the river bank, talk with your son about Jesus. Give him examples of how Jesus responded with good toward those who did him wrong. Use examples of injustice he can relate to from Christ’s life like the lies poured out against Jesus by the false witnesses; the way Pilate illegally charged him with guilt even though he was innocent; the ganging up by the false witnesses who collaborated on their allegations; and the betrayal by his friend Judas. Work together to think of similar scenarios today. For example, Pilate misused his authority. How do people misuse their authority or position against us? Not only government authorities misuse their power, but also coaches, teachers, parents, and even siblings can use their power for their own interests instead of those around them. Ask the initiate how it makes him FEEL when people are wrongly or unfairly treated. Then talk about how Jesus handled the unfair situations he faced. How did Jesus love his enemies?

This should be discussed with your initiate, but then his slate needs to be erased. Ask him if he has any enemies. If so, he should name them and their offense(s) against him. Then he should describe how their offense made him FEEL. I suggest that you send him away for a half hour or so to give him time to write them on paper and process them before the Lord.

**A Supplemental Guide “How to Forgive Your Enemy” in the back of this manual will help you lead this process.**

Forgiving our enemies brings us full circle to our first of the 5 Milestone Agreements. The power to forgive others is empowered and energized by our own forgiveness. “Be kind and compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you,” Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:32. John rephrased it, “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). The power to live out these commitments springs from our decision to follow Him. A real man is not recognized by his muscles, his money, his macho, or his magnetism; rather, the mark of a real man is the fear of God. It is his devotion to and respect for God lived out by his following of the ways of God. Allowing God’s ways and wisdom to have supremacy and primacy in his daily walk is how Adam was designed to live. This fear of God fuels a man’s ability to forgive and to love even his enemies. It is also what gives him the humility to submit to parents, the power to keep himself under control for his family, and to have compassion for his neighbors. These 5 Milestone Commitments are at the center of what makes a man and how he practically lives it out in the earth.



## chapter 7

# RE-ENTRY

### ASSIMILATION INTO COMMUNITY

*Today's young men are coming of age in an era with no road maps, no blueprints, and no primers to tell them what a man is or how to become one. They need the adults who orbit their world - their parents, teachers, counselors, bosses, coaches, administrators - to understand what is happening in their lives...<sup>38</sup>*

- Michael Kimmel

*The rite also tells your child that you are recognizing a level of maturity in his or her life.<sup>39</sup>*

- Jim McBride

Komong'unet is one East African tribe's term for its rite of passage's re-entry. Komong'unet means "emergence." Likewise, with commitments to manhood made, freedom found in forgiveness, and crippling wounds healed during the first stages of the manabout, your son is ready to emerge from his time of orientation and re-enter the community he left. Though still boys in body, they have been transformed in mind and heart. This inner transformation should be recognized,

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. Harper Pub. New York (2008) pg. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Jim McBride, *Rite of Passage: A Father's Blessing*. Moody Publishers Chicago (2011) pg. 109.

and their position celebrated, before their individual role(s) or duties to it are defined. To symbolize this change of status some cultures actually burn the clothing worn by the initiate during the rite of passage, illustrating a complete termination of childhood. New clothes are worn as he re-enters the village. Symbolism during re-entry, as in the other stages, is very important. Fathers, mothers, mentors, and family need to give time and thought to this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Before proceeding, let me emphasize how HUGELY significant re-entry is. Though a simple, but meaningful reception back from 'the wilds' can do the job, we encourage more. Consider a celebration packed with symbolism and meaning that is greater than his birthday parties, his high-school graduation ceremony, and right up there with his future wedding reception. This should outdo them all, because, very directly, this transformation sets the stage for all the others that will follow. Make it a big, big deal.

Borrowing from the book *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, a quote from Dostoevsky's classic *The Brothers Karamazov* underscores the significance of ceremony:

*I want you to understand, then, that there is nothing nobler, stronger, healthier, and more helpful in life than a good remembrance, particularly a remembrance from our childhood when we still lived in our parents' house. You often hear people speak about upbringing and education, but I feel that a beautiful, holy memory preserved from early childhood can be the most important single thing in our development. And if a person succeeds, in the course of his life, in collecting many such memories, he will be saved for the rest of his life. And even if we have only one such memory, it is possible that it will be enough to save us someday.<sup>40</sup>*

A few weeks ago, I attended an SEC football game. During pre-game, the band marched, instruments blared, drums boomed, and cheerleaders screamed. At midfield, a military flag corps stood at attention as dozens of majorettes twirled and tumbled across the field around them. Almost 200 high school students carrying brightly colored streamers joined the 1500 college students already on the field. The entire stadium of 100,000 stood and roared thunderously when the team raced onto the field. The atmosphere was electric. I can only imagine how those players must have felt being the focus of that cacophony. This is what our young men need to experience as they re-enter the arena of their house, neighborhood, and community. They need to know

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<sup>40</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Andrew R. MacAndrew, trans. (New York: Bantam, 1970), pg. 934.

we're all rooting for them to push hard, play their best, and win!

Every re-entry will be unique. The specifics of each young man's re-entry can be arranged and carried out in any number of ways, but we suggest that several elements are essential and deeply symbolic for these new men. More can be added to these, and the order of events can deviate from our example, but we caution against omitting any of the following six elements.

### **Food**

Festive ceremonial events should include feasting! Food is the universal symbol of inclusion. Incorporating this young man into his family and community is illustrated by the communal sharing of food. Eating from the same dish, in a figurative manner, says that he is accepted and that he shares responsibility for and ownership of the community. Go big! Whether it is a formal meal at an expensive restaurant or a backyard barbecue that includes the neighborhood, it should be special and include the right people. By 'right people,' we mean those who have contributed and will contribute to the initiate's life most directly. They include family and friends.

### **Family**

All family members who can attend, should attend. Some boys don't have many or any family members who will share in their event. These boys will need surrogates to stand in for those family members. Important men, like coaches, church leaders, and mentors, can fit this role. Mothers can also have stand-ins if biological or adoptive mothers are not available. When biological family is not available or willing, then the family of faith and community steps in to fill the void. These young men are important to others, and if it isn't to their biological parents or siblings, then it is to the larger family of humanity that they matter.

The point is that family should surround the young men. The family is the initial and most logically natural community into which they fit and matter. Prepare and send invitations to family, just as you would for a wedding.

### **Friends**

You want a crowd. You want your stadium to quake when he steps onto the field.

Initiates should return to an expectant curious crowd as you cut the ribbon on the unveiling of the new man. The initiate's age mates, as well as younger children, should attend. Boys who've gone through the manabout before the initiate should attend. Men and women should attend. Close and casual friends should attend. Neighbors, teachers, employers, church members, and even local elected officials can be invited. The larger the gathering, the greater the impact his new manhood will immediately have on the people around him. The re-entry is his initial impact on the world. His decision to make the five core commitments to manhood should be known to the world and the re-entry ceremony is a perfect place to make public his commitments. The larger the audience, the greater the weight of accountability it places on his shoulders to keep those commitments to those who will be watching him daily for years to come.

### **Mothers and Sisters, and the Prayer-Song of the Women**

Though it is not immediately obvious, the hoped-for effect of a successful manabout is a man who will see to the safety and security of women. (Don't read through that last statement too quickly.) Men, godly men, good men, mature men, Christ-like men, will protect women and children and provide what is good and best for them. Women are objectified by mannish adults; godly men glorify them, not in terms of raising them above God, but in terms of respecting, valuing, and honoring their wonderful and precious qualities and attributes and the contributions they bring to the world and to life.

At the same time, there is no greater thing a woman can bring to a man than respect. When she says, "I trust you," it stirs something powerful, deep, noble, and mighty in a man's heart. This is where women can provide a unique contribution to the re-entry. The women of the community need to make a statement to the re-entering initiate. They can do it individually through speeches from mothers or sisters or grandmothers. They can also do it in a very powerful way that seems to pierce deeper than any other - through song. I've seen this done in a most dramatic ceremony in which the females (children, girls, young women, mothers, and grandmothers) circle around the initiates and bless them by singing over them. An example might be this slightly altered hymn that's actually a prayer for the initiate. (Sung to the tune of the Christian hymn "Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer.")

Father, hear the prayer we offer:  
Not for ease that prayer shall be,

But for strength that he may ever  
Live his life courageously.

Not forever in green pastures  
Do we ask his way to be;  
But the steep and rugged pathway  
May he tread rejoicingly.

Father lead in paths of righteousness.  
Whether bright or dark the way,  
May he lead, protect, defend.  
Offer his life, for foe and friend.

So as Christ our LORD and brother  
Cherished sister, mother, bride,  
Cared for them more than self,  
Father, overcome his pride.

Be his strength in hours of weakness,  
In his wanderings be his guide;  
Through endeavor, failure, danger,  
Father, be Thou at his side.

Come young man to your rightful place,  
Stand with men in Jesus' Name;  
Self last, us first, God over all,  
The Father always at your side.

Amen.

### **Fathers and Brothers, and the Patriarch's Pledge**

As the women conclude their prayer-song, it is time for the patriarchs to step to the center. It is a powerfully significant act if at this point the community encircles the initiate to symbolize the boy's position in that community. Males who are 13 to 49 years of age form a circle at the edge of the group. Women and girls are next inside the huddle. The patriarchs who are 50 years or older, along with the boy's father or

mentor, stand nearest the initiate at the center of the circle. The youngest children, ages 12 and under, both male and female, also stand near the center. This gives the children front-row seating and symbolizes to them their importance and their security in this company. Also, being right up against the patriarchs and the new initiate, the young boys experience a small sampling of the glory and awe of godly manhood.

With the group listening as witnesses, and assuming the initiate has agreed to the 5 Milestone Agreements, the patriarchs place their hands on his shoulder or head and commission him. A grandfather or other similarly respected patriarch or mentor leads this pledge, reading each of the pledge questions. After each question, the leader should wait for the young man's verbal response to each question before reading the next.

The Patriarch's Pledge is a public, verbal commitment to godly manhood

Do you (boy's full name) \_\_\_\_\_ pledge before God and community to be faithful, loving, and loyal to God, to family, to friend, and to enemy as the LORD Jesus was faithful, loving, and loyal?

Do you pledge to seek the friendship of men of godly character, and to strive to always be humble and respectful of others, especially the elderly, children, and women?

Do you pledge to guard your words, speaking only what is true? Only what builds up? Only what encourages? Only what is needed?

Do you pledge to act in such manner that a woman or girl is never at risk in your presence?

Do you pledge never to speak with disrespect of any woman, but to speak of and to women with dignity and esteem?

If others would threaten a woman in word or action in your presence, do you pledge to rebuke, correct, and act in her defense? If men are speaking inappropriately of women, will you express to them your displeasure and leave their company?

Do you pledge to avert your eyes from looking at a wife or daughter of another in a lustful manner?

Do you receive the calling of manhood as an office ordained by God to promote faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords, King of Kings and the only Savior, and to protect those who seek to worship in His name anywhere upon the face of this earth that He has made?

The patriarch then asks, "And who will hold this man accountable?"

The community responds in unity, "We will."

Once this pledge has been publicly made, the boy's father or mentor then prays. A sample prayer might be, "LORD, this is your man. You have heard his pledge. You know his heart. We receive him into community. Be his guide. Be his strength. Make him into your image. Amen."

Should the initiate have not made the 5 Milestone Agreements, it is a matter for the Mentor or Father to determine whether to publically ask his verbal commitment to the Patriarch's Pledge. It would seem appropriate to talk with him in private beforehand to read through the pledge with him. If he determines that he will agree to these pledges, it may be appropriate to include it in the Re-Entry ceremony. If not, then the pledge may be left until a later time when he is ready to make these commitments. We suggest that at future times of transition, the mentor and the boy discuss the 5 Milestone Agreements and the Patriarch's Pledge commitments. These occasional meetings provide him a natural opportunity to reconsider his stance toward them. Potential times to readdress these commitments might be at any time he has a conversion, or when he graduates high school or has his 16th or 18th birthdays. These are generally viewed as milestone moments in Western culture and may prove a good time for reassessment.

The Patriarch's Pledge may be read at a special home gathering at any time the boy decides to make them.

### **The Father's blessing, and the exchange of a token**

As the amen is spoken, a token is produced. The token is important since it may be passed on from father to son for generations to come. A nicely bound Bible with the young man's name on it is one example. Others use a family crest, a coat of arms, a medallion, a knife, a sword, a ring, or a token to be carried in the pocket. There

are any number of options, but the item should be of heirloom quality - meaning it is something that will last and should be worthy of safe keeping and passing on to future generations.

Fathers and mentors need to think and pray about this token. You may want to have something created just for your family. You may make it yourself. It doesn't have to be expensive, just deeply symbolic, so that your future generations will want to possess it both for its historical family value and for its rich meaning.

The presentation of the token is the final gesture in the re-entry event of the manabout. A brief explanation of its significance to the boy and the listening crowd is appropriate. As an example, the MC or the Father may say, "If I may have everyone's attention. A gift is being given to (boy's name) at this time. It is a deeply symbolic item that will tie him to the men in his family before him and to those who will descend from him. His commitment to godly manhood is tightly bound up in this token. (Boy's name) understands what that commitment entails, and he has proven himself worthy of the adventure that is manhood. I am honored and delighted, therefore, to now entrust this symbol into his care and safekeeping, knowing that it is upon his shoulders to live in such a way as to honor God and honor his family name in this generation and on behalf of generations to come."

Handing this token to the young man, the father or mentor speaks a short statement of blessing. This blessing is critical. Hearing it coming the mouth of his own father is best, if possible. Even a nervous, shy, or not-good-at-making-speeches dad needs to overcome his nerves and step up on this. It is vitally important to a boy's emotional and mental health in years to come. The blessing does not have to be complicated but must include three elements. God gives us the best example of this blessing in what He said to His Son, Jesus, as Jesus rose from the waters of baptism. The Father said,

This is My Son.

I love Him.

I am pleased with Him.

Every boy needs to HEAR these from his dad. Your son needs to hear from YOU that he belongs (MY son). He needs to know that he is valuable (I LOVE him.). He needs to

know that he has what it takes (I am PLEASED with him.) Dr. Meg Meeker, an author and speaker, says, "Dads are the central figures in the identity formation of their children." Your blessing statement should include the three sentiments listed above. Here is an example of how this might sound:

"Today, I am proud to stand here with my son, Michael, as he re-enters from his rite of passage. He has made us very proud by completing the manabout and committing himself to the pursuit of godly manhood. Son, I love you dearly. I'm honored to be your father. Welcome to being a man."

The token is exchanged and the crowd applauds or cheers. Someone announces that food is available, and the music begins! The balance of the evening is filled with feasting, celebration, congratulations, and thanksgiving in ways that please and honor the LORD.

Congratulations are now in order for him, and for you, his father and mentor. Your son is literally and officially a man at heart. He stands far, far above his peers and well ahead of the culture, knowing what manhood means, embracing its duties and responsibilities, and being able to point to an event and even an exact moment when he crossed into it and became a man. The seed has been planted. The man in him has been conceived. It is the right place to begin, but not to stop.



## chapter 8

# ETHOS

### LIVING AS A MAN

*Sons need fathers who are involved in their lives - dads who will love them, teach them, and discipline them. But clearly, sons also need a masculine vision. They need a manhood language. They need a ceremony. And they need other men.<sup>41</sup>*

- Robert Lewis

*And at one point I turned when I heard a tree drop a heavy limb to the ground. I sat by the fire until the sun came up; and asked God to help me understand the story of the forest and what it meant to be a tree in that story.<sup>42</sup>*

- Donald Miller

The noun **ethos** refers to the particular rules and values that organize people, although the ethos can vary from group to group. For example, in some cultures, individual rights might be highly valued, while in others the good of the community as a whole might be considered more important. The Greek root word ethos is related to "ethics" and refers to moral character. In rhetoric, an appeal to ethos means that a speaker attempts

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father's role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood*. Tyndale House Publishers Illinois (2007) pg. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*. Thomas Nelson Nashville (2009) pg 199.

*to persuade the audience that he is authoritative and credible.*<sup>43</sup>

Ethos brings the manabout full-circle. Whereas the first three stages - calling, orientation, and re-entry - launch manhood, the fourth stage, ethos, applies it. Stages one through three can occur in a few hours or a few days, but ethos is life-long because it is the living out of the values taught and Milestone Agreements made during the first three stages. Ethos is the fulfillment of the pledges verbalized and symbolized throughout the rite of passage. A man is only a man in theory until he lives like one in everyday reality, or as the definition above might imply, until he “persuades the audience that he is credible.”

New habits and expectations should be placed on the boy immediately after the re-entry ceremony. These habits should include daily and occasional spiritual and physical practices. Spiritual habits and daily or regular routines provide for the new man’s knowledge of God’s word, involvement in prayer, and involvement in service. The book we recommend for the development and practice of the spiritual disciplines is available on Amazon.com. It’s called *D60: Transformation Through Discipleship*. This sixty-day spiritual workout provides an easy to follow weekly schedule which makes it ideal for a Father-Son joint venture into spiritual growth. We recommend that unless the father or mentor already has a daily spiritual development plan in mind, both father and son each purchase a copy of the book (which includes worksheets and charting) and go through the 60-day training together. Within 60 days, they will both have developed daily spiritual development routines which can sustain their continued spiritual growth for years to come. Members at manabouts.com will also find daily podcasts, blog posts, and resources for fathers and sons further develop spiritually and make application in daily life.

Physical habits include allowing the new man to take responsibility for his surroundings and his things. As an example, ask the boy to list 3-5 things he feels he should no longer depend on his parents to do for him. If he is having trouble, help him work through the process (without giving the answers) by asking helpful questions like these:

What should a man your age be doing instead of having his mother do it for him?

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<sup>43</sup> <http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-ethos-logos-and-pathos.html>

What would you expect you should no longer do for your son when he is your age?

What would be a simple daily action you could take for yourself to help your mother?

What are two things that you can do each morning before school (in under a minute each) that help someone else in the family?

Dads, you can help these young men move into these duties by patiently explaining or showing them how to do those things they've listed. Encouragingly coach them into competence. It may be that they need your help on something as simple as taking their dirty clothes to the laundry room instead of depending on Mom to do it. I find that my boys suffered from "laundry-blindness." They seemed incapable of seeing that their dirty clothes are on the floor and not in a laundry hamper. So, to train my sons, I literally went to their room with them and instructed, "Find all the dirty laundry you can and put it in, not beside or in the general direction of, your dirty-clothes hamper." (Our hamper, by the way, was nothing fancy. We used a cardboard box for this for years.) I watched as they picked up their undies and socks and tossed them into the hamper. "Tell me when you are all done." When they were finished, I generally could see anywhere from one to ten items they missed! "Keep trying, son. You missed some." Finally, after a few attempts, most boys will get the idea that ALL means ALL. I had my guys report to me the following day. "In the morning, call me to have a look when your room is cleaned again." When they had done a satisfactory job for a day or two, I gave them more room to be responsible. "Son, you are doing good now. I won't check in every day but will make it a random check. That means I won't give you any warning, but just check in every now and then to see if you are maintaining this habit of putting away your dirty clothes every morning before leaving the room. You okay with that? Any questions?" This general approach of deciding what he ought to do, then walking him through it, coaching, and checking to see how he is doing, works in any area of change or improvement.

Other habits may include getting a job to help pay for his clothes or to start saving for his college expenses or auto costs. Encourage him and help him, talk and walk him through the process, making sure he understands how to accomplish his goals. Young men need this opportunity to start taking care of themselves. The challenge is good for them so long as it isn't overwhelming or defeating. You are the one to make sure your son's or mentee's goals and expectations are attainable, to help him think through the process, and to provide accountability and follow-up coaching all the way

to success. He wants to BE a man, not just be called one - allow it and enable it.

For mentors, who do not live with the boy they are leading, a word about helping him develop spiritually. First, you can't be present as often as a biological father, living in the same house, could be. Not a lot you can do to change that, but you can be something else which is of great (GREAT) value. You can be dependable. Trust is one of the greatest losses a boy experiences. Your "Yes" being a "Yes", and your "No" being a "No" means a lot and goes far toward restoring his ability to trust. Trust is faith. Belief in God's faithfulness is assisted by a model of faithfulness from you. Just doing what you say you'll do; showing up when you say your will; and sticking to your plan are gifts of immeasurable worth - in this way more valuable than the 24/7 presence of a dad who isn't connected or believable. Trustworthiness is spiritual help in and of itself.

The other disciplines and habits which help a boy's spiritual growth can be accomplished by you almost as easily as they are by a live-in father. Again, *D60: Transformation Through Discipleship* is a very easy and doable way of starting the boy on a daily spiritual journey. Monitor his progress by checking in once a week in person, or even over the phone, to make sure he understands and that he is consistently sticking with the plan. Of course, taking him along to worship services, involving him in church youth activities, including him in men's events and in service to others are important ways of helping him grow in Christ.

Ethos is on-going. We at manabouts.com are building our site into a practical resource for fathers and sons who desire to move strongly into biblical manhood. We will be reviewing and recommending resources as well as inviting qualified guests, both men and women, who have been in the trenches and emerged with practical true-to-life tips and insights for the rest of us, and our young men. Our aim is to provide fresh weekly podcasts, blog posts, and videos at manabouts.com and to be a trusted go-to for fathers and sons so they may live according to their created design and their ordained purpose, to be as the original Adam was intended - the image of God on the earth.



## supplement A

# HOW TO FORGIVE YOUR ENEMY, YOUR DAD, OR ANYONE ELSE

*Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.*<sup>44</sup>

- Nelson Mandela

*We cannot embrace God's forgiveness if we are so busy clinging to past wounds and nursing old grudges.*<sup>45</sup>

- T. D. Jakes

*Whatever you loose on earth, you have loosed in heaven.*<sup>46</sup>

Hold an offense against a person, and God will hold yours against you. Let it go, and he lets yours go too. Forgiveness is freedom! Whatever you bind to others you bind to yourself. Jesus went into great detail in Matthew saying, "If you don't forgive your enemy... you won't be forgiven!"<sup>47</sup> That sobering thought should motivate us to forgive as quickly as possible.

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<sup>44</sup> Quote attributed to Nelson Mandela former President of South Africa

<sup>45</sup> T.D. Jakes, *Let It Go: Forgive So You Can Be Forgiven*, Simon and Schuster (2013), page 33.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 18:18

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 6:15

When you are ready to tackle the fifth Milestone Agreement to you're your enemies, give the initiate a page of paper and pen (or clear a place in the dirt/sand and hand him a stick) and lead him through the following steps.

**Step 1 - List Your Enemies** (and anyone who may have wronged you)

Pray with and for your boy, "Lord, help him think through these matters. Bring to his remembrance who and what needs to be given into Your care. Amen."

After prayer, ask the boy to list:

The names of all the people he can think of who have wronged him in ANY way.

The thing they did that was wrong

How it made him feel.

For example:

WHO WRONGED YOU	WHAT THEY DID WRONG	HOW YOU FELT/FEEL
My dad	He didn't take me fishing when I was 9 like he promised. I hate his job! I waited all day for that, but he never even said he was sorry.	It made me so sad
Bill Tomants	He lied about me	I felt so embarrassed

**Step 2 - List Who You've Offended** (Include their name, what **you** did, and how you imagine **they felt**.)

For example:

WHO I WRONGED	WHAT I DID WRONG	HOW THEY FELT/FEEL
My brother	I lied to my parents about him breaking Dad’s computer.	He was angry with me. Maybe he felt betrayed.

**Step 3 - Move Toward Forgiveness**

Read Romans 12:19-20. “Do not avenge ourselves, but leave room for God’s wrath. For it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ God says, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.’”<sup>48</sup>

Now, ask him to answer three important questions:

1. Do you think God is telling the truth when He says that He will settle matters with these people you’ve listed who have offended or hurt you over the years?
2. Do you think this is something that is too difficult for the God who made the universe?
3. Are you willing to let go of their offenses and let God handle them?

**Step 3a – If He is Willing to Forgive and Ask for Forgiveness**

If he is willing to forgive, then ask him to tell this to God in prayer. “God, I know you will do what is best. I was hurt. I am still hurt by these things, but I trust you know how to handle it better than me. I stop. I give you full authority to deal with (*He should name each person and their offense*). I forgive Dad for putting his job ahead of me. I also trust you to do what is best for Bill Tomants. He lied about me, and it embarrassed me, but I have also been a liar. I also need your forgiveness for myself, because I lied about my brother breaking Dad’s computer.

I forgive Dad and Bill and I ask you to forgive me. I trust you will handle both of us as is best for us...”

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<sup>48</sup> Romans 12:20

### **Step 3b — If He Is Unwilling to Forgive**

Express your appreciation for his honesty, and ask if he is open to God's help in being able to forgive. "Son, I'm glad you are honest. Honesty is a godly trait and I'm seeing God at work in you by being honest with me. Let me ask, "Are you open to getting God's help in forgiving those who have offended you?"

If he is open, ask him to express himself to God. Tell him to first (confess) admit to God that he is having a hard time forgiving (name the person(s)) \_\_\_\_\_. Next, have him tell God how he feels toward that person(s) and what they did wrong. Finally, have him (profess) express to God his desire to forgive, but that it is hard. So, he will conclude by asking, "God help me forgive (name(s)) \_\_\_\_\_ and trust You to take care of what's best for me and for them."

This helps your son or mentee move toward the freedom of forgiveness while also showing him **how** to work through treating his enemies as a man of God should. It isn't easy to forgive. Often our deep feelings prevent us from warming up to the idea easily. So, an admission of the struggle is a step in the right direction and God will hear/answer the boy's sincere prayer.

For those boys who don't forgive at this point, but are willing to ask for God's help, I encourage mentors to *revisit this exercise nearer the end of the trip*. At the final campsite, on the last evening, or as part of the long ride home, ask him where he is on forgiving his enemies. If he is ready to forgive, then have him pray using the bold texted prayer in Step 3a as a guide.

### **Step 3c - Revisiting Forgiveness**

If he was not ready for Step 3b earlier, ask if he is now. If so, follow Step 3b.

### **Step 4 - Keep the Option Open**

If after the first offers to work toward forgiveness the boy is unable or unwilling then leave the discussion for now. You can still do two VERY important things for him.

**1. Keep the conversational doors open.** You want him to come to you about these things in the future, and you want to be able to address it with him yourself when he is ready. Make the path an easy one with this simple statement: "Son, I see you aren't

ready yet to settle this, and that is okay. Forgiveness is difficult. We can talk about this again down the road. Anytime you are ready, just let me know. I'll be there for you. We can get you past this."

**2. Leave the responsibility on his shoulders.** This means you want him to know that it is PRIMARILY his life and his responsibility to deal with it, or to suffer from not dealing with it well. "Son, I can't do this for you. It is your life, and you are the only one who can take care of forgiving your enemies. He can best handle those who hurt you, and I hope you'll allow him to. God has good in store for you when you forgive. Mature men love their enemies. That begins with forgiving them. It is your responsibility. I'll be praying."

Dad. Don't just say "I'll be praying." Make it your practice to actually pray for him... daily! Offering to pray does not conclude your responsibility to see him through this. You should check-in occasionally, resubmit your offer to help, and be available when he is ready to forgive. Prayerfully wait and watch for God's move on his heart in days to come. If prompted, occasionally assure him the door is open. Consider if there is unforgiveness in your own heart that is affecting his ability to forgive those who have offended him. **Dads and mentors should make their own lists in advance of the manabout to remove any of their own iniquity from their son's or mentee's path.**



## supplement B

# HOW TO LEAD THE CORE STORY FOR A BOY

NOTE: *SUPPLEMENT E: Core Lies and Truths That Replace Them* has been prepared to be used in conjunction with this material in how to lead the core story for a boy.

The objective of the Core Story is to identify what we might call misunderstandings or false beliefs that have begun to operate in a boy's life in relation to his views on **security, control, and value**. Once identified, these false beliefs must be exchanged for correct understandings. This means lies must be replaced with truths. Where these false beliefs are allowed to continue, troubles are unavoidable.

The mentor is strongly encouraged to prepare for leading the boy through his Core Story by working through his own to evaluate his own Core Story 'scripts' or 'beliefs' about security, control, and value. Simply following the steps outlined for the boy is a starting place, but a better path is to work through a full genogram and then answer these three core questions. A genogram is a mapping of the relationships and key shaping events in a person's familial life. A video devoted to leading fathers through mapping their personal genogram and receiving help and healing is being prepared as part of an online Manabouts Course. For those only accessing this information through *The Manabouts Manual*, we suggest that in advance of leading your boy through them, you prayerfully consider and complete the exercises as they are outlined below.

We also urge men to devote a special time to prayer before this part of the manabout. Since the manabout is at its core a spiritual event, a father should enter the heavenlies on behalf of his son in order to seek the aid of God for himself and especially for his son. This can be a special hour or a half-day or even a weekend. Prayers for personal confession and repentance should precede a time in which the boy is prayed for. Specifically, ask God to prepare the boy's heart and make clear to him the core misunderstandings that may be in his heart. Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline that should also be considered during the pre-manabout prayer time.

Leading the Core Story takes faith, because this is something that we are trusting God to do in the boy. The leader is merely the person asking very important questions and then supplying truths that supplant them. God is the one at work in this portion of the manabout. This is appropriate since, in life itself, there are times when the boy, like his mentors, must lean strongly upon God for action and aid.

Begin by letting the boy know that you'll be asking him three questions and that he should simply answer what first comes to mind. There are no specific answers that you are wanting him to give. The "right" answer is simply what he believes about these three questions.

**Question One:** By the age of 12 years, what had you come to believe you needed to do to be safe and secure?

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Sample Answers: *Do what I'm told. Follow the rules. Go to my room. Keep quiet.*

**Question Two:** By the age of 12 years, what had you learned to do to be valued, loved, accepted, esteemed, or included?

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Sample Answers: *Do what my parents wanted. Go along with the crowd. Work hard. Be funny.*

**Question Three:** By the age of 12 years, what had you learned to do to control the way others responded to you?

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Sample Answers: *Be angry with them. Cry. Make them laugh. Ignore them.*

Allow the boy time to respond to each before asking the next one. Write down his answers just as he gives them — resist changing or rewording them! Do not offer sample answers unless the boy is totally blank. If he struggles, give him some time. Usually, he is just intimidated, but actually has answers in his mind. Pray with him asking God to help him answer. If he is slow to respond, be patient. Don't rush this exercise! However, if eventually, you sense the need to prompt him, the sample answers provided may be helpful.

Once all three questions have been asked and his answers written, ask the boy if these always work for him. "Son, thanks for being honest and open about this. Good job. Now, let's take a close look at them to see if your understanding always works for you."

Take them one at a time and assess each. Ask of each one, "You said \_\_\_\_\_. Does this ALWAYS work for you? If the boy answers that he has learned to be safe and secure by doing whatever he is told, then ask him, "Does doing as you are told always keep you safe?" Of course, it will at times, but what about when at school and a group of bullies asks him to do things he shouldn't? What about when teen friends prod him to bully someone else or makes joining them in smoking pot or drinking alcohol a prerequisite to his safety? Will doing what they request keep him safe? It may keep them from hurting him or excluding him, but there will be consequences for those actions that he will not be protected from. You, as father, must think through his answer and help him discern if it is true or flawed. This is why you pray, and possibly fast, for some time before the manabout journey. You'll need the help of the Holy Spirit in walking your boy through this.

A different example may help. Let's say he answers that the way he has learned to control how others respond to him is by using anger or force. He may have learned to get his parents to do what he wanted by throwing a temper tantrum or by yelling in a rage. He may have found that anger gave him control over his siblings and friends. So, he now believes that anger is a way to control the outcomes of things. The question is, "Will this always work?" The obvious answer is "No." There will be situations and people who will not back down. It will not always work for the rest of his life AND it will bring severe consequences that he doesn't want. He will lose friends. Law enforcement and others with stronger will or means will push back against him. There will be negative consequences. He can't control everyone or everything around him. This is a flawed understanding of life, and it won't always work.

Children's coping techniques are God's gift to help them through some difficult situations as children, but they become toxic when kids move into adulthood. Renouncing them and replacing them with correct understandings (truth) is essential, and the manabout is the perfect time to do this. It looks like this:

"Son, now that you understand how rage and anger will not always give you control of people or events, I want you to know what will work. I want you to be in control no matter the circumstance. Would you like that?"

Always ask for some sort of verbal buy-in to create ownership. If you simply give the boy answers, he doesn't own it and probably won't apply it. Simply asking him if he wants to know makes a great difference in whether or not he'll apply the truths you're about to reveal.

"Son, the truth is that no one can control anyone else. A person can only control himself. You can only control yourself. Your anger may cause someone to do what you want out of fear, but as soon as you are not involved, they will go back to what they want. Circumstances will often be out of your control. Things won't happen that should, and things do happen to us that shouldn't. Some people won't comply. Life very often feels and is beyond our control. The good news is that God is in control of all things. 'The earth is His and everything in it; the world and all who live in it.'" <sup>49</sup>

"So, God is in control of all things. That means that He understands what's going

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<sup>49</sup> Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

on and how to deal with it. Do you agree with that?" (Get his verbal buy-in. If he doesn't agree, then discuss why he hesitates to agree. This is a GREAT opportunity for the two of you to work through this together, which is exactly what the manabout should provide!). "I'm glad you see this. So, the real choice is whether you will or won't choose to do things as God says they should be done. If you really believe He understands what's going on and how to deal with it, then you won't have any trouble choosing to handle matters like He says. If you don't fully trust Him, then you'll opt for your old method. Do you see this?" (Always get verbal buy-in.)

"Son, to move away from childhood and childish understandings and ways, are you ready to let go of this notion that anger is the way to control people?" Allow him time to answer and then proceed. "Since God understands what is going on and knows how best to deal with it, are you ready to start dealing with people and things according to His ways?" If he hesitates or is not ready to commit to God's ways in dealing with these matters, then ask, "Help me understand what causes you to hesitate in making this step into manhood?" Listen and walk with him through his misgivings. There is no rush here. Don't put any rush on it. Ample time to listen and dialogue is why you've set aside these special days and hours.

This is the crux of the manabout, so let it be what it needs to be at this point. If the discussion seems to be at a standstill, then relieve the tension by moving it down the road a bit. "I think we've talked enough about this for now, don't you? Let's think about it, pray about it, and take it up later. That alright with you?" Get his agreement to stop and to take it up again. It's a good time to stir the fire, get some food, go fish, take up the hike. Generally, turn to something less emotional, but positive and physically productive, for now, but keep your eyes open for an appropriate time to resume the Core Story conversation.

If, however, the boy agrees to renounce his former misunderstandings and to accept God's ways of doing things, then celebrate and congratulate him on moving into Biblical manhood. This, by the way, is the essence of Biblical manhood. Doing as God would do is exactly what God wanted from Adam. It is what we see in Jesus. He said, "I do exactly what I see my father doing and say what I hear him say."<sup>50</sup> That is manhood. That is mature maleness. That is also conversion. What has occurred here, in more familiar religious terms, is confession (I see that my old ways were false

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<sup>50</sup> John 12:49 (NIV)

beliefs that I had), repentance (I don't want to follow them any longer), profession of faith (I believe God and His ways are true and best), and commitment to Him (I will follow His ways from now on.) This is the true "crossing" we're looking for in a boy's heart. It precedes the walking to the opposite bank of the river or the ride down the zip-line. It gives meaning to what we visibly witness in those other events. This makes the Core Story the centerpiece — the core of the manabout.

Celebrate and cement his confession in prayer by asking him to admit and apologize to God for having worked out of those misunderstandings (false beliefs/idols). Ask him to tell God of his new commitment to follow His true ways in the future.

For example, "Son, I want you to tell God what you have learned and come to believe following these steps. Follow them, but use your own words. Speak to God from what you truly think and believe.

Thank Him for showing you what you'd misunderstood (Confession)

Tell Him you don't want to keep on living like that. (Repentance)

Ask Him for forgiveness for living in these flawed ways. (Ask for Forgiveness)

Let Him know you believe his ways are true and best (Profession of Faith)

Tell Him you'll choose His ways as your own from now on (Personal Commitment)

Thank Him for showing you the truth (Thanksgiving)

Again, if a boy is not ready for these commitments at this point, give him some space, keep praying, and take it up again when he is ready. Dad, you must trust God to work in his heart, because that's what men do.

### **The 12-Year-Old Self**

Now, with all three Questions answered, ask the boy, "If you could walk up to your 12-year-old self right now and put your arm around his shoulders, what would you tell him?"

Write his reply:

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This often reveals the words he would like to hear, but it can also bring out the sentiments he has for himself based on what he thinks others think of him. If the thought is untrue, point that out to him and help him find a truth to replace it (as you did in the previous examples).

For example, if he tells his 12-year-old-self, "You are ugly," or "You can't do anything right," those are not true statements. First, he is a treasure created perfectly by God for high and noble purposes. Scripture is full of this affirmation. Together search for verses that support the truth. Psalm 139:14 is a good starting place, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Second, his failures don't make him a failure. We all fall short of what God (or even we) would want to be, but we are made right by the grace through the work of Jesus (Romans 3:23-24). Take this opportunity to talk through this together. Then, have him renounce false beliefs and embrace the truth in prayer.

### **The Core Truth**

Last, make sure he knows the **Core Truth**: that he is loved. This is the central truth. It is central to our mental and our emotional health. It is needed by us all. John 3:16 says it clearest, "For God so loved the world, he gave his only son..." Have him put his name in the place of "the world" and say the sentence aloud. "For God so loved (his name) that He gave His only Son..." This is the Core Truth, and he needs not only to

know it, but to connect and apply it to himself. Saying it aloud is the beginning of that process. It would be a good practice for both the father or mentor and the boy to restate this Core Truth aloud every morning and evening for the rest of their trip to reinforce it deeply.



# supplement C

## BAPTISM

### THE RITE OF PASSAGE INTO CHRIST

*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.<sup>51</sup>*

- *The Apostle Paul*

The manabout is, at its core, a call to follow the will and ways of God. It is an appeal to a boy to make up his mind and set his aspirations on imitating God's perfect man, Jesus. Basically, the manabout calls a boy to commit his life to God and God's

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<sup>51</sup> *Romans 6:3-10*

ways. This is more commonly called conversion or repentance and a profession of faith. In Scripture, it is punctuated by baptism.

There are a variety of understandings of baptism and the end of the manabout may not be the time you select for your son to be immersed, but we feel it is useful to present some thoughts on this rite of passage. For, in every way, Christian baptism seems to follow the pattern and contain the major elements in a rite of passage. As referenced earlier in this material, the act of baptism, described in Romans 6:1-14 contains all the basic rite of passage elements. The verses can be easily shown to fit the three basic rites of passage components of Genep and the fourth, ethos, element in the manabout.

**Severance** - "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

**Liminal Space** - "We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

**Incorporation** - "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life."

**Ethos** - "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires... for sin shall not be your master because you are not under law, but under grace."

Some history on the word baptism may be helpful. The word "baptism" is not a translation, but a transliteration. It comes from the Greek word *baptismo*, which means immersion in English. It was not always strictly a religious word, as it is today. In fact, for the Greeks it was simply the dipping of something dirty into water in order to clean it. The imagery can easily be seen in the religious act of immersion for the forgiveness of sins and cleansing of the contaminated soul.

The ancient Jewish background to the word is associated more closely with spiritual purity. Baptism was a very common practice among the Jews, and the pool or bath used for these immersions was known as a *mikveh* or *mikvah*. Around the Temple,

there were hundreds of these baths, because there were many occasions for using them. Unlike our western view of baptism as a conversion moment that is almost exclusively seen as an event marking the beginning of a new life in Christ, the Jewish community used the mikveh on other occasions as the marker of a new beginning.

For example, women were immersed every month at the end of their monthly menstrual cycle and beginning of their new cycle, which held hope and potential for a new life to begin. It was used by men with similar symbolism.

*Mikvah is also used by men on various occasions. The most widely practiced are immersion by a groom on his wedding day and by every man before Yom Kippur. Many Chassidic men use the mikvah before each Shabbat and holiday, some even making use of mikvah each day before morning prayer.<sup>52</sup>*

Baptism marks a new beginning. Conversion to Christ is the beginning of a new life. The manabout calls boys to follow Christ and to imitate the Father as Jesus did. It seems appropriate that they are invited to mark that decision, as did the first converts in Scripture, through immersion.

This is a matter between fathers and sons and should be subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit in each. Because it seems so in line with the biblical practice, we feel compelled to at least present it here for thought and prayer.

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52 [Www.thejewishwoman.org](http://www.thejewishwoman.org)



## supplement D

# THE DOUBLE CHEVRON'S DEEP SYMBOLISM

*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.<sup>53</sup>*

*Our God is steadfast in love and abundant in mercy. He saves us, not because we trust in a symbol, but because we trust in a Savior.<sup>54</sup>*

- Max Lucado

The Israelites are told to “Fear the Lord.” It is the first in a progression of commands they are told to discuss with their children, to tie as symbols on their hands, and to hang on their walls. God, in His perfect wisdom and design, made symbols for us. Symbols reduce large concepts to simple images. They address deep areas quickly. Symbols are powerful. The 5 double chevron symbols in our material are packed with deep meaning. They are mentioned in Module 4 of the Manabouts’ Video Course. Here we will take a detailed look at them and how they reflect the 5 Milestone Agreements.

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<sup>53</sup> Deuteronomy 6:8-9 (NIV)

<sup>54</sup> Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace*, published Thomas Nelson (2014).

## The 5 Milestone Agreements

-  **Fear of God** - Agreement to trust in the Designer's agape love and to learn his ways
-  **Honor of Parents** - Agreement to value the experience and learnings of parents and mentors
-  **Devotion to Family** - Agreement to serve, protect, and provide for family
-  **Kindness to Neighbor** - Agreement to do what is best for neighbor and friend
-  **Love of Enemies** - Agreement to do what is best for those who do their worst to them

### FEAR OF GOD

The first symbol is a double chevron facing left. Hebrew, the original language of the Bible), is written from right to left. It runs the opposite of English. The Hebraic alphabet is viewed as pouring forth or going forth from God into the world. Aleph, the first letter of that alphabet, is the first letter in many of the names of God in the Bible and it is thought to stand as a symbol of God.

The first agreement a boy is called to make on his road to manhood is to fear God. Trusting and following God in every facet of life is understood by this commitment. The double chevrons facing left are symbolic of this agreement. The first chevron is symbolic of God who is leading out into life. We have chosen not to make it oversized or of a different color for a reason. Jesus, who represented God on the earth, became like us. He took on our size and look. He became a man. How to fear God is best seen in Jesus. As Jesus walked out the Father's will and ways, we imitate. We walk in his steps. As the Africans might say, we "tiech ole katiech" – we step where he stepped.

John wrote that we should "walk in the light as He is in the light." (1 John 1:7). He says that by doing this we have fellowship with each other and that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. This too is symbolized in the color of the double chevron. Red,

in Scripture, is symbolic of blood and symbolic of the body. The first man's name, Adam, means "clay" or "red dirt." Jesus became a man, an Adam-person, and shed his blood for us. He was the perfect Adam. This is why being a true man means following Jesus as Jesus followed God, the Father. I hope the symbolism of the first manabout symbols is clear now. As we call our boys to agree to fear God, we are asking them to watch Jesus and live as he did. Jesus is the first arrow, the boy is the second.

There is an additional way in which you-- father or mentor --are in the place of Jesus. Sometimes you are the arrow he follows since you are often the one through whom he will learn and see how to follow Jesus in practical terms. The double red chevron moving into the world is a powerful symbol and is both first in order and in priority among the five. This is why it often stands alone for the manabouts brand. Everything centers in it.

One last point before we discuss the other four symbol. The color red, in Hebrew, is often recognized as "the Word of God." Or course, Jesus is the Word made flesh and we are his disciples. The double red chevrons symbolize the entirety of these concepts. Anywhere you see this symbol, you can know the wearer is stating that they have made a personal commitment to be the type of man Jesus exemplified. By this, all who have made that same commitment find, just as John wrote, fellowship with one another. We form a fraternity of fathers. We are a unique band of brothers on many levels.

## HONOR OF PARENTS

The next couplet of chevrons look upward and correspond with the agreement to honor parents. Authority in Scripture is about protection. Kings are to protect and provide for their kingdom. Husbands and fathers are to protect and provide for their families. Children are under authority; in other words they are under the protection of their parents. These two arrows signify the boy's wisdom in submitting to his parents, as God has instructed. In a sense, it is a double commitment. First, it is a commitment to submit to parental protection, but ultimately is a submission to God's protection. Again, Jesus showed us perfectly how this works out in life. His words are filled with statements like, "I do only what I see my father doing. I say only what I hear him saying." His very first recorded statement as a young man was, "I have to be about my father's business." Boys are to look to those over them (above them) for protective guidance. The double chevrons pointing upward picture the humility and submission

of the boy as he looks up to parents and to God for direction, wisdom, and for care.

### **DEVOTION TO FAMILY**

The third set of chevrons face downward and symbolize the opposite position of the previous set. In this arrangement, the boy is at the top of the symbol. He is the one in authority. He is the one attending to those below him. This includes wife and children. As his parents grow older, even they will be under his physical care and provision. He is to be like Jesus (the symbols are still red and therefore carrying the image of Christ in them) toward all those under his protection/authority.

A man of God carries authority differently than a man of the world. He serves, like Jesus, and he demands no service in return. He loves even when not loved in return. The chevron on the bottom is not pointing anything back to the top chevron. Our ministry is a selfless one. Real men are givers. Learning what that looks like is seen best and in its perfect form in Jesus who even shed his blood (red) for us WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS. All of this is in the double red chevron facing downward.

### **KINDNESS TO NEIGHBOR**

Our fourth set of chevrons change directions again. Here the chevrons move to the right. Again, remembering that God is seen as the first character/letter of the Hebraic and that the motion in the Hebraic alphabet is to the left, this set of chevrons represents moving back toward God. The agreement is to be kind to neighbor. The greatest kindness a person can afford another is to usher them in the direction of God. Boys on the manabout are being called to treat their neighbors with as Jesus treated people—giving his very life for them; but also he led us to the Father. We are calling boys to be disciple makers as was Jesus. Both care for neighbor and discipleship of neighbor are incorporated in the fourth double chevron set. At times the boy is the arrow on the left, serving in physical ways. At other times the boy is he the arrow on the right, leading his neighbor spiritually toward God. At all times, it is the life of Christ (red) that is involved in both his position as servant or leader and his purpose as doing what he does out of what Jesus has done for him (red).

### **LOVE OF ENEMIES**

The final of the five is of two red chevrons facing one another. Enemies, those who

oppose us, are to be loved. Love, in Scripture, is not emotionally based. It is a decision to DO what is best for others. Love for enemies does not require warm-fuzzies. It requires selfless choices. These two chevrons, one moving away from God as the other moves toward God, do not touch. There is no emotional connection, yet we could say that there is still a type of connection. Between the two chevrons is a space. Light fills that gap. This light is, for the sake of our symbolism, the Light that is Christ. He keeps me from harming my enemy. When my enemy sees me going the extra mile or walking away from retaliation, he is the light of Christ in me. He may not realize it, but it is true never the less. And we call our boys to live this selfless, Christlike way toward others. Notice also that both chevrons are red. This is to help our boys remember that Christ died for us all. His rain and sunshine fall on the just and the unjust. Even our enemies are loved by God and we are to demonstrate that love in how we respond to their opposition. In this pair, the boy is the arrow on the right and enemies are on the left. They are moving away from God, but perhaps, they will turn and join us in following God... which would reshape this couplet to look like our first and start the 5 agreement process in their life.





## supplement E

# CORE LIES AND TRUTHS THAT REPLACE THEM

The Core-Lies spring from a false premise. This premise is that **what I have, what I do, or what others think or say about me give me security, control, and love.** However, none of this is true. My security comes from who God is. He is my protector and provider. My love comes from what God thinks of me. He loves me even when I fail. I can control no one but myself. God is in control of everything else. What I can do is submit to Him.

### COMMON CORE-LIES IN 3 MAJOR AREAS

#### SECURITY AND SAFETY

- To keep safe, I do what I'm told.
- To be secure, I go to my room.
- I find ways to "disappear" when things get tense.
- To be safe, I have to be tough.
- To be secure, I need money.
- I'm safe when my family is near me.

#### CONTROL

- To control how others respond to me I am funny.
- Being obedient helps me control my situation.
- I escape to myself when things get out of control.
- I control others by being stronger than them.
- I help others to keep relationships under control.
- I argue and convince them I'm right.

## LOVE AND AFFECTION

- I am included when I go along with the crowd.
- I am liked because I am pretty (strong, smart, wealthy, funny, intelligent)
- I do what people want to make them happy with me.
- I don't insist on my own desires.
- I give in.
- I can't do anything to be loved. I'm not loved.

## COMMON CORE-TRUTHS IN 3 MAJOR AREAS

### SECURITY AND SAFETY

The truth is that people and things fail us. Jesus would not entrust himself to people (John 2:24) because he understood our fickle nature. Even Peter denied him.

The only constant is God. He will NEVER leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 12:5; Deut 31:6). **God is our safe place.** This means that following His ways is the safe path in life. When trouble comes, and it will, we should defer to His ways of doing life. There we wait, as if in a granite cave's protection, until the storm passes. The Scriptures and especially the Psalms shout, "God is our safe place!"

*Psalm 61:1-3 "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you. I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings."*

*Psalm 62:1-2 "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken."*

*Psalm 55:22 "Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."*

*Psalm 55:16 "But I call to God, the LORD saves me. Evening and morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me."*

*Psalm 27:1,14 "The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."*

*Psalm 32:7 "God is my hiding place."*

## **LOVE AND AFFECTION**

As a Van Gough or Rembrandt have value because of who painted them, the significance and worth of every person come from their creator. Parents love (give to) their children because they are THEIR children. They 'made' them and there is a natural motivation to see that their offspring are well, happy, and prosperous. This doesn't come from us, it comes from God, who made us. It is also his natural way to love those He has made-- even though they fail him.

God has designed a perfect way to live our lives (Scripture). Disobedience to that way means that we miss out on all the good God has in mind for us. Obedience simply positions us to enjoy the goodness of His design. Neither obedience nor disobedience change God's love for us. We are not loved because of what we have done, what we have, or what the world thinks of us. **We are valued because of who GOD is, what HE has done, and what HE thinks about us.**

*1 John 4:9-11 "In this the love of God was shown, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD BUT THAT HE LOVED US and sent His Son to be the payment for our disobedience."*

*Deuteronomy 7:7 "The LORD did NOT set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the least of all peoples, but it was BECAUSE THE LORD LOVE YOU and kept the oath He swore to your ancestors..."*

*John 15:16 "You did not choose me, but I CHOSE YOU and appointed you so that you might go bear fruit that will last..."*

*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son..."*

*John 15:9-17 "Greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends."*

*Romans 8:37-39 "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation**, will be able to separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus."*

*Ephesians 2:4-5 "Because of His great love for us, **even when we were dead in our trespasses** (still disobeying), God made us alive together with Christ..."*

## **CONTROL**

To discuss the topic of control over others, we have to consider two things. First, we cannot control anyone. Yes, we can get people to comply, but it is because, ultimately, THEY decide to. Ultimately, people make their own decisions. This means, consequently, that I control myself. I am the one to decide what I will or will not do or how I will or won't respond to circumstances or people.

Second, God is in control. Though a river has much freedom to twist, turn, rage, slow, or surge, it is under the control of the banks on either side. God gives us the freedom to make our decisions, but He is, overall and ultimately, in control.

The truth is that I cannot control others, and others cannot control me. I can, however, make my own decision to live under the guidance (control) of God or not to do that.

**We can choose to submit ourselves to God's control.**

*Joshua 24:15 "Choose this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

*1 Peter 5:6 "Humble yourselves under the hand of God and He will raise you up."*

*James 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

*James 4:10 "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."*

*2 Kings 22:19 "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD .... I also have heard you, declares the LORD."*

*2 Chronicles 33:12-13 "In his distress, he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors and when he prayed to Him, the LORD was moved by his prayer and listened to his plea..."*

*Philippians 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

*Luke 12:22-26 "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds?"*

Of course, there are many more verses that may be used, but these are offered as a starting point.