

The Noble Man: Recovering the Wonder of Manhood

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But the noble man makes noble plans and by noble deeds he stands. Isaiah 32:8

2: What is the Problem?

What do you want to be when you grow up? Adults may have asked that question of you as a child, as they watched you play. You were ready for it, replying with a list of the manly roles that caught your imagination. “I wanna be a fireman, an’ a asta-nut, an’ a cowboy,” you said. “Oh, yeah, an’ a doc-ter ‘cause they make a lotta money an’ you might need summa that.” Or, you may have looked at your father and said, “I wanna be like you, Daddy.”

There is a grown-up version of the question. It goes like this: “What do you want to do with your life (now that you have finished school – now that you are married – now that you need to make your way in the world – now that you are a man – now that you have a son)?” If you are like many guys, that is a scary question. You flat-out do not know the answer.

You look at your son, and ask him the question. You are amused with his responses until he says, “I wanna be like you, Daddy,” and you begin to wonder about who you are, and what you have become. What kind of a man will your son be, if he becomes like you?

When did you become a man, and how did that happen? To answer, you might be looking to high school or college graduation, to your first alcohol, to your first cigarette, or to your first date with a girl. But, as memorable as those events probably were, you know intuitively that they did not, could not, bring you to manhood. Manhood is about more than the passage of time and being male; it is more than sports, than wealth, than celebrity and the high regard of peers. God has built you for nobility.

John Eldredge writes, “This is every man’s deepest fear: to be exposed, to be found out, to be discovered as an imposter, and not really a man.”¹ He further says that the question that haunts every man, whether he knows it or not, is some version of, “Am I really a man? Have I got what it takes ... when it counts?”² For many men, something is missing, some threshold that has never been crossed which is not just related to the course of time, or of events.

The last time I was in Seattle to visit my son and his family, we all worked on putting together one of those 1000 piece puzzles. You know the kind where there are so many

¹ John Eldredge. *Wild at Heart: discovering the secret of a man’s soul*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), p. 45.

² *Ibid*, pg. 57

similar pieces that you despair of ever getting it completed? We spent an hour looking for a piece that turned up under the tablemat, when we put the puzzle away.

Life can sometimes seem like that. One piece is missing and you search everywhere for it. And then, just as you are ready to blame it on a defective product, you find the piece you need on the floor, or dropped into your pants cuff, or in your three-year-old toddler's smiling mouth. Once you have it, everything seems like it starts to come together. You get a glimpse of destiny – of pathway, outcome, or completion.

Even when they are many years down the road into their 40's, 50's or even 60's, and successful in their businesses, professions, or vocations, and even when their financial needs are met, many men still feel vaguely incomplete – like there is a piece missing. Is that you? You cannot quite put your finger on what that piece is, or where it is. Or, if you do know what and where it is, you fear it, because it calls you out of your field of competence and sends you to an unknown place.

Who are you and what does it mean, to be the man that your son might follow?