

Chris Bruno

# Man Maker Project

A Father's Guide  
to Initiating His  
Son to Manhood



# MAN MAKER PROJECT

## A FATHER'S GUIDE TO INITIATING HIS SON TO MANHOOD

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FOREWORD BY  
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# THE MAN MAKER PROJECT

## rites for the modern age

*If we don't initiate our boys,  
they will burn down the village to feel the heat.*

African Proverb

I talk with men all the time. It's what I do. My conversations have spanned a variety of topics and occurred in an even wider variety of locations—from the boardrooms of corporate America to back-alley cafes in Istanbul, from Skype calls to Afghanistan to the couch in my counseling office, from the backyard fire pit to high-country retreat centers tucked away in the Rocky Mountains. But none scare and thrill me more than the conversations I have with my own son, Aidan.

I spoke on the phone with him the other day. At least I *think* it was him. He's been visiting his grandparents for the past few weeks, and I barely recognize his increasingly deep voice. His vocabulary has taken a massive leap forward in the past year, and his humor and sarcasm have followed suit. About a month ago, his height surpassed

his mother's, and his physical strength now rivals my own. My boy is growing up. I am in awe.

Every day I am challenged with the ever-changing boundaries around his heart, mind, and soul. When he was a child, I could protect him from the atrocities of the world by restricting his access and exposure to darkness. Early bedtimes, iPod and television monitoring, video game limitations, and even the choosing of his friends<sup>1</sup> were all parenting tactics to protect and corral his heart. But now, as he shifts and grows and becomes, those same boundaries don't make sense, and I am forced to re-evaluate almost daily. He is slowly becoming a man—a force with whom I must now reckon.

Many boys in this world today have little guidance, if any, from their parents. More particularly, they have little leadership from their fathers and are often left to wander into manhood alone. Boys are increasingly left to meander through puberty and early adulthood, all with the hope that they will *somehow* figure it out on their own. But the truth is, they can't. They won't.

From the moment of Aidan's birth, I knew that it fell to me, his father, to guide and teach him how to be a godly man. Something in me switched on, and I woke up. A deep place in me recognized how truly difficult modern-day manhood is, and how ill-equipped I myself had been to face the realities of life, home, work, church, marriage, and ministry. Add to this the utterly ridiculous challenge of pursuing godliness in the modern world. It's practically impossible. If Aidan is to succeed, he needs *me* to show him the way.

Few fathers actively seek to make men out of their boys. And it's killing us. Now more than ever, unfinished men confront us at every turn. Yes, fathers teach their sons how to read, throw a ball, ride a bike, and even stick to a budget. We take them to church and correct their table manners. While worthwhile endeavors, these skills are secondary to the deeper need for boys to grow into men—true men—who will stand up for honor, dignity, and justice. Boys who do not receive intentional affirmation and instruction in these foundational aspects of manhood often spend their lives living selfishly, seeking

after their own gain, power, or reputation. They end up living lesser narratives, so far short of the epic tale God intended them to live. These boys grow into hollow men, and these men populate our neighborhoods, churches, and offices. While they may pursue “good” things, rarely do they become world-changers with a deep sense of purpose or impact.

As a counselor, I regularly work with men suffering from depression, anxiety, vocational concerns, addictions to alcohol or pornography, marital problems, fears, body image, and overall life confusion, to name a few. Yet, almost without fail, the moment I begin to poke around the stories of their fathers and their passages into manhood, their countenances change and their presenting problems fade into the distant background. The wounds that resulted from poor or insufficient fathering typically form the genesis of most other issues. In some way, they remain unfinished men.

I recognize this is not the case for everyone, and I most certainly do not have a cookie-cutter approach to therapy. I do have enough data, however, to warrant the question: where was dad?

Masculinity by osmosis is a farce. Not all males become men. It doesn’t just *happen*. Boys cannot enter manhood on their own. They may age into adult males, but they don’t become men. Every boy must be led. Boys are born. Men are made.

Committed to this idea, I set out to create a modern-day rites of passage process for my son. I planned to intentionally usher him into a deeper understanding of godly manhood. As a fallen man myself, I recognized that I would fail and wound him. Yet my hope was to somehow lessen the impact of my failures and paint a picture of manhood that exceeded what I could model for him. I wanted to erect a mental scaffolding of manhood by which he could ascend and discover his own unique calling as a man. I knew the task fell to me to father him as best I could, and I wholeheartedly accepted the challenge.

As a minister to men, I spoke with men from all milieus of life,

asking them for their stories and experiences of initiation and manhood. I spent months praying for insight and seeking godly counsel from older, wiser men. My bookshelf swelled with both secular and Christian titles from the past several generations of fore-runners who have attempted to address this issue for men.

The result is the Man Maker Project, a yearlong initiation process facilitated by the father for his son. While a few other Christian authors have offered their own methodology and insight, little has been written about rites of passage since the 1990s. As a result, I felt compelled to expand and modify the work that has come before.

Throughout this process, as I have spoken with men around the world about the Man Maker Project, their eyes have lit up as they said, “I want to do that too! Can you help me with my son? I’ve wanted to do *something* with him, but I just don’t know *what*.” Even mothers who have heard of the Man Maker Project have asked me to help. They recognize in their sons the deep hunger for fathering, and tears betray their desperation as they see their husbands lying down on the job. It is to those hungry parents that I humbly offer this work.

As a father reading this book, you are likely committed to the idea that your son needs you to lead him into manhood. God intends every boy to enter the world equipped with a father who is committed to showing him how to be a man. For your son, you are that man. Regardless of your own past, good or bad, fathered or unfathered, finished or unfinished, God gave you a son, and designed and called you to father him. I commend you for taking this step forward on his behalf. There is no greater legacy a father can give his son than a sure-footed foundation of true, godly masculinity. Generations later, boys and girls, husbands and wives, and even all of society will feel the effects of your bold move now.

You will find a major focus of this process also involves *your* heart and *your* story. I believe that your son’s initiation into manhood also requires you to reflect and review your own narrative. Your son was

born into an already-occurring story—yours—and for him to know himself, he will need you to know yourself. You can only take your son as far as you yourself have gone. Therefore, throughout this book, I encourage you to investigate the epic tale God is telling in *you* as you come alongside your son and help him discover his.

The reality is, we cannot do this alone. I encourage you to find a small brotherhood of men who share your desire to make men out of their boys. Read through this material together. Plot, plan, and pray with one another. Allow other men to sharpen you and be sharpened by you as God leads you forward in your intentional fathering. I have provided discussion questions at the end of each chapter as springboards to further conversation with other men. You can use these for personal reflection, but I encourage you to engage with other fathers, fully bringing yourself, your stories, your glories, and your fears to the table. You won't believe what results.

## THE MAN MAKER PROJECT

I have laid out this book in four parts:

**PART I: The Question and the Call** describes the necessary background and need for modern-day rites of passage. In this section, I address the deeply hardwired question in the heart of every boy: *Am I a man?* I seek to create the context for how fathers, through an intentional rites of passage process, are called by God to respond.

**Part II: The Atmosphere** addresses the four atmospheric conditions I believe are necessary for a boy's passage into manhood. These include: *intention by the father; removal from the feminine; risk, pain, and danger; and fatherly blessing*. As you consider walking your son through his initiation, these four elements are crucial.

**Part III: Restorative Manhood** lays the foundation for godly manhood. If we are to initiate our boys into masculinity as God intended, we need to provide them specific categories of what that actually means. The world teaches our boys that "true manhood" involves a heightened sexuality, passivity, and machismo or violence.

I have taken the long list of characteristics of a godly man and reduced it down to what I consider are six foundational qualities I want to bestow upon my son. These six are: *courage, integrity, excellent action, kingdom focus, protective leadership, and purity.*

Many authors in the modern-day men's movement represent manhood too narrowly. Instead of an archetype of manhood, I focus on six primary qualities of manhood, asking fathers to consider how these characteristics apply to them and their sons uniquely in their settings and according to their interests, while still providing the mental file folders for God's intent for men.

**Part IV: The Man Maker Project** describes the practical process of creating a yearlong rite of passage. With a small group of other men, I designed a multi-stage process that spans the course of a year, culminating in an "examination" and ceremony. I provide specific plans and incorporate the six manhood qualities with sample questions, biblical stories, movies to watch, and conversations to have. I also describe the key elements of the final blessing and offer insights into how you can take my skeleton and customize it to your own unique story, situation, and son.

I conclude by addressing the need to return the new man to society, with new expectations and responsibilities. I also discuss the shift in relationship between the young man and his mother. Just as a baseball player or golfer knows the extreme value of following through on the swing for the ball to achieve its aim, so too must a father carry his son all the way through the initiation process to land him fully into manhood.

*The Man Maker Project 101: A Father's Field Guide to Initiating His Son* is also available as a supplement to this book. In it, you will find a step-by-step guide to help you plan and execute a yearlong rite of passage for your son. Worksheets, guiding questions, and supplemental material map out how to make the Man Maker Project your own. In addition, the field guide challenges you to consider your own life and

story, asking you to *father yourself while you father your son*. This is available as a free digital download from [restorationproject.net](http://restorationproject.net).

Ultimately, regardless of how you go about this process, my desire is that you will boldly and unequivocally step into your God-given role as the father to your son. There is no one else to lead your son into God's intended manhood. In the end, we must all draw our masculinity from Christ, our only hope."