

INTRODUCTION

"Once a Marine, always a Marine."

IF YOU ASK ANY MARINE, no matter the age, that soldier will say that once initiated into the Marines, he, or she, is always a Marine, whether on active duty, or back in civilian life.

I once asked several non-active duty Marines, "How long did it take, and when did it become real, that you are now a Marine?"

They all answered in unison, "Eight weeks." They all agreed that Basic Training was what made them Marines, and that they knew they would always be Marines.

Then I asked, "How long did it take, and when did it become real, that you are now a Man?"

Silence.

Not one knew when he had become a real man. They were all secure in their identity as Marines, but when it came down to the much more personal level of identity, their masculinity, there was silence.

Why is this the case? What are the young men and women of the Marines given in those early weeks of their careers that is missing from the early years of their lives? What makes them know, without a shadow of a doubt, who they are and where they belong at the end of those eight weeks?

The missing link between childhood and manhood in our culture seems to be, above all else, the lack of a formal rite of passage, a collective initiation—Basic Training. In nearly every profession, there is a period of training and finally a formal initiation, all facilitated by a seasoned veteran who has gone before. Medical students learn under experienced doctors and are given the title of "Doctor" by the seasoned physicians who have trained them. When graduates receive their diplomas from the hand of their professor, they are sure of their new identity—no longer students, but alumni. This passage, this initiation is so important because without a clear identity, confusion and doubt creeps in.

Rarely can a boy pinpoint the moment that he knows for sure that he is now a man. As a result, rarely does a man have a deep sense of his true identity later in life. He is uncertain that he really has what it takes to endure hardship, and to come through for those who are counting on him. He may look okay on the outside, but just under the surface is insecurity and doubt.

I firmly believe that the reason for the underlying fear, doubt, and insecurity that exists in most men is that we have no formal initiation into our identity as men. Rarely does a father or trusted father-figure initiate his son into manhood. I'm not talking about being a drill sergeant. I am advocating an intentional season of training for our sons.

At the heart of this book's message is the hope that this practice of initiation—of inviting our sons onward and forward into manhood—will no longer be a rarity. We are, and have been, at a crossroads in America. Now is the time to look at the ancient pathways as fathers, and ask where the good way is, to walk in it, and find rest for our souls (Jeremiah 6:16).

There is a way to train our sons and grandsons. This rite of passage is based on something very old, ancient, and long missing from our culture. We must deliberately lead our sons into true masculinity.

This can happen, one boy, one young man at a time. This can happen, one father, one granddad, one uncle at a time. This is happening in small pockets across our country, but again, it is still rare. Together, let's make it a movement. That is my prayer for us all.