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From Boy to Man—the Marks of Manhood, Part Two

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Part one of this series presented six vital marks of manhood, intended to define the transition from boy to man. Now, seven additional marks to complete the picture:

7. Ethical maturity sufficient to make responsible decisions. To be a man is to make decisions. One of the most fundamental tasks of leadership is decision-making. The indecisiveness of so many contemporary males is evidence of a stunted manhood. Of course, a man does not rush to a decision without thought, consideration, or care, but a man does put himself on the line in making a decision—and making it stick. This requires an extension of moral responsibility into mature ethical decision-making that brings glory to God, is faithful to God’s word, and is open to moral scrutiny. Parents often leave their sons unprepared for this role by making decisions for them, and by failing to teach boys how to think and reason in responsible terms, how to weigh evidence and think clearly, and how to prioritize values according to a biblical standard. A real man knows how to make a decision and live with its consequences—even if that means that he must later acknowledge that he has learned by making a bad decision, and then by making the appropriate correction.

8. Worldview maturity sufficient to understand what is really important. An inversion of values marks our postmodern age, and the predicament of modern manhood is made all the more perplexing by the fact that many men lack the capacity of consistent worldview thinking. For the Christian, this is doubly tragic, for our Christian discipleship must be demonstrated in the development of a Christian mind. The Christian man must understand how to interpret and evaluate issues across the spectrum of politics, economics, morality, entertainment, education, and a seemingly endless list of other fields. The absence of consistent biblical worldview thinking is a key mark of spiritual immaturity. A boy must be taught how to translate Christian truth into genuine Christian thinking. He must learn how to defend biblical truth before his peers and in the public square, and he must acquire the ability to extend Christian thinking, based on biblical principles, to every arena of life.

9. Relational maturity sufficient to understand and respect others. Psychologists now talk of “emotional intelligence,” or EQ, as a major factor in personal development. While the world has given much attention to IQ, EQ is just as important. Individuals who lack the ability to relate to others are destined to fail at some of life’s most significant challenges and will not fulfill some of their most important responsibilities and roles. By nature, many boys are inwardly directed. While girls learn how to read emotional signals and connect, many boys lack the capacity to do so, and seemingly fail to understand the absence of these skills. While a man is to demonstrate emotional strength, constancy, and steadfastness, he must be able to relate to his wife, his children, his peers, his colleagues, and a host of others in a way that demonstrates respect, understanding, and appropriate empathy. This will not be learned by playing video games and by entering into the privatized world experienced by many male adolescents. Parents—especially fathers—must draw their sons

out of inwardness, and demonstrate what it means to relate to others as a man and as a Christian.

10. Social maturity sufficient to make a contribution to society. While the arena of the home is an essential and inescapable focus of a man's responsibility, he is also called out of the home into the workplace and the larger world as a witness, and as one who will make a contribution to the common good. God has created human beings as social creatures, and even though our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, we must also fulfill our citizenship on earth. A boy must learn to fulfill a political responsibility as a citizen, and a moral responsibility as a member of a human community. The Christian man bears a civilizational responsibility, and boys must be taught to see themselves as shapers of the society even as the church is identified by our Lord as both salt and light. Similarly, a Christian man must learn how to relate to unbelievers, both as witness and as fellow citizens of an earthly kingdom.

11. Verbal maturity sufficient to communicate and articulate as a man. Here's a striking phenomenon of our times—many adolescent boys and young men seem to communicate only through a series of guttural clicks, grunts, and inchoate language that can hardly be described as verbal. A man must be able to speak, to be understood, and to communicate in a way that will honor God and convey God's truth to others. Parents must work with boys, requiring them to speak, to articulate, and to learn respect for language. This respect must extend to an ability to enunciate words so that articulation is clear and communication succeeds. This skill must be learned at the dinner table, in family conversation, and in one-on-one talk, especially between father and son. Beyond the context of conversation, a boy must learn how to speak before larger groups, overcoming the natural intimidation and fear that comes from looking at a crowd, opening one's mouth, and projecting words. Though not all men will become public speakers, every man should have the ability to take his ground, frame his words, and make his case when truth is under fire and when belief and conviction must be translated into argument.

12. Character maturity sufficient to demonstrate courage under fire. The literature of manhood is replete with stories of courage, bravery, and audacity. At least, that's the way it used to be. Now, with manhood both minimized and marginalized by cultural elites, ideological subversion, and media confusion, we must recapture a commitment to courage that is translated into the real-life challenges faced by the Christian man. At times, this quality of courage is demonstrated when a man risks his own life in defense of others, especially his wife and children, but also anyone who is in need of rescue. More often, this courage is demonstrated in taking a stand under hostile fire, refusing to succumb to the temptation of silence and standing as a model and example to others, who will then be encouraged to stand their own ground. In these days, biblical manhood requires great courage. The prevailing ideologies and worldviews of this age are inherently hostile to Christian truth and are corrosive to Christian faithfulness. It takes great courage for a boy to commit himself to sexual purity and for a man to devote himself unreservedly to his wife. It takes great courage to say no to what this culture insists are the rightful pleasures and delights of the flesh. It takes courage to serve as a godly husband and father, to raise children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It takes courage to maintain personal integrity in a world that devalues the truth, disparages God's word, and promises self-fulfillment and happiness only through the assertion of undiluted personal autonomy. A man's true confidence is rooted in the wells of courage, and courage is evidence of character. In the end, a man's character is revealed in the crucible of everyday challenges. For most men, life will also bring moments when extraordinary courage will be required, if he is to remain faithful and true. Parents should give close attention to their sons' character, for if character is corrupt, nothing else will really matter.

13. Biblical maturity sufficient to lead at some level in the church. A close look at many churches will reveal that a central problem is the lack of biblical maturity among the men of the congregation and a lack of biblical knowledge that leaves men ill equipped and completely unprepared to exercise spiritual leadership. Boys must be taught to know, to treasure, to honor, and to understand the Bible. They must know their way around the biblical text, and feel at home in the study of God's Word. They must be taught how to read with care, "rightly dividing the word of truth," and they must learn how to apply the eternal truths of God's Word to the challenges of modern manhood. Furthermore, they must stand ready to take their place as leaders in the local church. While God has appointed specific officers for his church—men who are specially gifted and publicly called—every man should fulfill some leadership responsibility within the life of the congregation. For some men, this may mean a less public role of leadership than is the case with others. In any event, a man should be able to teach someone, and to lead in some ministry, translating his personal discipleship into the fulfillment of a godly call. There is a role of leadership for every man in every church, whether that role is public or private, large or small, official or unofficial. A man should know how to pray before others, to present the Gospel, and to stand in the gap where a leadership need is apparent.

When does a boy become a man? I'm glad I was asked this question, and this series represents my attempt to provide

an answer that will be both faithful to Scripture and applicable to the real-life challenges faced by men today. More urgently, it was good for me to think through this question and articulate these hallmarks as I seek to show my own son how to grow into biblical manhood. I am absolutely sure that there is more to be thought and more to be said, but this may help us all to see the challenges before us.

Dads, you are absolutely crucial to the process of man-making. No one else can fulfill your responsibility, and no one else can match your opportunity for influence with your son. By word and by example, we are teaching our sons the meaning of manhood. May God make us faithful as we seek to lead our boys to become true Christian men.

To read Part One, [click here](#).

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