



A HEROIC RITE OF PASSAGE
FOR JR. HIGH BOYS

Created by
Pastor Tim Wright and Dr. Michael Gurian

INFORMATION MANUAL

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FOLLOWING JESUS:

A Heroic Rite of Passage for Jr. High Boys



INTRODUCTION: A HERO'S DREAM

Every boy dreams of being a hero. Whether he's pretending to be Batman, Superman, or Spider-Man, or he's dreaming of being a soldier or a world-heavyweight championship wrestler, or any kind of significant leader, every boy has the DNA of a hero wired into him by his Creator. Every boy dreams of growing up to be a Heroic Man.

Jesus speaks to that sacred call by inviting boys to follow him; to follow him from boyhood into manhood, from princes to kings. Jesus accomplishes this goal by calling out of boys the image of God they were created to be; by shaping them into the sacred men they are created to become; and by empowering and sending them out to live a heroic life of grace, compassion, honor, sacrifice, and passion in service of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In other words, Jesus invites boys to be his disciples that he might lead them into Heroic Manhood.

The challenge for us today is that we no longer have those significant rites-of-passage our ancestors found so important in leading boys to Christian manhood. As a result, far too many boys drift from boyhood into adulthood, trying to figure out manhood on their own. And far too many of them, missing the input of other Christian men in their adolescence, end up confused about what it means to be a man and what it looks like to live a good life.

Following Jesus: A Heroic Rite of Passage for Junior High Boys is a tool for boys, parents, and mentors that can help boys learn what it means to follow Jesus into Heroic Manhood. During the Quest, a boy will be mentored by a team of people—his family, his church, and a small group of men whom he respects. The members of this team, particularly the men, will share their life-lessons with the boy, lessons regarding what it means to be a man, and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This team will pray with the boy, hang out with him, play games with him, listen to him, challenge him, and help him grow up. In doing this, men will be engaging him in a Discipleship model Jesus used with his followers. Specifically, during this *Quest*, a boy will learn some of the qualities of heroic living as he moves into manhood, so that he can live in the power and grace of Jesus.

THE NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT BOYS

People who study boys suggest that adolescence is one of the toughest times in a male's life. Some of the toughest of those tough years are ages 12-14, a daunting, exciting, exhilarating, and scary time of early transition from boyhood into manhood. As Michael Gurian writes in *A Fine Young Man*, this is an age of transformation:

“It’s fair to say that by nine or ten a boy’s brain is beginning to look forward and deeply into what a man is; by thirteen or fourteen, on average, his body is joining the brain in making the change.”

During this time of transformation, boys need men who will talk with them openly and honestly about the changes they are going through mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and relationally. An adolescent boy adores his mom and needs her deeply, but he now needs men in ways he can barely express. He needs dad and other men to guide him in answering four primary questions:

- *Who am I?*
- *When will I be independent?*
- *What is right or wrong behavior for me?*
- *What is love, and how do I do it well?*

Through the mentoring of our adolescent boys, we can help our sons answer those questions. We can offer them safe, positive guidance as they move through these exciting, fragile, confusing years. This is not only a practical task, it is a deeply spiritual one: the task of crafting and shaping boys into good and successful men. As Michael Gurian heard from a lawyer in southern Turkey, we want to “*craft our boys into men... because the last thing we want is for men to carry empty souls in their big bodies.*” (The Purpose of Boys, p. 8)

A BOY’S QUEST FOR MANHOOD

As your son begins to move all too quickly into manhood, you will start noticing several things about him:

- His voice will begin to deepen.
- His complexion will change.
- He will begin to develop a more muscular physique.
- He may begin to withdraw from you and spend more time with friends or hide out alone in his cave. The openness and perhaps even hugs and kisses may diminish.
- You may see mood swings in him ranging from giddiness to anger to seeming depression -- all in the span of 30 seconds!
- You may also be surprised by an out of the blue “I love you” or hug.
- At times you may wonder who this stranger is living in your house.
- At other times you may stop and give thanks for such a remarkable boy.

New brain science now offers us some insights into these and other behaviors (see Michael Gurian’s book, *The Wonder of Boys*). Chief among these new insights is the shaping power of *testosterone* in the life of boys.

As Michael points out in *The Wonder of Boys*:

- *Testosterone is the defining agent of whether a fetus will be male or female.* We all start out as females. Testosterone makes the male male.
- *Testosterone is an aggression and physical risk taking hormone.* Aggression and action and risk taking are hard wired into our boys. Aggression is not violence. Violence is taught. Aggression is hard-wired, and it is healthy if

directed toward the good and right.

- *Testosterone expresses itself in the need to move and do things.*
It's hard for boys to sit still because of testosterone. Boys learn better by doing. They bond with others quite a bit of the time by doing things and through activities.
- *Because of testosterone boys on average will.*
 - Turn toys into guns and swords more often than girls
 - Hit more
 - Try to one up more
 - Tend to be less in tune to the pain of others
 - Generally be more competitive
 - Seek rough and tumble play
- *Testosterone-driven boys will tend to seek independence earlier than girls.*
But only when they feel safe in mom's/dad's love.
- *As he moves into puberty he may have 5 - 7 surges of this action-oriented hormone each day.* Imagine that kind of energy flowing through him that often each day!
- *He will be quicker to act physically in reaction to external stimulation than girls might.*
- *He may tend to move to problem solving even in the face of emotionally complex experiences.*
- *He will often look for activities that will help him release the build-up of testosterone such as playing sports or focusing energy on a specific task.*

Our ancestors, including our biblical ancestors, may not have known about testosterone. But they knew about what it did to boys. And they knew intuitively, as have many tribal cultures throughout history, that boys need men to mentor them during adolescence -- men who will help these testosterone charged boys harness their aggression and energy for good, noble, honorable purposes. If left without guidance, these boys could too easily end up using their energy for selfish, destructive purposes.

Unlike girls who have a monthly built-in rite of passage reminding them of impending adulthood and the responsibilities it calls for, boys have no such rite of passage. Boys have no nature-based reminder of impending adulthood calling them up into noble manhood.

Intuiting the need to guide boys into manhood, cultures around the world and throughout history created rites-of-passages for boys. The purpose of these rites of passage was to help the boys turn:

- *their aggression toward service to the community*
- *their competitive nature toward compassion*
- *their high risk urges toward a meaningful purpose in life*

A rite of passage is a structured experience that moves the boy through the transition from boyhood to manhood. It involves mentoring and challenging tasks to help the boy discover what it means to be a good man. It gives a boy the chance to slow down as he grows up in order for the tribe/community and family to instill in him healthy morals and belief systems that will lead him into manhood. A rite of passage empowers parents and elders to raise their sons into noble men. Many of the great Quest stories throughout history are really rites of passage stories, stories of boys growing into men.

So, for instance, many Native American tribes put boys through many years of rites of passage. In Jewish cultures, Jewish boys were put through rigorous study and performance experiences. Similarly, among the Greeks and Byzantines, boys were required to perform spiritual tasks for an extended period of time in order to become Christian adults.

Today, with a few exceptions, our 21st Century culture has all but abandoned this important aspect of adolescence. So our boys, looking for a meaningful vision of manhood, look for guidance in other places, mainly their friends and media. Media, in particular, paints a picture of “manhood” based on consumerism, gratification, “self” at all costs, and a lack of responsibility. As a result, all too often boys end up lost in terms of a defining vision of what it means to be a man which leads to what some experts are now calling a crisis of “permanent adolescence” -- boys in men’s bodies.

Following Jesus: A Heroic Rite of Passage for Junior High Boys offers parents a strategic opportunity to guide their son into heroic manhood. This rite of passage experience invites boys into an intensive quest with their dads and two other men to discover what it means to follow Jesus into good, noble, generous manhood. It provides dads, in particular, the chance to pour masculine energy into their sons -- to pour substance into their souls.

Imagine, dad, the opportunity to spend strategic, intentional time with your son talking about what it looks like and means to be a man! This will be a life-changing experience for both of you, and it’s a moment in time that will never come again.

TWO MODELS OF FOLLOWING JESUS

A Heroic Rite of Passage for Jr. High Boys and A Journey of Wisdom for Girls

Because boys and girls today are so vastly socialized by media and their own peers toward extreme male and female behavior, both gender groups need guidance toward maturity, morality, protective and empowering intimacy, responsibility, service, compassion, success, purpose, higher callings, and discipleship. Thus, *Following Jesus: A Heroic Rite of Passage for Jr. High Boys* has a counterpart for girls: *Following Jesus: A Journey of Wisdom for Girls*. While both are based on the same principles, each program is geared to the unique differences between boys and girls.

The HEROIC Model: A Synopsis

Through the *HEROIC QUEST* boys are invited to become fully:

Honorable

Enterprising

Responsible

Original

Intimate

Creative

The Quest asks each boy, his family, and his mentoring team to focus on each of these over a set period of time—in deep, life-altering, and also, very fun ways. Jesus embodied all of these:

He was **honorable**: a moral boy who became a man of conscience and duty.

He was **enterprising**: a busy, industrious boy who became a man who got things done.

He was **responsible**: a boy who cared about what others needed and became a man of service.

He was **original**: a boy who was moral, busy, caring, but in being these things did not lose himself or enslave himself when he became a man. Instead, he expressed his own unique gifts throughout his life.

He knew how to be **intimate**: a boy who learned how to love, then became a man who could love others with dignity, affection, and self-sacrifice.

He was **creative**: a boy who dreamt big dreams and pursued his dreams in concert with his natural abilities and his calling from God.

THE HEROIC RITE OF PASSAGE

Overview of Practical Details

The *Following Jesus Rite of Passage* makes these HEROIC values personal. This Rite of Passage Quest is designed to give boys 7th to 9th grade opportunities to grow into these heroic ideals through mentoring and rites-of-passage over a concentrated period of time.

The launching point for the Quest is the *Introduction to the Quest*:

Toward the end of the boy's sixth, seventh, or eighth grade year (April or May) parents and the boy will meet with the Rite of Passage leader for an introduction to the Heroic Rite of Passage experience. At that time each boy will be asked to select three adult men (one of whom will be his dad or another significant man in the boy's life) who will commit to joining the boy in the Quest. They will support and guide him in exploring who he is as he grows into Christian manhood. The Quest experience will provide a Christian context for the questions adolescent boys ask themselves at this time.

The Quest itself consists of several experiences:

7 Quest Gatherings:

All of the boys and their mentors will meet 7 times with the Rite of Passage leader for an interactive look at the Heroic Topic for that gathering. This gathering will last about 90 minutes. The *Quest Gathering* lays the Biblical/Spiritual foundation for the topic.

6 Quest Fellowships:

Each boy will meet with his mentors 6 times to discuss the Heroic Topic introduced in the *Quest Gathering*. Each *Fellowship* can include a fun activity and will be guided by questions provided by the *Quest* materials. The *Fellowship* will last 90 minutes.

1 Jesus Project Presentation Gathering:

Each boy will work on a Jesus project and will present his project before the other boys and their mentors and before family and friends invited to the event. The boy will also read a passage from the Gospel of Mark that he has chosen.

1 Service Project Experience:

The boys and their mentors will participate in one mission experience during the *Quest*.

1 Quest Retreat:

Near the end of the *Quest*, each boy and his mentors will create and enjoy a two day retreat. Each *Fellowship* will set up their own retreat with suggestions and a plan provided for discussion, activities, etc. (An outline of the retreat will be provided.) Or, the whole group can decide to do the retreat together. That will be determined early on in the *Quest*.

Heroic Tasks:

Each boy and all of the mentors will carry out various Heroic Tasks as a part of the *Quest*. One of those tasks will be the Jesus Project (more details will be provided the first day of the *Quest*). They will also read through the Gospel of Mark and answer a few questions on each chapter. They will create a *Heroic Action Plan* based on the HEROIC model. And they will work through a series of questions that will enable them to look back over their lives to see how they have lived out the HEROIC model so far.

The Quest Ceremony:

The final rite-of-passage for the boy will occur in two parts:

The Quest Church Ceremony: At the church celebration, the boy will stand before the congregation with his mentors. He will read his chosen passage from Mark. He will recite one of the HEROIC Codes. And he will be asked a question or two about his experience during the *Quest*. He will receive a gift from the congregation to mark the event.

The Quest Family Ceremony: This is the chance for the parents to invite family and friends to celebrate this significant rite-of-passage. This can be done through an open house, a BBQ, a meal out at a restaurant, etc. Some ideas are offered at the end of this manual.

THE HEROIC TASKS FOR EACH PARTICIPANT

Here are specific tasks each boy, mentor, and parent will focus on throughout the *Quest*:

HEROIC TASKS FOR THE BOY

You will participate in the following HEROIC Tasks:

- In collaboration with your mom and dad, choose two men to coach and mentor you along with your dad (or other significant male in your life).
- Attend all *Quest Gatherings* and *Quest Fellowships*; participate in one service project; attend the *Quest Retreat*; participate in the end-of-the-quest *Quest Ceremonies*.
- Read through the **Gospel of Mark**. A worksheet of questions for each chapter will be provided in the *Quest Manual*.
- Work through the questions provided in the *Quest Manual*.
- Provide to the Rite of Passage leader a *HEROIC Action Plan* for your life, written with the help of your mentors, listing practical ways in which you will live out each of the six HEROIC qualities.
- Read an assigned passage in worship at least once during the *Quest* before the *Quest Ceremony*.
- Create and present a *Jesus Project* (ideas will be suggested in the *Quest Manual*).

HEROIC TASKS FOR THE MENTORS

Mentoring a boy for a specific period of time is a great privilege and a sacred honor. It gives a man the chance to positively impact a boy's life for years to come.

The word "mentor" comes from Greek literature. Mentor was the loyal advisor of Odysseus, entrusted with the task of training Odysseus' son. A mentor is an influential supporter.

As a mentor, you will be that influential supporter. You will be that cheerleader, the one who encourages, listens to, hangs out with, draws out, and challenges the boy on this particular quest.

To help you on your own journey as a mentor in this program, tools will be provided throughout the year. These will help you fulfill your role with ease and direction. Meanwhile, your tasks will be to:

- Pray regularly for your boy.
- Do fun activities with the boy.

- Read Tim Wright's book, *Searching for Tom Sawyer: How Congregations and Parents Can Stop the Exodus of Boys from Church.*
- Attend the *7 Quest Gatherings* with the boy.
- Participate in the *6 Quest Fellowships* by helping to plan activities for the *Fellowship*, and through openly talking about your life with the boy, using the questions of heroic living that will be provided.
- Read through the **Gospel of Mark** along with the boy, and discuss the meaning of the Book as you see it, and as he sees it. Questions will be provided for you and the boy to answer.
- Participate in the *Service Project* with the boy.
- Help design and participate in the *Quest Retreat* that will be a culminating event of the discipleship quest. You will be provided with suggestions for ways to do the retreat.
- Work with the boy as he writes up his *Heroic Plan*. Talk with him, ask him questions, listen to him. When he gets stuck, try doing some sports with him, or take a walk...something active, to get the dialogue going.
- Attend the *Quest Ceremonies* to honor the boy, which will be the final event of this discipleship program.

HEROIC TASKS FOR THE PARENTS

You have given your son life, raised your son as best you can, and continue to love and guide him. Now you are entering a time in his life in which he is beginning to individuate—to become a young man. In these early adolescent years, your role in your son's life is expanding in some ways (for he needs you even more than before), and contracting in some ways (for now, he needs certain other adults in ways he may not have when he was a little boy).

As you continue your journey as the boy's parent, discipleship tools will be provided to you -- tools that can help you stay close to your son and also begin to help you let him go. Among the many jobs you already do as a parent, here are a few that will hopefully be fun and full of love:

- Pray regularly for your son.
- Continually encourage him throughout his *Quest* process.

- Take the time to ask him what he's learning and experiencing throughout the *Quest*.
- Hold him accountable for doing his Heroic Tasks on this quest.
- Read Tim Wright's book, *Searching for Tom Sawyer: How Parents and Congregations Can Stop the Exodus of Boys from Church*.
- Read through the **Gospel of Mark**, at the same pace as your son, and work on the questions together, if your son would like to do that with you.
- Collect letters/emails from grandparents, uncles, aunts, older siblings, and other adults who have an impact on your son, letters that focus on several different areas of your son's life. These letters will be read to your son by you or by the writer if possible, during the *Quest Family Ceremony*. These will serve as powerful affirmations for your son from the people who love him. You will want to collect these letters and put them in a folder or booklet for him to enjoy for years to come. As you will see, this letter is quite comprehensive so you'll want to get people started on it as soon as possible.
- Plan a *Quest Family Ceremony*. *This will probably follow the Quest Church Ceremony. You will want to buy some sort of gift for your son to mark the occasion, a gift that will remind him for years to come of the Quest and his calling to follow Jesus into Heroic Manhood. This is where the family letters will be read and where Dad will present his journal.*

A SPECIAL TASK FOR DAD - DAD'S JOURNAL

Dad, one of the significant tasks for you during the Quest will be to write a journal for your son. The purpose of this journal is to "bless" your son by offering, in your own handwriting, your thoughts on your son and life. You will present this journal to your son at his *Quest Family Celebration*. This will be a journal that your son will treasure for years to come.

