

When Does A Boy Become A Man?

My wife and I have had the privilege of watching our two oldest children, who happen to be girls, grow up into womanhood, marry and now have children of their own. Now as we have seen our oldest son get married earlier in the summer and in less than a week we will see our youngest son head off to college, an awareness and burden comes on my heart as I contemplate not only mine, but all of the boys in our youth group. I recently talked to one of the young men in our church who grew up here, now married, father and all around successful in his life. I was thinking how he possesses these qualities of manhood. It is my goal and prayer that all of our young men become true men, but more especially, men of God and men of character. I have some prayerful thoughts that come to mind when I consider when a boy becomes a man.

A boy becomes a man when he is obedient to the unenforceable. He does right without outward coercion. Someone once asked me what the greatest truth was that my Dad ever taught me and without hesitation I answered, "Obedience to the unenforceable." It means doing right when there is no one around to make you do right. *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence..."* (Philippians 2:12).

A boy becomes a man when his main motivation in life is intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. He does right because of the inward peace that becomes the reward rather than the temporary external benefit.

A boy becomes a man when is willing to help those who need his help. Be the channel of His mercy to others; the harbinger of hope for the hopeless." *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it"* (Proverbs 3:27). *"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men"* (I Thessalonians 5:14). There is a benign and generous spirit that is associated with a gentleman. With that thought in mind another point follows naturally:

A boy becomes a man when he is a gentleman. A gentleman is defined as a man of noble or gentle birth (we can have that through Christ). Also, to improvise another definition, a gentleman is a man who combines his knowledge of who he is with chivalrous qualities. In other words, a gentleman is a man whose conduct conforms to a high standard of propriety or correct behavior. His mom is not standing over him making sure he behaves in this way; he is doing so out of a second nature. *"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men"* (I Thessalonians 5:15).

A boy becomes a man when he is determined to be the breadwinner. This aspect of manhood is almost forgotten in the culture in which we live. It was an unwritten rule, understood by boys during their up bringing, that we will work hard, pull our own weight, pay our own way, and take care of the family. As a matter of fact, if you cannot take care of your family, you were instructed not to even think about marriage.

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5:8).

A boy becomes a man when he acts courageously. Acting courageously doesn't mean that you never become afraid. Everyone experiences fear. A man, on the other hand will act valiantly with courage in the face of fear. *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions..."*(II Timothy 1:7,8).

A boy becomes a man when he is humbly thankful to God. A prideful person will not give the glory to God for all that comes his way. A truly thankful man is a humble man. He knows from Whom the blessings in life come. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:7).

A boy becomes a man when he accepts himself as a unique person, made in the image of God, destined to be what God wants Him to be. I'll never forget the advice that the late, Dr. Roy Westmoreland, a mentor of mine gave me on my twenty-first birthday..."Johnny has to be Johnny." I was following hard after God, but Dr. Westmoreland saw the frustration that I was going through as I did not (in my own eyes) measure up to my seniors who had been serving the Lord for decades ahead of me. It was as though he was saying, "Just be right with God and be yourself." How valuable and timely those words were to me! We know that people have pre-conceived ideas about where and how a young man should be. On one hand, we are not to look at personality idiosyncrasies as a license to licentiousness or worldliness; but on the other hand, a young man should be right with God and be the different man God called him to be. He is not to be any one else's clone. He should believe he is destined to be God's man! He should be owned, possessed and empowered by God...God's man through and through!

Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem **If** for his son, shortly before his son died while fighting for England against the Turks. He was as heartbroken as a father could be. When England became involved in World War I, Kipling compiled a small book of his writings, which were issued to the young men now going into harm's way. It was his way to serve his country, by raising revenues and giving inspiration to the troops. There is a touching true story of a young man who had the small book in his left side top pocket during combat. A bullet struck him and lodged with the tip of the bullet pointing to the opening lines of his famous poem. Although the words did not save his own son's life...they were used later to save the life of another young soldier in war. Allow me to borrow my favorite lines from Kipling's **If** to challenge all of our boys to be men! *"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs ...If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster...and so hold on when there is nothing in you...Except the Will which says to them: Hold on! ...If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch, If you can fill the unforgiving minute- With sixty seconds' worth of distance run, Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!"*

- Pastor Pope -

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