

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

For the past several weeks, you have gradually been making the transition from elementary school to middle school. This is a very important time in your life, as you begin making decisions which will impact and affect your young adulthood and ultimately your transition into manhood. You are now entering a phase in your life, wherein the foundation of personal choices and decisions that you make today will largely shape the man who you will soon become, and they will determine whether or not you live a life of integrity and honor, going forward. Right now...today...yes, this very moment is the time for you to begin thinking about the kind of man that you want to become, and to begin taking on some of the responsibilities of manhood. The purpose of this letter is my attempt to share with you several of the things, I believe, you need to know, as your father. Ponder the following quote from Henry Ward Beecher:

*"An acorn is not an oak when it is sprouted. It must go through long summers and fierce winters, and endure all that frost and snow, and thunder, and storms, and side-striking winds can bring, before it is a full grown oak. So a man is not a man when he is created; he is only begun. His manhood must come with years. He who goes through life prosperous, and comes to his grave without a wrinkle, is not half a man. Difficulties are God's errands and trainers, and only through them can one come to fullness of manhood." –Henry Ward Beecher*

What does it mean to be a man in today's world? Well, unfortunately, there is an abundance of poor examples in this world which provide a distorted view of manhood. Just look around you. Is a young person, such as yourself, supposed to take their cue from today's politicians, celebrities, professional athletes, musicians, actors, and/or the media? From the perspective of some of today's rap artists, here are a few examples of what a distorted view of manhood looks like:

*"Manhood is domination and brutality." –Eminem*

*"Manhood is 100% ego." –Kanye West*

*"Manhood is being a thug – and surviving it." –50 Cent*

Really? Even within G-rated family movies, one's perspective on manhood may become skewed. Gaston, the self-absorbed egotistical hunter in the Disney movie, "Beauty and the Beast", who vies for Belle's hand in marriage, is another example of how true manhood is often misrepresented. What, then, are the lasting qualities, values and virtues that distinguish a man from a boy and best define manhood? As a young man, what are some of the character traits that I am expecting you to embrace as you seek out manhood and learn what it means to become a good friend, student, neighbor, citizen, husband, and/or father some day?

Perhaps, the following examples written by Todd Wagner (Pastor of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas) are a good place to start. For now, just as an overview, focus primarily on the 5 characteristics of a godly man which are highlighted in **bold print**:

## Five Characteristics of a Godly Man – by Todd Wagner

1. **STEP UP: Lead. Initiate. Be a man of action. Assume it is your job and your moment. Hate apathy. Reject passivity.**

*When David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the army, the mighty men... "Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight." -2 Samuel 10:7,12*

*"I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one." – Ezekiel 22:30*

*Other Scripture: Psalm 101, Proverbs 14:23, Proverbs 20:6, Jeremiah 5:1, Ezekiel 22:23-31, John 10:11-13, James 1:23-25*

2. **SPEAK OUT: Silence in the midst of sin is a sin. Be courageous. Fear God not man. Speak the truth in love.**

*Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy. – Proverbs 27:5-6*

*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy. – Proverbs 31:8-9*

*Other Scripture: Proverbs 14:25, Proverbs 15:1-2, Proverbs 24:11-12, Isaiah 8:11-13, Jeremiah 1:17, Romans 1:16*

3. **STAND STRONG: Don't give in when you are challenged, attacked or criticized.**

*"Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. – Jeremiah 1:18-19*

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. – I Corinthians 15:58*

*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. – 1 Peter 5:8-9*

*Other Scripture: 2 Chron. 16:9, Prov. 24:10, Isaiah 41:10, Jeremiah 12:5, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Galatians 1:10, Philippians 1:27-28*

4. **STAY HUMBLE**: Be vigilant against pride. Get the log out of your eye. Don't think less of yourself, think of yourself less.

*Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it, for still my prayer is against their wicked deeds. – Psalm 141:5*

*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. – 1 Peter 5:5-7*

*Other Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 12:1, Isaiah 66:2, Micah 6:8, John 15:5, Philippians 2:3-5*

5. **SERVE THE KING**: Seek first His Kingdom, His glory, His righteousness. Hope in the eternal. Live for a greater reward.

*"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." – Matthew 6:33 "*

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." – Mark 10:45*

*Other Scripture: Joshua 24:14-15, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 84:10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 6:10, 1 Peter 2:21-23*

No doubt, you will face a number of challenges and responsibilities over the next several years and throughout your lifetime, and so I pray that your faith in God will always continue to serve as the foundation to your personal character. As your dad, I expect for you to grow into a young man who demonstrates the highest of character, honor, integrity, morals and principles -- in all of the areas and relationships of your life. By the time that you graduate from high school and leave home for college, you will need to have learned how to be responsible for yourself, and to be ready and well-equipped to take on the world, all on your own. With more freedom and independence, for sure, comes greater responsibility and obligations. Over the next several years, as you enter high school, college and as you go out into the world, I look forward to you taking on certain qualities and traits, and steadily building on them over time.

In the days ahead, XXXXX, I encourage you to always strive to conduct yourself with honesty and integrity, to be diligent in your work, to learn how to be thankful and content with what you have, to give more than you take, to be inclusive, to encourage others, to forgive everyone, to defend the defenseless, to practice daily random acts of kindness, to communicate your love for

others, to listen more fully, talk less, and respond with a soft answer (more often than not), to treasure the simplicity of everyday moments, to laugh/sing/dance each day, to honor your body (since it is the only one that you have), to spend more time improving your character than you do improving your appearance, to keep God's word close to your heart and, above all else, to pray without ceasing. A godly man keeps his heart pure, keeps his mind sharp, shows integrity, uses his words wisely, works hard, devotes himself to God, never gives up easily, and gives of himself to others without complaining. I challenge you to be the man who steps up, who speaks out, who stands strong, who stays humble and who loves and serves God at all times.

No doubt, XXXXX, you will make mistakes along the way and fall short of your God-given potential. This is true for all of us. There will be times when you will not only disappoint those around you, but even more so, you are likely to disappoint yourself at times. Remember, that it is not the individual mistakes we make, themselves, but what we do with these mistakes that sets us apart. When you do face seemingly insurmountable challenges, difficulty and failure ahead, I encourage you to re-open this letter and once again read what I have tried to outline here for you.

Also, simply being male does not, in and of itself, guarantee that you will grow up to be a gentleman. For a boy to become a man (and ultimately a gentleman), is an ongoing process -- this is a marathon, buddy, not a sprint! The following examples, written by Deborah King, are also worth considering, as you ponder what it means to enter manhood and become a gentleman:

### **10 Traits of a Gentleman – by Deborah King**

1. A gentleman is generous with his time, wisdom, and resources. He willingly serves others and extends a hand to those in need.
2. A gentleman possesses a positive outlook on life. His humor and consistent encouragement attract others to him.
3. A gentleman is a lifelong learner. He maintains a teachable posture and embraces change for the better.
4. A gentleman models civility in how he treats others. He demonstrates respect, restraint, and personal responsibility in all his interactions. He is honorable, and values and respects others.
5. A gentleman is well-mannered and knows what is appropriate. He is able to navigate various social and professional settings with ease and proficiency. He embraces all people – those from other cultures, as well as individuals from various social and economic backgrounds.
6. A gentleman possesses a strong work ethic. He takes pride in his labor and strives to give his very best. He is trustworthy, loyal, and people speak well of him.

7. A gentleman is confident. His posture and body language communicate a strong personal presence.
8. A gentleman is well-dressed. He knows how to select clothing that is appropriate for any occasion and that will assist him in accomplishing his goals. He is well-groomed and practices good hygiene. He understands that his personal appearance - the way he chooses to dress, groom, and carry himself – opens doors to new opportunities.
9. A gentleman is well-spoken and a generous listener. He knows how to effectively connect with others and communicate his message.
10. A gentleman is known for his integrity. He is a man of his word and follows through with his commitments, whatever the cost. His actions reflect who he has chosen to be and are not based upon the opinions of others.

XXXX, sometime, when you are on the MBA campus and have a little extra time on your hands, take the opportunity to read any of the many quotes posted in the hallways and on the placards of many of the buildings, and the countless inspiring words that are etched in stone throughout the campus. Here are a few quotes that I found quite meaningful, myself, as I began preparing this letter for you:

“Our own heart, and not other men’s opinions, form our true honor.” –**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

“When wealth is lost, nothing is lost. When health is lost, something is lost. When integrity is lost, all is lost.” –**German Proverb**

“Character is much easier kept than recovered.” –**Thomas Paine**

“Honor – your word is your bond. Truth, honesty and character are your watchwords never to be forgotten.” –**Colin L. Powell**

My beloved son, XXXX, I want you to know that I am always committed to you, and that you can always count on me to be in your corner, when faced with any challenge or obstacle. Whenever you need something, big or small, or even *think* that you may need something, I am here for you...for as long as I am alive. As you continue your journey into young adulthood and beyond, I am praying that you mature into the kind of man of whom you also can be very proud.

You have always been and continue to be an amazing gift to your mother, XXXX and me. God has gifted you with so many wonderful qualities and talents. I love you beyond measure, XXXX. Indeed, you are my beloved son, with whom I am already very proud.

– You have all of my love,

**50 more quotes which attempt to define “Manhood”**

"Show me the man you honor, and I will know what kind of a man you are, for it shows me what your ideal of manhood is, and what kind of a man you long to be." –**Thomas Carlyle**

"The greatest thing a man can possibly do in this world is to make the most possible out of the stuff that has been given him. This is success, and there is no other. It is not a question of what someone else can do or become which every youth should ask himself, but what can I do? How can I develop myself into the grandest possible manhood?" –**Orison Swett Marden**

"This is the test of your manhood: How much is there left in you after you have lost everything outside of yourself?" –**Orison Swett Marden**

"We need the iron qualities that go with true manhood. We need the positive virtues of resolution, of courage, of indomitable will, of power to do without shirking the rough work that must always be done." –**Theodore Roosevelt**

"Opposition is what we want and must have, to be good for anything. Hardship is the native soil of manhood and self-reliance." –**John Neal**

"It is not necessary for a man to be actively bad in order to make a failure in life; simple inaction will accomplish it. Nature has everywhere written her protest against idleness; everything which ceases to struggle, which remains inactive, rapidly deteriorates. It is the struggle toward an ideal, the constant effort to get higher and further, which develops manhood and character." –**James Terry White**

"No man should go through life without once experiencing healthy, even bored solitude in the wilderness, finding himself, depending solely on himself and thereby learning his true and hidden strength" –**Jack Kerouac**

"Life is a storm, my young friend. You will bask in the sunlight one moment, be shattered on the rocks the next. What makes you a man is what you do when that storm comes. You must look into that storm and shout as you did in Rome. Do your worst, for I will do mine!" –**The Count of Monte Cristo**

"Life is too short to be little. Man is never so manly as when he feels deeply, acts boldly, and expresses himself with frankness and with fervor." –**Benjamin Disraeli**

"To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible." –**Antoine de Saint-Exupery**

"No man stands so tall as when he stoops to help a child." –**Abraham Lincoln**

"I intend to make myself a man, and if I succeed in that, I shall succeed in everything else." –**James A. Garfield**

"The superior man is he who develops, in harmonious proportions, his moral, intellectual and physical nature. This should be the end at which men of all classes should aim, and it is this only which constitutes real greatness." –**Douglas Jerrold**

"A man does what he must -- in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures -- and that is the basis of all human morality." –**Winston Churchill**

"No man is more unhappy than he who never faces adversity. For he is not permitted to prove himself." –**Seneca**

"A man's ledger does not tell what he is, or what he is worth. Count what is *in* man, not what is *on* him, if you would know what he is worth—whether rich or poor." –**Henry Ward Beecher**

"It is not what he has, or even what he does which expresses the worth of a man, but what he is." –**Henri-Frédéric Amiel**

"Masculinity is not something given to you, but something you gain. And you gain it by winning small battles with honor." –**Norman Mailer**

"Private and public life are subject to the same rules—truth and manliness are two qualities that will carry you through this world much better than policy or tact of expediency or other words that were devised to conceal a deviation from a straight line." –**Robert E. Lee**

"Without an adversary, *virtus* shrivels. We see how great and how viable *virtus* is when, by endurance, it shows what it is capable of." –**Seneca**

"Men have discovered their distinctive virtues and vices through grappling with the perennial dilemmas and demands of love, courage, pride, family, and country—the five paths whose proper ordering gives us the key to the secret of happiness for a man." –**Waller Newell**

"The courage we desire and prize is not the courage to die decently, but to live manfully." –**Thomas Carlyle**

"The longer I live, the more I am certain that the great difference between men—between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant—is energy, invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then—death or victory! That quality will do anything that can be done in this world, and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities, will make a two-legged creature a man without it." –**Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton**

"We don't need to reinvent manliness. We only need to will ourselves to wake up from the bad dream of the last few generations and reclaim it, in order to extend and enrich that tradition under the formidable demands of the present." –**Waller R. Newell**

"The way of a superior man is three-fold: *virtuous*, he is free from anxieties; *wise*, he is free from perplexities; *bold*, he is free from fear." –**Confucius**

“If unwilling to rise in the morning, say to thyself, ‘I awake to do the work of a man.’” –**Marcus Aurelius**

“Manhood is the defeat of childhood narcissism.” –**David Gilmore**

“What a man knows should find its expression in what he does. The value of superior knowledge is chiefly in that it leads to a performing manhood.” –**Christian Nestell Bovee**

"The lesson taught at this point by human experience is simply this, that the man who will get up will be helped up; and the man who will not get up will be allowed to stay down. Personal independence is a virtue and it is the soul out of which comes the sturdiest manhood. But there can be no independence without a large share of self-dependence, and this virtue cannot be bestowed. It must be developed from within." –**Frederick Douglass**

"Genius is the power of carrying the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood." –**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

“Strength, Courage, Mastery, and Honor are the *alpha* virtues of men all over the world. They are the fundamental virtues of men because without them, no ‘higher’ virtues can be entertained. You need to be alive to philosophize. You can add to these virtues and you can create rules and moral codes to govern them, but if you remove them from the equation altogether you aren’t just leaving behind the virtues that are specific to men, you are abandoning the virtues that make civilization possible.” –**Jack Donovan**

“Manliness means perfect manhood, as womanliness implies perfect womanhood. Manliness is the character of a man as he ought to be, as he was meant to be.” –**James Freeman Clarke**

“A man’s got to have a code, a creed to live by, no matter his job.” –**John Wayne**

"First find the man in yourself if you will inspire manliness in others." –**Amos Bronson Alcott**

“A man is one whose body has been trained to be the ready servant of his mind; whose passions are trained to be the servants of his will; who enjoys the beautiful, loves truth, hates wrong, loves to do good, and respects others as himself.” –**John Ruskin**

“It is not the situation which makes the man, but the man who makes the situation.” –**Frederick William Robertson**

"Duty is the essence of manhood." –**George S. Patton**

"There is one rule, above all others, for being a man. Whatever comes, face it on your feet." –**Robert Jordan**

“Stand true to your calling to be a man. Real women will always be relieved and grateful when men are willing to be men.” –**Elisabeth Elliott**



“Men cannot be men—much less good or heroic men—unless their actions have meaningful consequences to people they truly care about. Strength requires an opposing force, courage requires risk, mastery requires hard work, honor requires accountability to other men. Without these things, we are little more than boys playing at being men, and there is no weekend retreat or mantra or half-assed rite of passage that can change that. A rite of passage must reflect a real change in status and responsibility for it to be anything more than theater. No reimagined manhood of convenience can hold its head high so long as the earth remains the tomb of our ancestors.” –**Jack Donovan**

“A man should be able to hear, and to bear, the worst that could be said of him.” –**Saul Bellow**

“There are two questions a man must ask himself: The first is ‘Where am I going?’ and the second is ‘Who will go with me?’ If you ever get these questions in the wrong order you are in trouble.” –**Sam Keen**

"If boys don't learn, men won't know." –**Douglas Wilson**

“Adversity toughens manhood, and the characteristic of the good or the great man is not that he has been exempt from the evils of life, but that he has surmounted them.” –**Patrick Henry**

“It is a grand mistake to think of being great without goodness; and I pronounce it as certain, that there never was yet a truly great man, that was not at the same time truly virtuous.” –**Benjamin Franklin**

"Personally, I hold that a man, who deliberately and intelligently takes a pledge and then breaks it, forfeits his manhood." –**Mahatma Gandhi**

"In the modern techno-industrial culture, it is possible to proceed from infancy into senility without ever knowing manhood." –**Edward Abbey**

“It is very sad for a man to make himself servant to a single thing; his manhood all taken out of him by the hydraulic pressure of excessive business. I should not like to be merely a doctor, a great lawyer, a great minister, a great politician. I should like to be, also, something of a man.” –**Theodore Parker**

“The man who is deserving the name is the one whose thoughts and exertions are for others rather than for himself.” –**Walter Scott**

"A man is not merely a man but a man among men, in a world of men. Being good at being a man has more to do with a man's ability to succeed with men and within groups of men than it does with a man's relationship to any woman or any group of women. When someone tells a man to be a man, they are telling him to be more like other men, more like the majority of men, and ideally more like the men who other men hold in high regard." –**Jack Donovan**