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Manhood

To a neighbor and close friend of mine.

As you grow older, it is important that you are able to fully distinguish what it truly means to become a man. You are in a very interesting point in your life right now because you are in high school and you are approaching adulthood. Yes, I know that life may seem confusing to you as of right now and you really aren’t sure how you should act and conduct yourself. I once was in high school as well and I know how stressful it can be with trying to cope with all of the pressure of maturing and becoming a man being brought upon you by your parents and other adults as well. Do not be overwhelmed by this pressure because the people that instill it upon you are the ones who understand and know the importance of maturing and becoming a man and to make the right choices in life. Trust me, I know how annoying it is to constantly be reminded of what type of man you should be and what alterations there are that you need to make in your life in order to become more mature and to become an adult. The people in your life that tell you these things all the time are the exact same people who deeply care about you because if they didn’t, they would not bother to expend an ounce of energy into informing you of what you need to do in order to grow up. They want nothing but the best for you and all of your endeavors in life.

I am also well aware of the fact that it is very difficult when trying to stand your ground and be a leader when faced with a tremendous amount of peer pressure. It is of the uttermost importance that you do not succumb to all of the pressure brought onto you by your friends because this will only hinder you from becoming the man that I know that you are capable of becoming. By now I’m sure you are wondering what exactly a man is and what do you need to do in order to become one. This is why I personally am writing to you so that I can inform you on what path you should take to become more mature and a man.

As your friend, it is my responsibility to make sure that I give you good advice so that you are able to make the best possible decisions for yourself and so that you are also able to reach success in everything that you do. Manhood isn’t granted to you simply through age and materialistic things, but rather the actions that you perform which demonstrate that you are ready to accept the title of a man. By the time you finish reading this, it is my intent that you are able to have a full understanding of what it is that actually constitutes a man. Between examples of what most of society deems to be a man and my own personal definition of manhood, I hope that you are able to come to a conclusion as to what type of man you want to become and the steps you need to take in order to get there.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines manhood as “1. The condition of being a human being, 2. The qualities associated with men, 3. The condition of being an adult male as distinguished from child or female, 4. Adult males.” (Merriam-Webster Online). Today, there are many movies, books, and magazines that you can find which illustrate what a “man” actually is. They all contain the same ideas which include expensive homes, how wealthy a male is, fancy sports cars, the ability to attract and hook up with women, an impressive lean body, and they also must be well groomed and have a neat appearance to them. In *Criminal Justice Today*, Frank Schmalleger claims that this definition of a man has led some “middle class youth to focus on what has been called the “automobile –alcohol-sex combination,” rejecting middle-class values of social duty and personal restraint.” (Schmalleger 550). This idea of a man will only make you concentrate on trying to obtain things outside of yourself as opposed to working on developing strong character traits. Due to your current teenage status, this idea of a man may seem more appealing to you. However, this type of mentality has led many down a path of ruin.

Likewise, as stated in the Bible under The Book of Genesis, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.” (*New American Standard Bible, Genesis 1:27*). If man is created in the image of God, then what must a true man be like? Now, you see that a man is more defined as who he is, like God, rather than what he has. If you are to be like God then you will do what is honorable and just. You will try to make good choices for yourself and for others as well. You will love and respect not only yourself but others just as God does on our behalf.

Therefore, let us compare and contrast the world’s view of a man as to what I propose to you what constitutes what a man actually is. In *Hear Our Cry: Boys in Crisis*, Paul D. Slocumb explains that the world’s view depicts males in the media as using “violence as a means for solving differences” even though “the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics projects that by 2010 about 7.7 million adults in the United States will have served some time in prison.” (Slocumb 5, 8). In my view, a real man feels secure in who he is as an individual and seeks out ways to resolve matters so that everyone wins and feels respected. A real man has no need to keep others down such as through acts of racism which is “a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals.” (qtd. in *From Rage to Hope* 49). Hasn’t this type of behavior gone on long enough? When are people going to finally realize that you don’t need to become a collector of materialistic items in order to deem yourself as a man? You have the ability to take a stand and establish your role as a leader in life. I believe that you withhold all of the characteristics and morals in life to depart from society’s narrow view of how a man should be defined as.

You are now at a crucial crossroads in your life. Many of your friends are choosing the easy path to manhood. This path may seem like a fun road to travel along. I mean who wouldn’t want to drive along it in a flashy and expensive car with a cute girl by his side? As you drive down that road, remember to have a definite destination in mind. In other words, do not do what you feel like doing at the spur of the moment or whatever will bring you pleasure immediately. Instead, always have a long term goal in life and tailor your lifestyle and the actions that you perform now in order to meet those goals that you set out for in the future.

Throughout your high school career, you will be faced with peer pressure. Your friends, much like yourself, are in the same position that you are in and are unsure of their own identity and who it is that they are going to become. Maybe they are just possibly afraid of coming to terms with having to mature and defining themselves as who they are going to be and what kind of life they are going to live right away. This in turn makes them lash out rebelliously and they will try to encourage you to join them in their acts. It is vital that you do not succumb to this pressure. By establishing your role as a leader, you will be sending them a message that you know what it is that you want to do with your life and you are not going to throw it all away through some foolish acts. Be their beacon of light and try to guide them onto the correct path of becoming a man. Let them follow you instead of you following them.

Remember that the decisions you make now will affect you in the future. I say this not to instill fear in you, but rather to open your eyes and realize all of the wonderful possibilities that there are in the world that could be yours with only a little planning and self-discipline. Being a man doesn’t just mean that you can do what you want when you want. Instead, it means that you should choose the best alternative rather than something that will only satisfy you for an instant in your life because in the long run this will benefit you and those that you care about.

In *Hear Our Cry: Boys in Crisis*, Paul D. Slocumb states that “masculinity is not defined by occupation, hobbies, or interests, but by how a male honors himself and others. The empathy he has will define his conscience, his sense of right and wrong. His boundaries will define his personal code of ethics and sense of personal integrity. He will have the words to connect with his family, his friends, his community, and himself.” (Slocumb 142). I agree with this idea of manhood and not with the common sayings of “real men don’t cry, real men don’t snitch, or real men are tough.” No one can live up to these sayings all of the time. By my definition of a man, you couldn’t possibly follow these sayings all of the time. If you loved and cared about others so much, how could you not shed a tear for them if something devastating were to happen? How could you not snitch even if it meant telling on your best friend in order to do what was right and just? Do not let these commonly held ideas dictate what type of man you should become. I see a great amount of potential in you and I believe that through a little guidance, you can become a positive role model for everyone and make a big difference in the world.

In Conclusion, do not allow your possessions and your friends try to persuade you into becoming something that you are not. It is your duty to rise above the occasion and to establish yourself as a leader so that you may be able to set an example for others to follow and also so they can aspire to be like you. As your friend, I wish for nothing but the best for you and to watch you grow into the honorable, just, loving, and respectful man that I know that you are capable of becoming. It brings me great joy to be able to share with you my own personal definition of what a man consists of and what you can do in order to attain that status. I hope that this letter was able to give you some closure as to what kind of man it is that you are going to become. Do not go where the path may lead. Instead, go where there is no path at all and leave a trail.

Sincerely,

James Logan

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