



Candlewood Church



The Measure of a Man

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BIG IDEA: The world makes you prove you are a man; the Father tells you that you are his son before you have done a thing. So, the men who never got the blessing are the very ones God sends to bless someone else.

Scripture Focus: But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” **1 Samuel 16.7 NLT**

Blurb: Some of us grew up with strong examples of manhood. Some of us grew up with gaps. Either way, God cares deeply about what shaped us; and more importantly what’s shaping us now. This month we’ll explore a biblical vision of manhood that’s formed by Jesus: men who are rooted, humble, courageous, and faithful; men who lead with love, serve with strength, and show up with integrity where we work, live, play and pray! God isn’t just redeeming us; He’s restoring what’s been stolen and building what lasts. What is behind us doesn’t have to define what’s ahead.

Today we look at the phrase, “The Measure of a Man.”

In our series of Womanhood we began by sharing that women were created as image bearers. In the same way, men were also created as image bearers ([Genesis 1:27](#) - So God created mankind in his own image), which keeps both series anchored in the same dignity rather than treating the sexes as competition with each other.

If you remember we discussed how history handled Mary Magdalene! I just want us to know there is a definite distinction between biblical masculinity and cultural masculinity.

Too much of what was preached as "biblical manhood" in American churches was actually the “John Wayne” archetype, the stoic provider, the self-made rugged individualist. That

perspective became entangled with a Biblical view and was believed to be a clear picture of manhood.

That manhood image was tradition, not Scripture, in much the same way the prostitute label got attached to Mary.

If we can separating these cultural traditions from Biblical truths, it gives us permission to take an honest look both the **old cultural script** and **the new cultural scripts competing for young men today**.

Let me tell you a simple story from my childhood.

Four words in a clean garage

I was riding my **Schwinn-a-like bike** down the sidewalk one day when the chain broke and fell off the sprocket. I got off the bike and just stared at it for a few moments, not having any idea what broke, when I heard a voice, "hey do you need some help?" It was Stan, a neighbor a couple of houses down. Stan and Louise were original owners in house on Harding street. Stan had retired and now spent his time meticulously keeping the house in immaculate condition. The grass on the front lawn was a deep rich green with every blade exactly in its place. It was manicured weekly. The house was painted a bright white with a nice green trim – he must have touched it up every year. And then there was his garage. **It was one of those garages that a man would love to claim as his own.** The shiny cement floor was flawless, no oil, scuffs or dirt! And **Stan had one of those boards with peg holes with an outline of each tool carefully drawn around the hook that it hangs on.** Every tool was hanging perfect and ready for use. Stan walked my bicycle into **his immaculately clean garage and skillfully flipped the bike on its back.** He pulled the ½ open ended wrench off its position on the pegboard and began to loosen the bolt that held the back tire in place. He carefully untangle the chain and paused. **He was about to transmit the wisdom of all bicycle mechanics into my brain.** He smiled and said, "**You want to know about the 'master' link?**" He said it in such a way that I felt like looking both ways over my shoulder before giving him the nod. He continued in a hushed tone, "**this is the 'master' link, the one link that allows you to take the chain off the rear sprocket.**" "Wow!" I said. I was mesmerized by this master mechanic. He's got to be the smartest man in the whole world. With the speed and skill of a seasoned craftsman he re-assembled the chain around the sprocket and then just before he began to tighten the rear lug nut – he paused a second time. "**You want to try it?**" He was extending the tool towards me gently **nudging me to discover the joy of fixing something yourself.** I took the wrench in my hand, it felt good – even natural like I had held it all my life. I began to turn the nut on the rear axle when as he coached me once again, "**righty-tighty, lefty-loosey,**" otherwise known as "**clockwise to tighten counterclockwise to loosen.**" Ah, another secret of the trade. And then he added, "**put some muscle into it to synch it down tightly.**" I didn't know what "synch" it meant, but I gave it my best shot. I felt like Superman couldn't have tightened it any better than I did that day. But **it was Stan's third comment that changed my life.** It was the moment that transformed Stan, the nice neighborhood man a couple of houses down, into Stan, my hero. **Stan spoke four more words.** Four words that **empowered me.** Four words that **inspired me to greatness.** Four words that would mark the rest of my life. I cannot understate the power of these four words spoken at that time of my life. Stan said, "**you do that WELL.**" My instincts forced me to look around to see who else had

entered the garage. "Did he just say that to me?" I had to ask because I had never been told that I had ever done anything well. As an eight-year-old kid, I didn't know enough to think that he was just being kind. I mean the fact is I just turned a lug nut on a bicycle axle for goodness sake – it's not like I just put a man on the moon. But I didn't care. I grabbed the compliment like a starving boy jumping at the chance for a hot meal. From time to time, I would wander over to Stan's while he was crafting in his trade. I probably broke things just to have Stan show me how to fix it. **From that moment on I knew "I had the power to fix stuff!"**

What are the key issues about manhood that boys and men struggle with?

- 1. Identity and calling.** The current crisis is largely one of purpose: failure to launch, aimlessness, worth collapsed into productivity. **Genesis 2:15 gives Adam vocation before the fall, *avad* and *shamar*, to cultivate and to guard, meaningful work and a protective role that predate sin.**
 - a. This addresses both cultural messages:
 - that "men **are the problem**" or
 - that "men are **defined by their paycheck**".

A Man's calling precedes his career.
- 2. Strength, leadership, and the pendulum.** Culture currently offers men two failed options: **domineering strength** (the manosphere, Andrew Tate and company filling a real vacuum for searching young men) or **apologetic passivity**. **Jesus offers a third: strength under control.** Christ modelled it himself. **He had every right and opportunity to dominate** and instead he served others and laid down his life (Ephesians 5:25, John 13). **Jesus cleared the temple and he wept!** The question is, **"what does a man do with his power, not whether he has it."**
- 3. Fatherhood and the fatherlessness crisis.** The shift over 50 years in family structure is enormous, and the data on fatherlessness is sobering. The Dig Deeper Notes have a list. Scripturally you have **Malachi 4:6** (hearts of fathers turned to children), the running father of **Luke 15**, and God revealing himself primarily as Father. Worth treating both literal fatherhood and the spiritual fatherhood the church owes to men who grew up without one.
- 4. Emotional life and the loneliness epidemic.** The **male friendship deficit and the rise in deaths of despair and male suicide are well documented.** The cultural script says real men don't feel; **Scripture shows David lamenting, Jesus weeping** (John 11:35), **Jonathan and David's deep friendship**, men who feared, grieved, and said so. **Permission to have an inner life** is genuinely good news to a lot of men.
- 5. Sexual integrity in the porn era.** This is arguably **the largest behavioral change in male life in 50 years and almost nothing in church culture from a century ago anticipated it.** Job's covenant with his eyes (**Job 31:1**) and **1 Thessalonians 4** give you the texts, and you can tie it directly back to the Womanhood series: **pornography is the precise opposite of treating women as image bearers.**

6. **The gospel is for men who have failed. Shame is what keeps men out of the room.** Peter denying and being restored (John 21), David after Bathsheba, the whole pattern of God restoring men who blew it badly.

Young men are actively searching and the loudest voices answering them are often the worst ones, which is exactly the moment I want them to know; Jesus has something better to say.

What is “The measure of a man?”

The Phrase, Biblically

“The measure of a man” is an English idiom, but it lands almost word for word in Ephesians 4:13.

“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **Ephesians 4:13 NASB**

Paul says we grow up “into a complete man” (*andra teleion*), “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (*eis metron hēlikias tou plērōmatos tou Christou*). The key word is *hēlikia*, which carries both senses at once: physical stature (height) and maturity (age).

The world measures a man by his stature; God measures a man by his maturity into Christ. In other words, God looks at the heart of man.

Paul gives us a couple of other key verses that give us a Biblical understanding of this phrase, the measure of a man.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth (the Orange County, California of his day)

1. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. **1 Corinthians 16:13-14 ESV**

“Act like men” is one Greek verb, *andrizesthe*, “be a man, be courageous.” Here’s the foundation of men being courageous: “stand firm in the faith... be strong” (v.13), then immediately “let all that you do be done in love” (v.14). **Biblical manhood is courage and love dynamically held together in tension.**

That verse corrects both failed scripts at once: the manosphere offers courage without love; the passive script offers love without courage; Paul refuses to separate them.

2. The other one is in **1 Corinthians 13:11**

Quit acting like a child!

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” 1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

The Measurement

Looks can be deceiving... but so can cultural perceptions!

God tells Samuel to go under the guise of “making a sacrifice,” and make sure to invite Jesse to the sacrifice. God would show Samuel which son to anoint – Jesse had 7 sons (Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, Nethaneel, Raddai, Ozem, & David). All of his sons were of military & household duties, except for David, who was a youth. But Samuel thought he recognized the one **right away!**

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed!” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:6-7 NLT

This verse should let us know that God’s standard or measure of a man are not the same as we would think.

Samuel rightly looked for what a future King should look like, but forgot all about how he found Saul before he was anointed. Samuel misjudged what God was looking for, but didn't he find Saul in an unusual resistance to leading?

The measure of a man is not self-generated and not culturally assigned; it is given to him and developed by Imago Dei – the image of Christ.

But today **We have completely lost any sense of our Rites of Passage.**

Most global cultures have clear “rites of passage,” helping a child understand their role and how to move from child to youth then onto adulthood.

See the Dig Deeper Notes on cultural rites of passage:

The anthropology is more unified than the cultures look on the surface. Arnold van Gennep (*Les rites de passage*, 1909), later developed by Victor Turner, mapped nearly every initiation onto three stages:

- **Separation.** The boy is severed from childhood and from the mother’s world.
- **Liminality (transition).** The threshold: an ordeal, fasting, testing, and instruction by elders.
- **Incorporation.** He returns and is publicly recognized as a man, often with a new name, role, or status.

The structure is nearly universal, which makes it’s even harder that it is lacking modern in modern American culture!

A Christian lens (Richard Rohr, *Adam’s Return*). Rohr studied male initiation across cultures and distilled the hard truths the old rites delivered to young men:

- life is hard.
- you are not that important.
- your life is not about you.
- you are not in control.
- you are going to die.

Modern messaging tells boys the exact opposite of all five!

The whole point of initiation was to move a boy from "the world revolves around me" to "I exist for something larger," which is Rohr's "your life is not about you" and Paul's "love does not insist on its own way" (13:5) saying the same thing in two languages.

Becoming a man is not mainly about abandoning childhood's wonder, it is about love displacing self at the center. The measure of a man, again, turns out to be love with courage, not capability without it.

The hard truths that set you free

The Old Rites Hard Truths vs Modern Messaging.

The old rites delivered five hard truths that, paradoxically, set a young man free.

Modern messaging delivers the exact opposite of each, and the result is not freedom but a constant hum of permanent anxiety, because the promises can't be kept.

1. **"Life is hard" becomes "life should be easy."** The whole machinery of modern life is built to remove friction: one-click everything, same-day delivery, swipe to be entertained, an app for every discomfort. **The quiet message underneath is that pain is a malfunction, that if something is hard you are doing it wrong or you've been wronged.** A boy raised on that reads ordinary struggle, a hard class, a dull job, a marriage that requires work, as evidence that something has gone wrong rather than as the normal texture of a life. The good buried in it is real (relieving needless suffering is a mercy), but inflated into "all hardship is abnormal," it leaves a man brittle the first time life refuses to cooperate.

2. **"You are not that important" becomes "you are special, you are the main character."** This is the self-esteem era grown to maturity: participation trophies, "you are enough exactly as you are," personal brand, "main-character energy," an algorithm that literally centers the feed on you. The grain of truth is precious, every person bears God's image and is loved. But detached from that and turned into "you are exceptional and the world owes you recognition," it produces young men who are simultaneously grandiose and fragile, certain they're destined for something big and crushed that it hasn't arrived. The old rite said the opposite to a boy's face: **you are one of many, you owe the tribe, take your place and be proud of it.** Oddly, that was a relief, because a man who doesn't have to be exceptional is finally free to be useful.

3. **"Your life is not about you" becomes "your life is entirely about you."** This is excessive and expressive individualism, the reigning script: follow your bliss, live your truth, your authenticity is the highest value, self-care over self-gift. The good it grabs is that the self matters and shouldn't be erased. But as a total philosophy it collapses inward, and **a man whose life is**

only about himself ends up with a very small life, because meaning is found in what you give yourself to, covenant, children, mission, God, not in growing yourself. The initiation's rite of passage's entire purpose was to move a boy from "the world revolves around me" to "I exist for something larger."

4. **"You are not in control" becomes "you can control everything."** This is the **optimization and manifestation script**, and it's the loudest one aimed at young men right now: **biohack your body, manifest your reality, be the CEO of your life, the right routine and mindset and supplements will let you master your outcomes.** The good is that agency is real and discipline matters. But sold as total control, it sets a man up to read every uncontrollable thing, illness, recession, a child's choices, grief, as a personal failure he should have engineered away. **The hard truth is gentler than the lie: you are not in control, so you can stop carrying what was never yours to carry, and you can trust a Father who is.**

5. **"You are going to die" becomes "you can avoid death."** Death is the great unspeakable. **Culture worships youth and sells anti-aging as a moral project, and offers a curated digital self that never visibly ages.** Whole fortunes now chase longevity under the banner of "don't die." **The truth that every traditional rite delivered, mortality, is the one modern messaging works hardest to hide.** But a man who never reckons with death stays an adolescent, because nothing focuses a life like knowing it ends. The Psalmist wrote **"Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12)** is the rite the culture refuses to perform.

Rites of Passage, delivered by men who have lived and led a godly life, can be speaking these truths into a younger generation.

The mansphere postures as the one voice telling young men "hard truths," yet it actually sells them the counter-messages on steroids,

- you are exceptional (alpha),
- you can dominate and control everything,
- optimize your way to mastery.

Modern culture flatters the ego while claiming to toughen it. The truly counter-cultural voice in the room is the one willing to say you are not that important and you are not in control, and to say it as good news.

Every one of Rohr's five truths sounds like bad news and lands as freedom, and the gospel says each one out loud.

Culturally contrary, yet God is with us!

- Life is hard, and a Father walks you through the wilderness ([Matthew 4](#)).
- You are not that important, but you are a beloved son before you've done anything ([Matthew 3:17](#)).
- Life is not about you, and that's how you'll finally find yourself ([Mark 8:35](#)).
- You are not in control, so you CAN rest ([Psalm 46:10](#)).
- You are going to die, so live well and remember death has been beaten because of Jesus ([Psalm 90:12](#)).

The world tells young men five comfortable lies that keep them anxious; the Father tells men five hard truths that set them free.

Rogue Elephants Lacking Male Bulls

In Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa during the 1990s, young male elephants began killing white rhinos for no foraging or predatory reason, throwing sticks at them, harassing them, chasing them over great distances, and finally stomping them to death. Up to roughly 49 to 50 rhinos were killed between 1992 and 1997. Rangers first suspected poachers, but discovered it was much more complicated.

These young bulls were orphans, the product of translocation of young animals remaining from culls in Kruger National Park, so they grew up with no mature bull hierarchy above them.

The physiological consequence is specific and measurable: **they entered musth about 10 years younger than expected, and maintained musth for a full term at first occurrence, a hormone-driven aggressive state that older bulls normally trigger on and off.** In a normal herd, older bulls usually keep the young ones in line; without chaperones, the testosterone surge ran unchecked.

Park managers introduced six older bulls from Kruger. At first, the young problem animals met up with them and there were some minor scuffles, but the Kruger bulls clearly dominated. The results were immediate and astonishing. The attacks on rhino stopped and the aberrant behavior disappeared. After standing down to a dominant bull, the rush of hormones in the younger male stops, in some cases in a matter of minutes.

The presence of a mature male literally switches off the destructive state. The same approach was later used successfully at Hluhluwe-Umfolozi and elsewhere, which is why the science stands rather than being a one-off anecdote. **One South African newspaper headline on the intervention was, fittingly, "Operation Father Figure."**

The word "rebelliously" overstates it. **This isn't moral rebellion or wounded grief acting out; the best-supported explanation is endocrinological. The absence of older males caused early, prolonged musth, and musth caused aggression.**

Some early accounts speculated the young bulls were traumatized by watching their families culled, but the dominant scientific verdict is the simpler hormonal one. So the accurate framing is "young males without older males to regulate them went physiologically haywire," not "they chose to misbehave because no father figure disciplined them."

Why is this a popular comparison?

The young need elders, not peers, to become regulated adults, and the mere presence of a mature male recalibrates the younger one.

African proverb: "the boys who are not initiated into manhood will burn down the village to feel the heat."

When a culture provides no threshold, no path, no rite of passage... **young men manufacture their own, usually through destructive proxies.** The vacuum does not stay empty.

REFLECTIONS

- **On four words in a clean garage.** Stan was not Glenn's father. He had no ceremony, no authority, no plan to change a boy's life. He had a pegboard, a wrench, and four words: "you do that well." That is the whole argument of the message in miniature, that the blessing a boy needs does not require a perfect father or a formal rite; it can come from a neighbor two houses down who simply notices and speaks. Which means most of the men in the room are four words away from being someone's Stan, and most have no idea how starved a young man next to them is to hear them.
- **The measurement.** There is a quiet exhaustion in being measured by stature, by paycheck, performance, who you outrank. It never finishes; there is always a taller Saul. When God tells Samuel "the LORD looks at the heart," He is not lowering the bar, He is moving it off your back. The measure of a man is something grown in you by grace toward the fullness of Christ, not something you manufacture and defend. One tape measure produces anxiety: the other produces rest.
- **On hard truths that set you free.** Is it worth sitting in the strange mercy of it: the world's ego-flattering messages (you're special, you can control everything, you'll basically never die) leave men anxious, because the promises cannot be kept. God's hard truths (you're not that important, you're not in control, you will die) land as relief, because each one is attached to a Father. The most loving thing you can tell a young man is the thing the culture is most afraid to say.
- **On the need that leads to aggression & anger.** The elephants are not a story about bad young males; they are a story about absent old ones. Remove the regulating presence and the testosterone does not pause politely, it goes haywire. The sobering line for the church is that the absence of godly older men is not neutral. The empty vacuum will be filled! The hopeful line is the other half: the mere presence of a mature, regulated male recalibrated the young ones in minutes. Showing up is not a small thing. It may be the thing.

APPLICATION

Action Steps to Take?

- **Be a Stan.** Pick one person, a son, a younger man, a kid in the church, and speak specific, spoken blessing over him this week. Not generic encouragement: name a real thing and say it to his face: "you do that well." **You are handing him a kind of father's blessing.**
- **Name your tape measure.** Ask honestly this week: **What have I actually been using to decide whether I am a real man, income, comparison, the scoreboard at work?**

Name it out loud, then consciously hand that measure back and take up God's, the heart, growth into Christ.

- **Cross the peer line. The young need elders, not just peers.** It's the opposite of [1 Corinthians 15:33](#) – **good company promotes good character!** If you are younger, ask one godly older man to walk with you. If you are older, stop assuming no one needs you and pick one younger man to invest in. The elephants did not need more peers; they needed a bull.
- **Release what was never yours. Take "you are not in control, so you can rest." Write down the one thing you have been struggling with, then pray Psalm 46:10 over it, "cease striving," and physically let it go. Trust the Father who actually holds it.**

SCRIPTURES

Ephesians 4:13 NASB

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 ESV

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

1 Samuel 16:6-7 NLT

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."



DIG DEEPER NOTES

THE STATE OF MEN TODAY – [Download Here](#)

THE MEASURE OF A MAN – **GENE GETZ CLIFF NOTES** – [Download Here](#)



Saul's reluctance to lead.

The Bible portrays Saul as reluctant and insecure about kingship.

- Reluctance at selection: After Samuel anointed Saul privately, **Saul initially hid among the baggage when he was publicly chosen by lot, showing reluctance to assume the role** (1 Samuel 10:21–22).

- Insecurity and fear: **Early in his reign Saul often acted from fear** (e.g., he offered the burnt offering himself instead of waiting for Samuel when the people scattered and the Philistines gathered; 1 Samuel 13:8-14). Samuel warned that Saul had not kept God's command and that his kingdom would not endure.
- Resistance to prophetic direction: **Saul repeatedly disobeyed God's commands through Samuel** (the incomplete destruction of the Amalekites and sparing Agag and livestock; 1 Samuel 15). When confronted, Saul made excuses and shifted blame to the people or to ignorance (1 Samuel 15:20–21, 24–25).
- Jealousy and opposition to David: After David's military success and popularity, **Saul grew jealous, fearful, and hostile toward David**; actively seeking to kill him and pursuing him over many years (1 Samuel 18-31). His conduct moved from insecurity to vindictive violence.
- Decline under spiritual distress: **Saul experienced periods of troubling spirits and consulted mediums** (1 Samuel 16:14-23; 28), reflecting spiritual turmoil and increasing instability.



Old cultural scripts versus new ones

The old scripts are the inherited twentieth-century pictures of manhood, **mostly built around external function**.

- The provider script: a man's worth is his paycheck and his ability to support a household.
- The stoic script: real men don't show fear, grief, or need; you handle it alone and you don't talk about it.
- The rugged-individualist script: the self-made man, the John Wayne archetype, strong, silent, needs no one.
- The patriarch script: authority and headship as command and control.
- And the playboy script from the other direction: manhood proven through sexual conquest.

These scripts are fading partly because **the economy that underwrote the provider model changed**, and partly because the **culture spent the last few decades critiquing them**, sometimes fairly (the stoicism is genuinely harmful) and sometimes by lumping the good in with the bad.

The new scripts are what rushed into the vacuum when the old ones lost authority and nothing coherent replaced them.

- The manosphere and "alpha male" script (Andrew Tate and his many imitators): dominance, money, status, and treating women as conquests or adversaries, sold to young men as the cure for their aimlessness.
- The grievance script: masculinity as a defensive identity, men as victims of a culture that hates them.
- The opposite script, the "toxic masculinity" script: masculinity itself as the problem, which leaves boys with the message that their basic wiring is something to apologize for.
- The perpetual-adolescent script: the man-child, comfortable, entertained, low-commitment, launched late or never. And the optimized-individual script: the influencer

ideal of the man as a self-improvement project, all cold plunges, supplements, and metrics, sculpted but unattached and strangely hollow.

The Bible has the better answer the culture stopped giving, **that a man is for image-bearing, covenant, sacrifice, and blessing**. The vacuum is the opportunity.



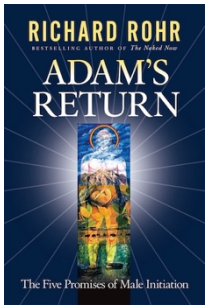
Biblical "childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11)

Paul writes, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. **When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.**" The temptation is to read "childish things" as a scolding list of immature behaviors, then turn it into a sermon about men needing to stop playing video games and grow up. That is not what Paul is doing, and the context matters.

Notice three things.

- **First, the immediate context is love, not maturity in general.** The whole chapter is the love chapter, and verse 11 is an illustration sandwiched between "love never ends" and "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." Paul's point is that the spiritual gifts the Corinthians were boasting about (tongues, prophecy, knowledge) are partial and temporary, like childhood; love is what endures into adulthood and into eternity. So the "childish thing" he most has in view is gifted, knowledgeable, impressive Christianity that lacks love. That is a striking word for men specifically, because the new alpha scripts are all capability and no love, exactly the thing Paul calls childish.
 - **Second, the Greek is worth one careful note.** The word translated "gave up" or "put away" is *katargeō*, the same verb Paul uses two verses earlier for prophecy and knowledge passing away. **It is not "I cleaned up my bad habits"; it is "I set aside what was provisional because the fuller thing arrived."** Growing up, in Paul's image, is less about willpower against immaturity and more about the greater thing displacing the lesser. **Love crowds out the childish**, the way the dominant bull's presence shut off the young elephant's musth. **Maturity comes by the arrival of something bigger, not mainly by gritted teeth.**
 - **Third, the Bible is not anti-childlike.** Jesus says you must become like a child to enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3), and Paul himself tells the same Corinthians to be infants in evil but adults in thinking (1 Corinthians 14:20). So Scripture draws a clean line: **childlike trust, wonder, and dependence are commanded; childish self-centeredness, impatience, and partial vision are to be outgrown. The "childish things" worth putting away are**
 - the self-as-center reflexes,
 - the demand to be impressive,
 - the inability to love past one's own needs.
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Rites of Passage: The Structure



Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest who founded the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque and spent years leading male initiation retreats. *Adam's Return* (Crossroad, 2004) is the distillation of what he learned running those rites and studying traditional male initiation across cultures, history, and religions. His core claim is that initiation rites everywhere, however different on the surface, were all trying to deliver the same handful of truths to young men, and that modern culture has stopped delivering them, with predictable damage.

1. **Life is hard.**
2. You are not important. (often rendered "**you are not that important!**")
3. **Your life is not about you.**
4. **You are not in control.**
5. **You are going to die.**

His point is that these sound like bad news but function as good news. They puncture the ego's four illusions: that life should be easy, that I am the center, that I am in charge, and that I will essentially live forever. A man who genuinely absorbs the five is set free rather than crushed, because he stops spending his energy defending a self that was never the point. And modern messaging, he says, tells young men the exact opposite of all five, which leaves them perpetually adolescent: either passive and avoidant, or grasping and controlling.

The surrounding argument fills out the rest of the cliff notes: Initiation must come from elders, not peers. **Boys cannot initiate boys; older men have to do the work of leading younger men** across the threshold, and a culture that has no functioning elders cannot make men. The setting matters too; Rohr stresses the "container," a bounded ritual space and time set apart from ordinary life, because transformation needs a held space.

The wound is the doorway. Rohr leans on the idea that a man's necessary suffering, his "sacred wound," is not an obstacle to growth but the very place growth happens. Initiation traditionally took men down into limitation, grief, and powerlessness before it brought them back up, descent before ascent. He is sharply critical of a religion that tries to give men ascent without descent, success without the cross.

First half and second half of life. This thread, which he later expanded into *Falling Upward* (2011), distinguishes the first half (building the ego, identity, achievement, the "container") from the second half (letting much of that go for something deeper). Initiation is what hands a man the key from the first to the second. Without it, men keep trying to win a game that no longer matters.

He reads Scripture and Jesus through this lens, treating the gospel as the deepest initiation pattern: losing your life to find it, the grain of wheat that must fall and die, the cross before the resurrection.



Three Cultures (Text vs. Tradition)

Jewish: The bar mitzvah ceremony as we know it, the boy called to read Torah and the celebration, is medieval, roughly thirteenth to fifteenth century. The age-13 obligation appears earlier in rabbinic literature (Pirkei Avot 5:21), but the Bible itself prescribes no coming-of-age rite at all. What Scripture gives is a threshold of responsibility at twenty: counted in the census, liable for military service and the temple tax (Numbers 1:3; Exodus 30:14). Luke 2:42-52, Jesus at twelve in the temple, is often called a bar-mitzvah moment, but that reads a later ceremony backward; better to call it the first recorded glimpse of him stepping into his Father's house and his Father's business. The honest point preaches: the instinct to mark the transition is ancient and good, but the formal ceremony is tradition layered on top, and the modern church has neither the ceremony nor the instinct.

Roman: A freeborn boy wore the *toga praetexta* (purple-bordered) and a *bullā*, a protective amulet, through childhood. At roughly fourteen to sixteen, often at the Liberalia festival in March, he laid the bulla and the child's toga before the household gods, put on the plain white *toga virilis* ("toga of manhood"), and was led to the Forum and enrolled as a citizen. A public, dated, visible threshold. Paul's readers knew exactly what putting off the old garment and putting on the new one meant (Colossians 3; Ephesians 4 trade on that image).

Native American: Better framed as hundreds of distinct nations than one practice. The common shape still matches van Gennep: separation from the camp, a solitary ordeal often involving fasting and endurance (the Plains vision quest, *han̄bléčeya*, "crying for a vision," is the most cited), and a guided return through an elder who interprets what happened.

Hispanic (an honest note). The strong surviving rite in Latino culture is female: the quinceañera at fifteen. A male equivalent never settled in the same way, which reinforces the thesis rather than undercutting it. Even cultures that still mark the passage often mark it only for the daughters, and the **sons are left to improvise.**