“I Liked the Article About Modern-Day Knights”

I read the article “Raising a Modern-Day Knight” by Louis D. Whitworth. I would like to thank him and the others involved with the article. I am going to be turning 20 April 16 of this year. I know that I am not a teenager anymore but that did not make me a man. At least I do not feel like one. I do have Jesus in my heart. I was raised at a FBC understanding. Also I did not get a Father till 12. I would like to thank him again and the site. I will be looking at your site in the future. I pray that Mr. Whitworth will get this message of thanks.

Hi _____,

Happy Upcoming Birthday!

I will certainly make sure that Lou gets your message. He is no longer with Probe, but I will forward your note to him. Do yourself a favor and get a hold of the book he reviewed (*Raising a Modern-Day Knight* by Robert Lewis), or another truly exceptional book that we enthusiastically recommend to all our high school and college age guys who come to our conferences: *Tender Warrior* by Stu Weber. If you want to know how to grow into being a godly man, that’s the best book there is. Lots of men in their 30s and 40s have been greatly impacted by this book, and if you read it as you turn 20 you will be SET!

God bless you.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Knighthood and Biblical Manhood – A Christian Perspective on True Manliness

Lou Whitworth summarizes an inspiring book which lays out the characteristics of a godly man. The ceremonies and the code of conduct of knights are compared to a biblical perspective on Christian manhood. This model encourages us to live in Christ as examples of godly men.

A Vision for Manhood

In this essay we will be looking at an inspiring book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* in an effort to learn how we can motivate our sons to live lives of honor and nobility. This book, written by Robert Lewis, grew out his own experiences as he and some close friends struggled to lead their sons into balanced, biblical masculinity.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the disparate strands of manhood—fierceness and gentleness—can find healthy synthesis in the person of the knight and in the code of chivalry. Here these competing impulses—normally found in different individuals—find their union.(1)

Were one of these two bents given full rein, the balance required for authentic Christian manhood would be lost. Strength and power, without tenderness, for example, give us the brute. Tenderness and compassion without masculine firmness and aggressiveness produce a male without the fire to lead or inspire others.

Biblical examples of these two elements resident in one man

are numerous. Jesus Christ, our Lord, revealed both tough and tender aspects in His humanity. Once Jesus expressed a desire to gather the citizens of Jerusalem together as a hen gathers her young under her wings.(2) We know that Christ wept at least twice: once at the tomb of Lazarus(3) and again as He looked out over the city of Jerusalem and reflected on the fate of those who rejected His witness.(4) However, Jesus could also be very stern. Once He made a whip, ran off the money changers in the temple area, and turned over their tables.(5) And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, His mere glance knocked grown men to the ground.(6)

In Paul, we see the same blend of firmness and gentleness. He poured himself out tenderly nurturing his spiritual children,(7) but he endured more hardship than most soldiers(8) and didn't hesitate to castigate false teachers.(9)

In the Old Testament, we see David, who was a poet and singer, but also a warrior and king. He had the fierceness to kill Goliath, the giant, and the tenderness to provide for the needs of Jonathan's descendants after Jonathan was killed.

Keeping the right balance between our impulses toward power and aggression and the need to be gentle and tender is a challenge most men face. In his book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis says that Christian fathers can use knighthood as a symbol, an ideal, and a metaphor for guiding their sons into authentic manhood. In this way opposing drives can be harnessed and balanced.

Now, of course, everyone experiences difficulty balancing competing impulses, but it is specifically the violence by young males that is bringing our society to the verge of breakdown. Our young men need a vision for masculinity that challenges and inspires if our society is to be stable and healthy. In an age of great social, spiritual, and gender confusion, such as ours, there is a desperate need for clear

guidelines and models that can inspire young men and harness their aggression for constructive ends.

This is where the image of the knight comes in. Since the Middle Ages these men in iron have fired the imaginations of young men. Knighthood is attractive because of its code and its call to courage and honor. Young men are intrigued by testing themselves against various standards, and the code is inspiring because of its rigor and strictness.

The Need for Modern-Day Knights

In his enthusiastic foreword to Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* Stu Weber writes:

> *Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. If it's difficult for you and me as adult males to maintain our masculine balance in this gender-neutral' culture, imagine what it must be like for our sons, who are growing up in an increasingly feminized world.(10)*

We must supply our young men with healthy, noble visions of manhood, and the figure of the knight, in this regard, is without equal. In the knight we find a conception of manhood that can lift, inspire, and challenge our young men to new heights of achievement and nobility. One authority asserted: "Not all knights were great men, but all great men were knights."(11) According to Will Durant, chivalry and knighthood gave to the world one of the "major achievements of the human spirit."(12)

C. S. Lewis, in his essay, "The Necessity of Chivalry," agreed.(13) He wrote that the genius of the medieval ideal of the chivalrous knight was that it was a paradox. That is, it brought together two things which have no natural tendency to gravitate towards one another. It brought them together for that very reason. It taught humility and forbearance to the

great warrior because everyone knew by experience how much he usually needed that lesson. It demanded valour of the urbane and modest man because everyone knew that he was likely as not to be a milksop.(14)

In Malory's *Morte Darthur* a fellow knight salutes the deceased Lancelot saying: "Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest." This expresses the double requirement made on knights: sternness and meekness, not a compromise or blend of the two. Part of the attraction of the knight is this combination of valor and humility.

Someone once said history teaches us that, "When most men are soft, a few hard men will rule." For that reason we must do everything we can to build into our boys the virtues of strength and tenderness so they can be strong, solid family men and so society will be stable.

The lack of connection between fathers and sons in our culture, made worse by broken homes and the busyness of our lives, has left many young men with a masculine identity crisis. That's why the ideas in this book are so timely and important. Our sons are looking to their fathers for direction. Fathers are searching for real answers in their attempts to guide their sons into godly manhood. This book provides answers and guidelines for this search.

First, from the example of the knight, fathers have a way to point their sons to manhood with clear ideals: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause. Second, the pattern of advancement from page to knight provides fathers with a coherent process for guiding their sons to manhood. Third, numerous suggestions for ceremonies equip dads with a variety of means to celebrate and validate their sons' achievements.

The Knight and His Ideals

Now we will turn our attention to the knight and his ideals. In *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis suggests three major ideals for modern-day knights: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause.

A Vision for Manhood – The author states four manhood principles: Real men (1) reject passivity, (2) accept responsibility, (3) lead courageously, and (4) expect the greater reward. He suggests that though men have a natural inborn aggressiveness, they tend to become passive at home and avoid social responsibility. These principles, if followed, prevent passivity from becoming a significant problem.

A Code of Conduct – The code for modern-day knights comes from the pages of the Bible. Lewis lists 10 ideal characteristics appropriate for modern-day knights taken from the Scriptures: loyalty, kindness, humility, purity, servant- leadership, honesty, self-discipline, excellence, integrity, and perseverance. Modern-day knights must be trained in three important areas. First, the modern-day knight needs to understand that there must be a will to obey (God's will) if there is to be spiritual maturity. The young man must come to know that life is inherently moral and that there is a God who knows everything and who rewards good and punishes evil. He must know that absolute values exist and that the commandments of God are liberating, not confining. Lewis states "True satisfaction in life is directly proportionate to one's obedience to God. In this context, moral boundaries take on a whole new perspective: they become benefits, not burdens."

Second, the modern-day knight needs to understand that he has a work to do that is in keeping with his inner design. This work is not just his profession or trade, but refers to work in his home, church, and community. Life is certainly more than a job, and your son should hear this from you lest he get the mistaken perception that manhood is just one duty and

obligation after another.

A third realm of responsibility for the modern-day knight is a woman to love. The code of chivalry requires that all women be treated with respect and honor. Sons need to see and hear from their fathers the importance of caring for women in general and loving, leading, and honoring their wives in particular.

The knight in training should be taught the value of work, have summer jobs, do chores around the house, and study hard on his school work. The goal here is to establish patterns of industry and avoid sloth so that a solid work ethic is in place as he gets older.

A Transcendent Cause – Life is ultimately unsatisfying if it is lived solely for self. Jesus said if you give up your life you will find it, so if you live for a cause greater than yourself, you'll be happy and fulfilled. A transcendent cause is a cause that a person believes is truly heroic (a noble endeavor calling for bravery and sacrifice), timeless (has significance beyond the moment), and is supremely meaningful (not futile).

The only antidote to the futility of life is a transcendent cause and a vision for life that "integrates the end of life with the beginning," and connects time and eternity. Obviously becoming a Christian, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and living for Him are basic, irreplaceable elements for having a meaningful life.

A Knight and His Ceremonies

At this point, we turn to focus on the importance of ceremonies in the life of a young man. It is said that a knight remembers the occasion of his dubbing (i.e., his installment as a knight) as the finest day of his life. Such is the power of ceremony that it makes celebrated events unforgettable. Ceremonies are also invaluable markers that

state emphatically: “Something important has happened here!”

In much of the world, older men have instinctively seen the wisdom of providing for their sons markers of their journey to manhood. These markers have been in the form of periodic ceremonies or a significant, final ceremony. Following such events there is no doubt in the young man’s mind that he has reached the stage in his development celebrated in the ceremony. Later he can always look back on the ceremony and remember what it meant.

After the elaborate physical, mental, and religious disciplines endured and passed in relation to his dubbing ceremony, no medieval knight ever wondered, “Am I a knight?” Such matters had been settled forever by the power of ceremony in the presence of other men. This is what our sons need.

Our sons do not normally have such experiences. As Lewis writes, “One of the great tragedies of Western culture today is the absence of this type of ceremony. . . . I cannot even begin to describe the impact on a son’s soul when a key manhood moment in his life is forever enshrined and memorialized by a ceremony with other men.”(15)

The author suggests that there are natural stages in a young man’s life that lend themselves to celebration. Each stage has a parallel in the orderly steps toward knighthood.

Puberty: The Page Ceremony – The first step for a young boy on the path to knighthood was to become a page. He was like an apprentice, and he learned about horses, weapons, and falconry and performed menial tasks for his guardians. Since puberty occurs in a young boy’s life around 13 and is an important point in a young man’s journey toward adulthood, it is an excellent time for a simple ceremony involving the boy and his father celebrating this stage of the young man’s life.

High School Graduation: The Squire Ceremony – The next stage on the path to knighthood was the squire; he was attached to a

knight, served him in many ways, and continued to perfect his fighting skills. This stage is roughly parallel to the time of high school graduation. It should be marked by a more involved ceremony led by the boy's father but involving other men.

Adulthood: The Knight Ceremony – This is the stage in which the squire, after a period of testing and preparation, is dubbed a knight in an elaborate ceremony. This marks the end of youth and the arrival of adulthood for the knight. For the modern- day knight this stage of life is characterized by the completion of college or entering the world of work or military service. The author suggests this stage as a perfect time to have a celebration marking a son's arrival at manhood and full adulthood. This ceremony should be very special; it should involve the young man, his father, his family, and other men.

Some Final Thoughts on Knighthood

In this discussion we have been looking at Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* and discussing knights and chivalry in an attempt to promote the knight as a worthy ideal, symbol, and metaphor for young men to emulate. A question left unasked is why young men might need a stirring, vivid image or concept like the knight as a model. After a lifetime of studying cultures and civilizations, both ancient and modern, the eminent anthropologist Margaret Mead made the following observation:

> *The central problem of every society is to define appropriate roles for the men.(16)*

Though Margaret Mead was a controversial figure, and I have sometimes disagreed with her myself, in this statement, I believe she is right on target. Author George Gilder adds a similar insight when he states: "Wise societies provide ample means for young men to affirm themselves without afflicting

others."(17)

Men need appropriate roles, and they need the desire to live and perform those roles. They need to be inspired to do so. Men need roles that are considered valuable and held to be worthwhile. This is true because men are psychologically more fragile than women and suffer with their identity more than women do, though feminists would have us think otherwise. Why is this so? It is true because "Men, more than women, are culture-made."(18) This is why it is so important to have a culture-wide vision of manhood.

In modern Western society boys make the journey to manhood without a clear vision for what healthy manhood is. If they get out of control, the whole society suffers. Proverbs 29:18 states: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" [or, "are unrestrained"]. Knights and chivalry can supply a stirring vision of manhood that has been lacking. Yet some may think that the figure of the knight is an inappropriate image to use to inspire Christian young men. Such people need to take a close look at Scripture. The teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul use the image of the hard working farmer, the athlete, and the soldier to illustrate the points they are trying to make.

Furthermore, there are numerous biblical passages that picture knight-like images, some of whom are angelic beings and others are Christ Himself. Specifically, Revelation is replete with images of courtly life familiar to medieval knights: kings, thrones, crowns, swords, censers, bows, armies, eagles, dragons, chariots, precious stones, incense, etc.

Actually, we are more indebted to the knightly virtue of chivalry than we realize. Many of the concepts and words have become part of our familiar vocabulary. It is from chivalry, for example, that we acquired the concept of the gentleman (notice the dual stress here—gentle-man) and our concepts of sportsmanship and fair play. It is perhaps no accident that

the decline in chivalry parallels the rise of taunting and the "win at any price" attitude among our sports figures.

There is one more aspect to all of this that needs to be emphasized. If we are successful in inspiring our young men to seek to become modern-day knights, we need to remind them and ourselves that one can't become a knight on his own. Our young knights need the company of godly men to be all that they can be; they need the Roundtable. As Robert Lewis states so well: "Boys become men in the community of men. There is no substitute for this vital component. . . . if your boy is to become a man, you must enlist the community."(19) Why? "First, if a father's presence is weighty, the presence of other men is weightier still. . . . Second, enlisting the community of men results in a depth of friendship that the lonely never experience. . . . And third, the community of men expands a son's spiritual and moral resources."(20)

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," *Present Concerns* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 11-16.

2. Matthew 23:37.

3. John 11.

4. Luke 19:41.

5. John 2:13-16.

6. John 18:6.

7. Thessalonians 2: 5-9.

8. 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

9. Galatians 5:12.

10. Stu Weber cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising A Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to authentic Manhood* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Focus on the Family, 1997), vii.

11. Matthew Bennett, "The Knight Unmasked," *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 4(Summer 1995): 10, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

12. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization—The Age of Faith 4* (New York: Simon & Schuster,1950), 578, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

13. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," 13-26.

14. Ibid.

15. Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 99.

16. Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1968),168, cited in Lewis, 46.

17. George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1992), 34, cited in Lewis, 46.

18. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic, 1995), 17, cited in Lewis, 46.

19. Lewis, 150.

20. Ibid., 150-51.

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