

INITIATE

A **WARRIOR'S** GUIDE TO BECOMING A MAN

WRITTEN BY **DAVID HEARN**

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MAN

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The boy was left behind somewhere between Lejeune and Fallujah. He had a good childhood, tough, for sure, but good. His mom tried hard to keep him and his brother off of the streets and on the honor roll. But the boy felt weak, had few friends, and still looked for someone to teach him about life.

That boy changed when he met a man in the barracks. To the boy, the man addressed only as "Drill Sergeant" was God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost all wrapped into one loud ball of fury. He learned from that Drill Sergeant how to stay sharp, be disciplined, keep his nose and his rifle clean, and how to become strong.

But that's not really where the boy died, though it was the beginning of the death, for sure. The boy met others that were like him; at first they banded together to fight the common foe, the Drill Sergeant. But then, the boys together began to die. They died a little when they learned how to dress each others' wounds. They died a little more when they began to understand they were fighting to protect each other, their mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers.

The boys died soon after the sweat and tears began to be mixed with real blood. That happened in the dust, far from home, scared, but still running towards the explosions and gunfire, protecting their brothers-in-arms and their way of life.

The men that remained were more honest, more ready to serve, and stronger physically, mentally, and spiritually... they knew there had to be a God up there somewhere.

The second guy had it easier. His parents had enough money to buy him the good shoulder pads when he started playing JV, then Varsity football in high school. The teachers loved him, he had nice clothes, the best video game systems, and was a hit at parties. His parents didn't care if he snuck some beer from the fridge before he went to his buddy's house.

His parents also got him a nice car to drive to college upstate. School was pricey but the guy was able to get some sweet loans that he didn't have to worry about for years. He met some really cool guys that invited him to their fraternity where his initiation involved cricket bats, copious amounts of alcohol, and a hazy early morning with a girl.

After college, he found a job with his new degree, but his days still looked the same: 9-5 work, happy hour at the pub, then hang out with the guys either playing PlayStation, intramural softball, or taking the girls out to dinner.

Maybe the guy wanted more out of life, but he really couldn't see himself getting married. He used to think he wanted a wife and kids, but he just had it so good now. He could travel when he wanted, no woman would tell him to shut off the PlayStation, and anyway, committing to a relationship meant too much sacrifice, both monetarily and time-wise.

With his prestigious job, nice house and fast car, he was the envy of the other guys. He was happy where he was; life wasn't perfect, and he sensed something was missing, but still, he thought of himself as a modern, hip guy that really had a bright future.

The third guy has a unique story of his own, but we'll meet him later...

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INTRODUCTION

Initiate: A Warrior's Guide to Manhood

There's something missing in the lives of males these days. An initiation. This gaping hole in the middle of a man's heart is a byproduct of our modern culture: the failure or absence of fathers, false initiations (like video games, high school cliques, and fraternities) and the convenience found in hiding behind technology. Universities don't initiate and sports teams are only a shadow of what true initiation can accomplish. Some gap years and mission trips are a start, but boys need something extreme, something hard, to mark them and their passage to manhood.

Historically, initiation has involved a specific event, a so-called "rite of initiation." While I believe a single culminating, symbolic event is essential, I do not believe it is the most important aspect of initiation. Most importantly, fathers must foster a lifestyle of initiation where they are continuously teaching and training their sons.

Rohr's Five Promises of Male Initiation

In *Adam's Return*, Richard Rohr describes what he calls "The Five Promises of Male Initiation." I've used his broad outline to act as a starting point for my descriptions of the steps needed in modern-day initiations:

Strength Through Struggle
Becoming Others-Centered
Giving It All Away
Relinquishing Authority
Facing Death & Overcoming

Before We Start - The Rules

A note before I begin: The key to initiation is love. We do not initiate to punish misbehaving sons. Let me repeat that; initiation is not a punishment, nor is it not a rehabilitative boot camp. It is a childhood of unconditional love and intentional discipline that provides our sons an entrance into manhood.

In the case of an adult who has missed out on a childhood initiation, the background relationship may not be as extensive, but it is no less important. John Maxwell wrote, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." You must first lay a foundation of care and love before leading someone through an initiation. Once that is accomplished, the precepts in this eBook can be followed.

While this book focuses on fathers initiating sons, the concepts behind initiation (serving, respect, learning, honoring, discipline) are obviously equally important for daughters. I have focused on sons because that is where I have seen the greatest need. I intend to teach my daughters these same concepts, albeit in a different way.

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STRENGTH

THROUGH STRUGGLE

Unfortunately, boys have been coddled and protected too much by well-meaning parents, or single mothers trying to fill the gap of a father. This type of upbringing produces boys who have no idea what hard work really is, who grow up with a “self-service, drive-thru, get what you want, I will always have a safety net” mentality.

How do they come to grips with the fact that life is hard? First, boys must realize that life is not fair. Good guys get screwed, and bad guys get rich. Good people get sick. You can't always get what you want. The sooner children learn this the better.

Pain isn't the problem. Not working through pain is the problem.

Boys must face pain and learn how to deal with it. They must go through hardship, physical and mental, and experience what it's like to come out on the other side. They need to know that pain exists, that they will not be able to avoid it, and their parents or guardians can't get them out of it. They need to be able to process the pain and know that there are other men that have gone through it and survived.

I am not talking about hurting your son on purpose - this is a ridiculous thought and a poor way to initiate. But it won't take much effort to find things that we have been shielding him from as a boy that now he can mentally handle as a man. For instance: the death of a loved one, the physical effort of outdoor chores, or the realities of budgeting his allowance.

Initiation Should Leave A Mark.

There needs to be a father, or a father figure, who is there to encourage and support the boy (but not do it for them!), to sympathize with him when the task is completed, to offer a “Job

well done," and to debrief the struggle and assure the boy that even though the pain comes, it can be overcome.

A true initiation needs to include a "Strength Through Struggle" phase, typically involving a task that is physically and mentally demanding. It doesn't have to be excruciating or scarring (but it can be...), just hard enough to cause exhaustion and the realization that sometimes, some tasks are just plain tough.

Climb a mountain, carry a heavy load, travel solo, or hunt an animal. Maybe it's boot camp, and going to war. Maybe it's serving in a third world country with nothing more than a backpack. There is a need for an event, a line in the sand that must be crossed. That's why many cultures include a scar, or tattoo, that the man will always remember as a memorial of the event.

Warrior, Not War-Like

There is something inside men that is built for the fight. As boys, we build guns from everything, want to wrestle, and like the competition and sweat of sports. As fathers, we can recognize and encourage that without them becoming war-like.

We must allow our sons to display "righteous anger" but teach them to reject rage. In the former, we are fighting for a cause that is worth defending. With the latter, our aggression takes over and we fight simply from fear or anger. We must not swing so far to political correctness that we suppress our boys' "warrior instincts."

INITIATE: Strength Through Struggle

- 1.** Complete a physical task.
 - a.** It must be physically demanding.
 - b.** It must be completed. If the task isn't finished, start over again, either with a modified task or wait until the boy is ready.

- c.** Examples: Hike up a mountain. Build a stone wall. Build a simple cabin, lean-to, or tree house. Run a race. Plow a field.
- 2.** Afterwards, take time for silence and reflection.
 - a.** The father, or father figure must guide this time and tell the boy to reflect on his past endeavor, what was hard about it, then release it to God.
- 3.** End with a “debrief”: the father, or father figure leads this.
 - a.** Walk through the challenges of the boy’s childhood.
 - b.** Ask the boy about the task: how hard was it? (maybe you need to dial up or dial down the rest of the initiation) Did he finally complete it? How did that make him feel?
 - c.** Recognize the “marks” of the task: a bruise, a scrape, a cut. (Do not cause marks intentionally!)
 - d.** If applicable, the father, or father figure may tell a story of his own initiation and congratulate the boy on succeeding at the task.

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BECOMING

OTHERS-CENTERED

"All I know is that there is a God, and I'm not him." - Author Unknown

Every Mommy wants her little Timmy to feel good about himself, so why shouldn't he get a trophy?! But this mentality has become ingrained in children today; "I deserve a trophy, I played just as hard" ... "Why does Sally get a trophy and not me?" ... When our children realize that life is painful, life isn't fair, they begin to get a realistic worldview that reminds them they are not the center of the universe. Shocker.

As a parent, I want the best for my kids. But I have to weigh that against the fact that I must teach them this concept. As parents we can't give our kids everything they want.

God Doesn't Owe You Anything

A prominent Christian pastor and author once wrote about an experience he claimed was an example of "the favor of God." To me, it sounded instead like a lesson on how not to act like a Christ-follower:

[The author] arrived at the ticket counter with an expensive television camera that he didn't want to check into the baggage hold on a flight to India. The counter clerk insisted that the airline's policy strictly forbid him from it carrying on. The author persisted and asked if he could talk to a supervisor. Finally, a pilot walked up and offered to stow the camera behind the cockpit.

"The woman behind the counter glared at me and shook her head, clearly aggravated," he writes. "I just smiled and said, 'Sorry, ma'am; it's the favor of God.'"

Now to me, this story just smacks of entitlement, not favor. It sounds like the pilot who overheard this exchange merely stepped in to de-escalate a brewing storm. This sounds like someone who has started believing in his own celebrity, not someone who is a humble servant.

For boys about to become men, they have to realize something: We Must Become Others-Centered.

How Do We Teach This Today? By Serving.

Adulthood is a transition from a me-centered life to an others-centered life. The way to instill an others-centered life into children, into boys becoming men, is to teach them to serve. We have to realign our sons' brains to think of others first.

We've often heard the old adage, "Women and children first." On the 15th of April, 1912, this saying was personified as the RMS Titanic struck an iceberg and began to sink. 1,352 men died that night, with honor, so that their children and wives could live. The men literally sacrificed their lives so that others might live. That is the kind of serving that we must instill in our boys.

So we teach our children to share their toys, to give instead of hoard presents at Christmas, and to help others in need. As parents, leaders, and mentors we must model servanthood daily in everything we do.

INITIATE: Becoming Others-Centered

- 1.** An initiation must include an element of serving others.
 - a.** If the initiation is a physical journey or task, integrate an activity of physically carrying others, like a fireman's carry up a mountain.
 - b.** If the initiation is a task to complete, show your son how to make it beneficial to others:
 - Bring him along to lend a hand on a church workday. Allow him to work beside you, see you serving, getting dirty, and working alongside others.
 - Organizations like Habitat for Humanity provide opportunities that allow your son to come along, help, and watch you work and serve.

1. If the initiation is a service trip, make sure it's a working trip, not a sightseeing one.

2. If the first phase of initiation was a solo task, this service task should be a cooperative one. Make sure your son is integrated into a team, learning how to work and make decisions with others.

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GIVING

IT ALL AWAY

The next step in initiation, after putting boys through an experience that makes them stronger through facing pain, after teaching them to become others-centered, is to open their eyes wider to the world around them. As men, we must educate ourselves to become aware of the needs of our world; we can no longer remain ignorant.

We, in the western world, have no frame of reference for the conditions that exist in the developing world. For the most part, we live sheltered lives that give our children the unfortunate ability to grow up in ignorance of the pressing needs of those around us. Secondly, to truly transition into adulthood, we must pass through an experience where we are living for someone else, usually in the form of a spouse; for younger "initiates," it can be in the form of an orphan, the homeless, or the poor.

Staggering Statistics

We may not even realize the scope of the following facts, but we need to make sure that our children know they are a reality:

- 1 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water.
- The average American uses 400-600 liters of water/day (cleaning, cooking, drinking)
(UNICEF, Dec 2007, p.40; Fit for Children)
- Every 7 seconds a child under 5 dies of hunger (UNICEF, p.18)
- Americans throw away 14% of the food they purchase (Timothy W. Jones, 2004)
- 1 billion people live on less than \$1/day. (oecd.org)
- Americans spend more/year, than 1/2 of the world does on all goods. ('Affluenza')

- More than 50% of the world's population lives on less than \$2/day (World Bank, '07)
- The American teenager spends over \$70/week (Market Research Portal, Nov 12, '04)
- 90% of the world doesn't own a car.
- 1/3 of American families own 3 cars. ('08)
- 40% of the world lacks basic sanitation.
- 6 billion people have no electricity. (UNDP HDR, 07/2008, p44)
- 1 billion can not read or sign their name. (UNESCO, July '02)
- 100 million children are denied basic education. (UNICEF, Progress for Children, p12)

Are You Responsible for Something or Someone Else?

One of my mentors, Andrew Shearman, often states, "You're not really living unless you are living for someone else." There is a level of responsibility and self-discipline that comes when you realize that someone else depends on you for their very life. Maybe your someone is a wife, maybe a child, but for growing boys, this could mean sponsoring an orphan, anything to give them an opportunity to truly serve others.

Sacrifice and Continuity

The keys here are sacrifice and continuity, which will allow for growth of both responsibility and discipline. Don't add to your child's allowance so they can sponsor a child, but encourage them to give up a few ice cream cones per month. Make sure when they go to the homeless shelter or retirement home, they are engaging with the people there, not hanging out by the door. After serving, help them

stay in contact with the people they've helped, to see how their lives are impacted.

INITIATE: Giving It All Away

- 1.** This is a difficult concept to initiate, especially for younger boys. For boys 12-17, I recommend events such as:
 - a.** Sponsoring a child or orphan, or
 - b.** A visit to the inner city to help the homeless, or
 - c.** A trip to a care home to visit with the elderly, or
 - d.** A mission trip to serve and build in the third world.

This is another concept that must also be modeled. Make sure your son sees you living this concept out. He will see right through your facade if you tell him he must empathize and sacrifice for others, but your own life is wasteful and selfish.

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RELINQUISHING

YOUR AUTHORITY

Our entire lives are spent subordinate to someone; it could be a parent, teacher, boss, or pastor. Children need to learn discipline and to respect the authority figures in their lives. Too often nowadays, parental fear of “not-making-the-same-mistakes-of-my-parents” turns into a misshapen, upside-down relationship with their children. We are doing our children a disservice when we don’t teach them respect for authority.

Our children need to have proper relationships with parents and authority figures that emphasize listening, learning, and honoring.

We Can’t Be Our Kids’ Friends

I believe this idea is the main cause of many of our children’s inability to adjust to an unfair, hard world where they are not the center of the universe. Parents think that they have to be friends with their kids in order to be able to talk on their level and let them have an equal say around the house. This is driven partly by the parents’ insecurities and need for acceptance.

The relationship between parent and child was not created as a friendship. The unfortunate truth is that the concept of authority has been lost on the younger generations. We can have a good relationship with our children without making them our peers. They will still respect and love us when they are adults if we discipline them as children. I don’t mean harsh corporal punishment, but a balanced, loving discipline.

This type of discipline, coupled with your personal example of self-discipline, is how children will learn that they are not in control. Our children must learn that they are not our peers, and that they should listen more than they talk, especially when conversing with adults.

Stop Letting Your Kids Boss You Around.

The parents of John Walker Lindh, the child of privilege turned

Taliban terrorist, didn't put their foot down when he announced he was going to drop out of school, didn't interfere when he decided to become a Muslim, were actually proud of him for pursuing an alternative course. His mother said it was 'good for a child to find a passion.' They didn't object when he asked them to pay his way to Yemen, nor when his new circle of friends included gunmen. For as long as he could remember, his oh-so-progressive parents had said yes to his every whim, fancy, and passion. The only thing they insisted on was that nothing be insisted on.

Newsweek calls it "truly perplexing" that Walker, who "grew up in possibly the most liberal, tolerant place in America... was drawn to the most illiberal, intolerant sect in Islam."

There is nothing perplexing about it. He craved standards and discipline. Mom and Dad didn't offer any. The Taliban did.

Apprenticeships: Teach Your Kids Respect AND Plumbing

We've lost the concept of apprenticeships. In an apprenticeship, a skilled "master" takes a child, usually his own, under his wing to show him the tricks of the trade and how to build upon the skill of the teacher.

These days, a father takes his car to a mechanic, immediately calls a plumber because he's too busy at work, and uses a lighter (and copious amounts of lighter fluid) to light a campfire because it's faster. As fathers, we are losing the capacity to pass on essential abilities and skills to our sons.

The key is to bring our kids up in an atmosphere of learning, which includes values and morals along with practical skills. It's through this process that boys watch their fathers, where fathers earn respect, and where the bonds of the relationship are forged. Boys realize that they are valued, that they can contribute, and that their dads love them and want to pass on their knowledge.

Who Is Really Running This Show?

(And no, it's not you.)

Not only should sons be learning to respect and honor their fathers, but they need to show honor to God. Build into your child's initiation a time of reflection, of listening to God's voice, of learning from His Word, and of honoring Him through worship and prayer. A great place for this is out in "the wilderness" where your children can find some natural beauty, quietness, and time for prayer.

Probably the most critical part of initiation is to show your children that There Is A God and You're Not Him. Listening to, Learning from, and Honoring God are the greatest traits that you can teach and model for your children.

You won't regret it.

INITIATE: Relinquishing Authority

- 1.** Listen: Tell your son a story about authority from your childhood. Honesty is a plus. Make it a life lesson. A first kiss (was it too soon?), a first car (did you save up to buy it?), an adventure you took (did it scare you?).
- 2.** Learn: Following the life lesson taught in the Listen Phase, teach a skill. How to change the tire/windshield wipers/fluids/oil filter/entire engine, etc. of a car. How to start a fire from scratch. How to build a shelter. How to cook a four-course meal. Teach what you know, or learn a new skill together.
- 3.** Honor: Set aside a time to honor God in all you do. Recognize our smallness next to His awesomeness. Dedicate your life to a purpose larger than yourself!

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FACING DEATH

AND OVERCOMING

The final element necessary for a rite of initiation: a “death” to the boy, and an emergence of the man. There needs to be a revelation of the reality of life, through recognition of our human fragility and the need for a rebirth.

In tribal cultures, this passage is marked by pain: a burning, a circumcision, a scarring. The boy is meant to emerge from the pain, scarred yet healed.

Scars Are Okay

Men were not built to look pretty. This should be obvious (at least judging by what I look like in the mirror each morning). Men were made to be scarred, with rough hands, scratches, bumps, and yes, actual scars.

As parents, of course we don’t want to see our children hurt, but we can’t protect them from everything. Boys becoming men will tend to get scratches and cuts.

As future warriors and men willing to do hard work, we must realize that scars happen. They tell a story of experience and pain, but also of healing.

Get Healed, Then Get On With It

We can’t keep picking the scab, allowing old pains to fester. To break free from momma’s skirts and to be able to stand on their own, boys need to realize that pain happens. But then we move on.

A rebirth needs to happen. Sometimes that’s symbolized in a water baptism, other times by going into the wilderness and not returning until we’ve hunted and killed big game.

In any initiation process, a boy must realize that, while becoming a man, it’s okay to have a past, but not to dwell on it. Once the pain has healed, let it go. Move on with your life; enter into manhood with pride, independence and trust.

In the movie *The Kingdom of Heaven*, there is a scene where the dying father is passing on his title and inheritance to his son. After passing on the oath and the family signet ring, the father slaps his son hard across the face, saying,

“And that, is so you remember it”

INITIATE: Facing Death & Overcoming

1. The Dying Phase

a. Physical: Have the boy spend a night or two alone in the wild with nothing, maybe try out their new skills at fire making or shelter building. Maybe make them find their way out. (Be sure to adjust the level of difficulty to match the boy's maturity, skill, and confidence). The key is to find something that will stretch them to the breaking point, but not hurt them.

b. Symbolic: Maybe this is the right time for a symbolic gesture such as water baptism. Other cultures have different ceremonies that symbolize a son's transfer from his mother's skirt to his father's side as a warrior.

c. Relationships: Make a change in their rules & responsibilities that accompanies a higher stature as a man. Maybe a later curfew, additional yard responsibilities, or permission to go with Dad to “men's” activities.

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THE CHALLENGE

OF INITIATION

As the father of a young boy, I realize that the lessons I am teaching him now set the foundation for his development in the years to come. I am reminded daily of the importance and urgency of implementing these steps as I watch my son grow and learn.

And yet I see around me adult males who have yet to go through an initiation themselves, to truly enter manhood; they are still living a selfish existence.

So I want to conclude this eBook with a challenge.

Because, even though initiation is necessary and critical for our children to grow up as responsible and disciplined adults, I think the fact remains:

You Still Won't Do It.

It's too hard, it's too painful, it will take too much time and concerted effort, and maybe you think modern-day efforts at initiation are hokey. But I promise you the results will be worth the sweat and tears, and your children will thank you for it in the end.

Maybe you think I am generalizing and just trying to evoke a reaction. But I don't think I am. The unfortunate reality is that I have met boys and young men who have been deprived of an initiation experience in their life, and they are worse off for it.

A Challenge To Fathers

So, fathers, I recommend this:

Give your children everything they need. Do not give your children everything they want.

Take your son into the wilderness. Teach him how to make a fire. Teach him how to change a tire. Teach him how to treat a woman and

how to respect adults. Teach him to listen more than he speaks. Teach him that he is not the center of the universe. Teach him to fight for something that is worth fighting for.

A Challenge to "Guys"

If you see yourself in the category of missed initiation, I urge you to seek out a father; your biological father, a trusted mentor, or a spiritual father who will lead you through an initiation.

The goal here is to cross into manhood, to live a life with purpose, to bring life to others, and stop living a self-centered life. If you need someone to lead you through that process, yet feel that you have no one, [contact me](#).

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EPILOGUE

The third man grew up in a traditional culture where life was a true struggle. The food his family ate was either grown in their garden or purchased at an outdoor market. He learned early that if you

didn't work, you didn't eat. His life was regulated by an exhaustive list of regulations that seemed to govern everything, from what you wore, what you ate, even how you bathed. Discipline was simply part of his everyday life.

He apprenticed under his father, who was a skilled craftsman. His hands were scarred from rough lumber, his thumbnails black from getting hit with the hammer, and his back strong from helping his father deliver their wares to neighbors' homes. But he also exercised his brain and learned from the spiritual leaders around him. He memorized volumes of information, and used his time in his father's workshop to ponder life and purpose.

This boy did have a formal ceremony, a rite of passage, to mark his passage into manhood. But his initiation wasn't complete yet; he was determined to continue serving others, to give away what he had learned. He did this so much so that people began calling him "Teacher."

Even as he began to be revered as a leader, he knew he was under authority. He gave God the first place in his life and encouraged others to do the same. While others tried to tell him to buck authority and rebel against his government, he knew that the authorities were there for a reason.

Eventually, his life became more and more about serving others. Everything he had, he gave away. His authority, his influence and power, he distributed freely to others. But he knew the day would come for his time to face death.

The man who grew to be the most powerful man on earth, lived a life of learning, of service, of honor, and of respect. And the death that he faced was not a symbolic one, but a real death at the hands of those who were threatened by his message of love, of grace, and

of victory.

Just as He predicted, Jesus Christ faced death and overcame it, and is more than able to initiate each new generation of men. He gave His life as the ultimate sacrifice for us, and He continues to be an inspiration, challenging all of us to give our lives away as we live for Him.

Continue Your Journey of Authentic Manhood. Step Into the War Room



PURCHASE NOW

War Room:

A Combat Guide to Men's Ministry

is not only a vital resource for men who desperately long to be validated, but the in-your-face style in which it was written will be a welcome relief in a world full of “politically correct” essays that produce little change.

