

THE
PAINS &
JOYS
OF RAISING BOYS

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SECTION 1

**In All Thy Getting,
Get Understanding**



I am a Man!
No You're Not!
Yes I am!

The Struggle

There is a roadblock, a mountain, a hurdle in the path as we undertake the challenge of raising our sons from boys to men. Contrary to popular belief, the biggest hurdle parents face is not dealing with a single-parent family, homosexuality, feminism, bad parenting, or gangster rap.

Our biggest hurdle which blocks our sons' pathways leading them from boys to men is the fact that our society won't or can't agree on what a man really is.

This world has no idea anymore about the building process it takes to become a man. We do not even know what the final "man" looks like, sounds like, feels like, thinks like, acts like or even lives like! Therefore, too many families are blindly struggling to raise their boys into their own versions of "men."

In Dr. Martin Luther King's book, *The Measure of a Man*, he writes, "The question, 'What is man?' is one of the most important questions confronting any generation. The whole political, economic, and social structure is determined by the

answer to this pressing question.” He goes on to say, “But although there is widespread agreement in asking the question, there is fantastic disagreement in answering it.”

Some time ago, due to my speaking schedule, I thought it would be wise to buy a home gym. My thought was that I could work out early and avoid the time wasted driving to the gym. When the equipment arrived, knowing that a “man” could build anything, I opened the box and began putting screws in holes. After what seemed like forever, I realized I could not assemble this “easy to assemble” product without following the instructions. And then, I realized that seeing a picture of what it should look like when I am finished would help. So I looked at the photo of the home gym on the box. Once I did that, I knew what the end product should be, and following the instructions was much easier.

That is what is going on today with most parents raising boys—there is no agreed upon set of instructions for the process. And many of us who are responsible for this awesome task of building a “man” have never seen an “authentic man” and are truly working under a blindfold.

What is a Man? And What is Manhood?

It has been said, “Manhood is the suburb right outside of Boys-ville, and in order to move into Manhood one can no longer look, think, or act like a boy!” Others have said that manhood is the butterfly from boyhood.

The older men in the barbershop used to say, “Boy, your maleness is inherited, but manhood is merited!” As I got older, I understood what that meant. It meant that I was male by default. And my maleness had nothing to do with my wisdom, my deeds, or choice. However, the title of “man” had to be learned and earned.

Oftentimes at my parent workshops, I joke by saying, “My wife and I will know when my son has matured into manhood when his driver’s license has a different address on it than ours.” Although that comment fills the room with laughter, there are many parents in the audience who are praying for that day to come. However, even though that achievement is a major signal of independence and responsibility, a new address alone does not say “manhood.”

If I were to ask the question to a group of men, you’d hear many different answers depending upon environment and upbringing. Some may say, “He is a man when he has reached a certain age.” Others say, “When he has moved out from under his mom’s roof and has his own car and apartment.” And some believe that making a certain amount of money is attaining manhood. None of these things alone gives our boys their address in “the city of Manhood.”

The question becomes, “Where does this manhood training take place?” In the book, *Lost Generation? Or Left Generation!*, Rev. Clarence Lumumba James, Sr. suggests there are four key institutions in American society that purport to teach boys how to be men: the street, the prison, the military,

and college. He writes:

Survival on the streets is a test comparable to survival skills in the rainforest; however, a boy trained in the streets becomes a dangerous man to his community. A boy raised in prison becomes a man who believes manhood is someone with the physical force to protect the physical integrity of his or her anal cavity. And prisons don't produce the kind of men needed to build healthy relationships. The third institution, the armed forces requires our boys to shut down critical thinking faculties. For a soldier must not reason but do or die. Lastly, although they start the manhood process, a boy in college has adolescence prolonged, for he still depends on mom and dad for food shelter and minutes on his cell phone.

Finally, he goes on to say:

If the Church were to rise to the challenge, it would become the institute of manhood-training that we need it to be and would solve its own manhood deficit.

Although I agree with most of his assessments and recommendations, my money is on the family as *the* institution perfectly and purposely designed for **manhood training**.

According to "street code," the definition of a man is

based on extreme masculinity and the amoral values of street life: gaming, hustling, girl hunting, loud talking, liquor drinking, tricking, lying, stealing, disobedience to authority, and fighting. Finally, one must go to jail, survive, and return back to the streets with a list of prison “who’s who” contacts and stories to tell.

If one were to believe everything he or she sees in the media, “men,” as defined in gangster rap culture, are grimacing, over-sized, monosyllabic cartoons, instead of the complex individuals “men” actually are. Lyrics in a majority of mainstream rap songs depict an image of manhood as including multiple female partners, a violent criminal history, and extreme interests in material goods such as: cars, jewelry, and expensive alcohol. The main problem with this image, as most social scientists would agree, is that it is too one-dimensional to encompass such a complex being.

The Agreement

Therefore, since it is difficult to get agreement on what *manhood* is, why don’t we start with where we agree. First, I think we would all agree it takes a boy to be born in order for there ever to be a man. Another way to put it is, a boy is the only thing that God gives us to make a man—no other substance or substitute will do.

Secondly, let’s agree that there is *manhood*. There exist a distinction between being male and becoming a man. Being

male only qualifies one for the class; it does not guarantee that one will graduate into manhood. If we can at least agree to these two basic facts then the “what a man is, how he acts, and when does he becomes a man” conversation can begin.

Okay, if you accepted my barbershop wit and the societal agreement that there is a state of *manhood*, let us begin the conversation about what a man is. For this trick I will move from barbershop and hip-hop to the wisdom from the R&B group *The Ojays* and Holy Scripture. In the song, *Family Reunion*, the responsibility of a father was described this way:

*You know the family is the solution
To the world's problems today
Now, let's take a look at the family
In the family the father is like the head
The leader, the director*

*Not domineering but showing love, guidance
For everyone else in the family
Now, if we could get all the fathers of the world
To stand up and be fathers, that would be great*

*Then we have mothers
Who are the right arms of the father
They're supposed to do the cooking*

*Raise the children, do the sewing
And help the father to guide and direct*

*Then there's the son
The son, most sons are like imitators of their fathers
So, we're back again to the father
If he is guiding in the right way
The son is definitely gonna be alright*

1 Corinthians 13:11, lets us know that not only is there a state of manhood, but most importantly, there is a distinction between a male child and becoming a man. Here Paul the Apostle is talking about love, and in verse ten says, “but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.” But it’s almost as if someone said, “Paul, how do you know you are a man?” Paul says “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

From 1 Corinthians, we know that unlike a male child, a *man* does not **speak** like a child anymore—the imperfect has gone away. He does not whine, pout, throw tantrums and have childish conversations. Unlike a male child, a *man* no

longer **thinks** and **understands** the same way. He reasons with maturity and conviction. He no longer thinks only of self, he now considers how his actions and decisions affect others in the process. Fleshly pleasure is not his base desire and the driving force behind all he does, as it would be for a child. Lastly, a *man* puts away **childish things**. This lumps whatever else we want to discuss into one final statement: A man puts away all the childish stuff!

The bottom line is, a man does not speak, think, or act like a child, that is how we can know he is a man. It is not so much what a man *is* that describes a man, but what a man *does* that qualifies him for manhood.

The following chart provides a few helpful distinctions

Man	Male
Is a teacher	Is a student
Is a producer	Driven by consumption
Gives to his community	Takes from his community
Makes things	Breaks things
Gets married and stays committed to one woman	Shacks up
Brings order	Brings chaos
Is self-led	Is a follower of a group
Has a life full of responsibilities	Has a life full of video games, music, clothes, and chasing women
Will raise his children and someone else's	Won't raise his own children.

between *man* and *male*:

Corinthians also clearly communicates that to pass the “man test,” you need to demonstrate proof that you are no longer a child. Manhood is a process, transition, and arrival from inherited maleness to an earned destination of distinction and responsibility. This is communicated when Paul says, “but when I became a man...”

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In the book, *Playing Through*, Mr. Earl Woods writes a letter to his son Tiger explaining his intentional training and involvement in Tiger’s transition into manhood:

A letter to my son...

You are my little man. You are my treasure. God gave you to me to nurture and to grow and to develop. I always have had your interests first and foremost in my life, and they always will be. In fact, you mean more to me than life itself. I can remember when I taught you that it was okay to cry—that men can cry. It was not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength.

That was part of the education and the legacy that I wanted to leave with you, that sharing and caring for

others is a way of life. And it is not to be taken lightly. I pass on all my abilities to share and to care to you. I realize that you have an infinite, higher capacity, and capability to perpetuate this philosophy in our day's world. I trust that I have given you the guidance and love with which you can then execute that mission. What God has in mind for you, I don't know. It is not my call. It was my job to prepare you. I trust that I have done the best job that I can. I know you will give it your all. And you will be my little man forever.

Love,

Pop

The promise of future and long-term blessings for a boy is first and foremost tied into his family and not any other institution. Ephesians 6:1–3 makes this clear when we read, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

The human experience was designed in such a way that we would learn our future roles just by living life at home. “Manhood training 101” was designed to start by a boy honoring his father and mother and the rest of the training would fall right in place.

Therefore, if we want to save our boys on any grand

scale, we must first resurrect, rebuild, and depend on our families. I know I can hear the crowd saying, “But what about the boys who don’t have the original family set-up?” In the upcoming chapters, we will discuss and provide key answers and strategies for developing a boy into a man whether he has his dad at home or not. However, please note God’s formula has not changed; a boy needs a man to become a man. Don’t worry; there is still plenty of room in the city of **Manhood** for your son. We’ll leave the light on for him.

