

XXX,

As you are growing into a young man – and soon will be an adult – I want to share with you a lot of things that I have learned about what being a Man is all about. Today’s culture defines manhood in a lot of false ways. Some of these falsehoods are that a “real man” isn’t sensitive (too tough to cry or show emotion), that a real man drinks alcohol and takes drugs, that a real man makes out with lots of girls, that a real man can always do things by himself and doesn’t need help, etc.

XXX, these are not what being a “real man” is all about. A real man is sensitive, has close friends that he’s vulnerable with and relies on, doesn’t act “cool” by drinking or taking drugs, is respectable to women (and all people), etc. As you become an “adult man” in time, you will be defined by your character and your friends. Many of your peers will give into to being cool, being popular and doing what society says is cool (from watching high school kids, college kids, the movies, etc.).

In about 9 months, it’s hard to believe but you will enter high school. You will face challenges and temptations that you have never faced. You will be forced to make decisions that you have not faced before, as peer pressure to be “cool” will only increase. I hope that when you face a tough and tempting decision in the future, you will lean on “doing the right thing”. You will lean on what you have been taught is right by men in your life like Mr. XXX, Coach XXX, Coach XXX, Coach XXX and your Mom and Dad – and by the lessons of Jesus and how he handled certain situations.

XXX, as I have been telling you for years, I want you to be a Leader – a Leader of Men. Leaders come in all shapes, sizes and styles – and being a leader doesn’t mean you have to be a vocal leader. Some of the best leaders in my life have been the quiet leaders – leaders who live by example and are well-respected amongst their peers. Based on your natural personality, this is the type of leader I expect you to be. Being a leader is being a man with high character, honor, morals and principles – not the man who is charismatic and cool and always seeking the spotlight and attention.

As you grow older, life gets harder and more complicated (as you have more expectations and more responsibilities), but it also gets more fun in a lot of ways – as you gain more independence and deepen personal relationships. At your age, you are changing from a boy to a young man – physically and emotionally. This change will not happen overnight, as it will be more gradual. As your father, who loves you more than you will ever know, I feel that it’s my duty to teach you about manhood – and challenge you more over time and expect more of you.

In 5 years, you will be going to college – likely moving to a different city – and experiencing freedom and responsibilities that you’ve never faced. You will make some bad decisions (as you are human), just as I did as a young man. You will have failures and setbacks, just as I did. You will have a crush on a girl who doesn’t like you back. You will have disappointments in

academics and athletics. You might get rejected from a college you want to attend or a job you want. I dealt with all of these disappointments. I want to help you prepare for how to overcome setbacks and failures – because they are in your future. And the good news is that through failure often comes your greatest growth as a man!

In the next 14 years of your life, you will likely graduate from high school and then college, have a full-time job or two, get married, maybe have a kid or two, etc. That's crazy when you think about all of this. As a man, you serve many roles – as a son, a friend, a husband, a father, etc. While all of these roles are important parts of your identity, what's most important is that you are a child of God (no matter what your age is). If you follow the teachings of Jesus, you will live a much happier and healthier life. Jesus is the best example of a real man that's ever lived. I try to pattern my life after Jesus, but I fall short all the time – because I am a human being with an ego and selfish desires. But that doesn't mean that I shouldn't try to be like Jesus.

I encourage you to deepen friendships, as many of these guys you are in school with now will be your friends for life. Girls can be fun but spending time with your guy friends is a lot more fun. I encourage you to eat healthy and exercise. If you take care of yourself, you will truly feel better each day. I encourage you to push yourself in athletics. You have a lot of God-given talents in football and basketball – so push yourself to be the best athlete (and teammate) that you can be. In 5 years, your athletic career will probably be over – so enjoy it to the fullest over the next 5 years. Always prioritize academics over athletics. It's not all about grades but more about your effort. Push yourself (as you have) academically, as that will help you for the rest of your life. And pursue your passions, whether that's playing football or piano. I will be proud of you if you pursue something you love – no matter what that is.

XXX, my commitment to you is that I will always be there for you. I will be available to talk about serious things, your struggles, your insecurities, your mistakes, etc. You can count on me when times get tough in your life – always know that. If I don't think you're being the best version of XXX that you can be, I'm going to let you know that.

XXX, my firstborn child, I love you. Your mother and I are very proud of the young man that you've grown to be, and I look forward to so many fun times ahead. You have so many great qualities about you – your independence, you being a great role model for your younger sister and brother, your calm yet confident demeanor, your easy-going and obedient personality, your friendly demeanor, etc. I am proud that you are my son, and I want you to grow to be a man that many men admire and respect.

Love Always,