

# FLIGHT ★ PLAN ★

**YOUR MISSION TO BECOME A MAN**

Howard Graham, General Editor



# THE STORY BEHIND THIS BOOK

For over twenty years, we've been developing the Flight Plan curriculum at Presbyterian Day School (PDS), an all-boys elementary school in Memphis, Tennessee. It started as an optional Bible study, but it quickly grew to a full-school curriculum centered on the seven virtues of manhood.

In 2004, Lee Burns and Chris Hill, then headmaster and chaplain of PDS, wrote the first draft of *Flight Plan*. It was expanded and updated in 2009 by Lee Burns and Braxton Brady (who first added the analogies between a boy's journey to manhood and a pilot's plan for success).

To share Flight Plan with a national audience, Braxton Brady updated and edited the book, with PDS' headmaster Steve Hancock serving as the general editor. In this latest edition, further revisions were made by Taylor Tollison and Howard Graham, the executive director of Building Boys, Making Men. We are deeply grateful for the contributions of everyone who has helped to create the book you are reading today.

In addition to major content updates, we've developed a suite of online resources for boys and their dads, teachers, and mentors; you can find those at [FlightPlan.org/TakeOff](http://FlightPlan.org/TakeOff). We've also published an additional book, *The 7 Virtues of Manhood*. We pray these books help many boys grow into godly young men.

## Find us online for more resources and tools:

[FlightPlan.org](http://FlightPlan.org)

[SevenVirtues.org](http://SevenVirtues.org)

[StrategicDads.org](http://StrategicDads.org)

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**THIS BOOK INCLUDES FREE  
ACCESS TO EXCLUSIVE ONLINE  
CONTENT FOR EVERY CHAPTER:**

Journals, activities, and quizzes for boys

Discussion questions and activity ideas for  
parents and teachers

Set up your account at

**[FlightPlan.org/TakeOff](https://FlightPlan.org/TakeOff)**





# **A NOTE TO PARENTS**

Too often, we leave boys on their own to navigate the critical transition from boyhood to manhood. We don't give them a vision of where they are going. We can put more thought into the college they get into, or the sports team they play on, than what kind of man they will become.

Without guidance, many teenage boys get lost, make poor choices, and grow up into confused and conflicted men, husbands, and fathers. The fog of the culture clouds the road to manhood. To raise our sons into men, we need to see where we are going—what men who follow God really look like.

This book offers boys a clear vision of manhood that can help them face the challenges of adolescence and make wise choices for their futures. We want to help boys see how the decisions they make today set them on a path for the men they are becoming.

We recommend that boys read this just before they enter adolescence (around age 12) and then again in the middle of their teens. This book covers the real challenges they will face, and it candidly addresses issues from relationships to drugs to puberty. Parents and mentors, please read this book alongside your boys. We hope it will serve as a starting point for an open and ongoing dialogue about growth into manhood.

Throughout this book, we have used the Bible as our foundation. We need to know the sort of men God wants boys to become. We need to understand how God wants them to respond to the challenges and opportunities they will face. However, while this book is written from a Christian perspective, we hope it is helpful to any boy embarking on the journey to manhood, regardless of his faith background.

In addition to research from some of the leading thinkers and researchers on the issues men face, this book also draws on interviews with over a thousand teenage boys and hundreds of dads. These were invaluable in giving us a first-hand glimpse into the lives, thoughts, and hearts of teenage boys. Finally, this book draws on the wisdom and experience of the Presbyterian Day School faculty, many of whom have been teaching and mentoring boys for decades.

Throughout the chapters, we have included some questions for boys to reflect on, write about, and discuss with parents or mentors. There is also a key verse at the end of every chapter; we encourage you to memorize these with your son. You can find more free discussion questions, activities, and resources at [FlightPlan.org](http://FlightPlan.org).





# CHAPTER 01

Prepare for Takeoff

Roger, liftoff, and the clock is started.

Alan B. Shepard Jr., Astronaut

It was my fear that made me learn everything I could about my airplane and my emergency equipment, and kept me flying respectful of my machine and always alert in the cockpit.

Chuck Yeager, General



The engines roar so loudly that you can feel your whole body shake as the fighter jet accelerates down the aircraft carrier's short runway. You can smell the burning fuel. Standing on the deck of the carrier, you can't even see the fighter pilot inside because his plane is racing by at such an incredible speed.

Just seconds before, the jet was calmly stationed at the end of the carrier, next to a few others. But now, it's racing off the end of the runway and up into the blue sky. Where is the plane going?

Like the fighter jet, you are also heading down a short runway to take off on a great adventure with many possible destinations. During childhood, you have probably grown slowly and steadily, like a plane taxiing to the runway. But soon you will accelerate in a very intense, rapid period called adolescence. And at the end of adolescence, you will take off on an even greater adventure: manhood.

## **PREPARING FOR FLIGHT**

Any fighter pilot will tell you that preparing well before the flight is essential to a successful mission. Every pilot spends thousands of hours learning to fly. He has considered problems he could encounter, and maneuvers he could use in those dangerous situations. He has tested and serviced the plane. He has filled it up with fuel. He has studied the flight plan, considered the weather, and learned the goal and details of the mission.

Likewise, you are a man in the making. Before you take off, it's important to make sure that you are prepared for the flight; that you know how to fly the plane and that it has fuel in it; and that you know what you will do when you come under enemy attack. And most importantly, you must know what the mission is and where you're going. It's easy to get lost in the vast sky of your future without a plan.

## **CHANGES ON THE WAY**

So buckle up! The next few years will be a great adventure. There are several changes coming your way that you need to be prepared for:

**INTELLECTUAL** You will start growing in wisdom. You will long for more independence and new challenges. You will dream new dreams and develop your own identity.

**PHYSICAL** Your mind, body, and emotions will change in ways that you can't understand until you experience them. You will feel new and more intense passions and desires.

**SPIRITUAL** You will begin asking more serious questions about faith and likely strengthening your relationship with God.

**SOCIAL** Your relationships will look completely different. You will think about girls, your friends and your parents differently, and you will relate to them in different ways.

Did you know Jesus went through all of these same changes? Check out this verse:

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

Jesus grew in intellectual maturity (wisdom), physical maturity (stature), spiritual maturity (favor with God), and social maturity (favor with people). He has gone through everything you are about to go through as a boy who is becoming a man. Sometimes we forget that Jesus really was a boy. He experienced everything in the same way other boys do today.

In addition to these changes coming your way, you'll also face several challenges.

## **CHALLENGES ON THE WAY**

Every adventure also has its share of difficulties and dangers. Self-esteem often dips during your teenage years, though many boys try to hide that by faking confidence. While you will enjoy the increasing freedoms, they will bring temptations that can be hard to resist, and a bad decision can seriously hurt you or others. While your body will grow in size and strength, it can be an awkward process with aches and acne. Girls can make your pulse race and your heart break. Adolescence can be like riding a roller coaster with many ups and downs.

In this book, we will cover the real issues and temptations that you will probably encounter. While some of these topics can be awkward or hard to talk about, it is better to know the challenges you will face ahead of time, so that you are prepared for them.

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus has been through everything you are preparing to go through. According to Hebrews 4:15, Jesus faced all of the same challenges and was tempted in all of the same ways you will be tempted, yet he did not sin. Throughout this book, we will cover a lot of ground together. Through it all, don't take your eyes off of Jesus. He is our hope, and the champion over sin and death.

Does the idea of becoming a man make you nervous, or is it something you are looking forward to? Why or why not?

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How would you define manhood?

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If you could have one question answered about the road ahead, what would it be?

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**QUESTIONS**

**YOUR PLAYBOOK**

Great coaches begin the season by talking about where they want the team to be at the end of the season. They talk about conference championships and bowl games and final rankings. But they also give their players a playbook to instruct them on how they want the game to be played day by day. God has given you his playbook to help you navigate the issues that you will be facing in the next few years. Boys are often surprised to hear that the Bible speaks on so many topics. Drinking, peer pressure, friendships, families, girls, even puberty and sex—the Bible gives us perspective and instruction for all these issues.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

## 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17



Most importantly, the Bible describes God's love for you. The Bible is not just a book about advice and rules—it is the true story of how much God loves us and how he saves us. It's the good news of what he has done for us, not what we do for him. You need to understand this before you read anything else in this book, so let's read that again:

**The Bible is about what God has done for us, not what we do for him.**

God loves you more than your dad or your mom love you, and more than your best friends love you. He loves you more than you can imagine.

Here's the hard truth: on your own, you are a mess. You were created to serve and love God, but you naturally live for yourself. God has every right to punish you for that. Instead, he chose to love you when you had nothing to offer him in return. He died for you and paid the penalty for your rebellion. And now he wants to bring you into his own family.

Here's how the Bible describes that:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 2:1-2)

Even if you grew up in a Christian family, those verses describe how you were without Jesus. You were not giving God any reason to like you. You were dead. Dead people don't move, breathe, think, or do anything. They definitely don't obey; they're stuck. But then God stepped in to rescue you:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

God chose to love you. He saved you from your sin. He adopted you into his family. And because he loves you, he asks you to love him back.

That's not all. Now that you are part of his family, God has a mission for you. He has adventures for you, challenges for you to face, and opportunities for you to help other people. Here's what Paul says next:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:9-10)

Your works—the things you do for Jesus—don't save you. But because Jesus has saved you, he has work for you to do. And he will help you do it.

We love because he first loved us.

1 JOHN 4:19



As you think about these truths and grow in your understanding of God's love and grace, we hope that you will also grow in wisdom and stature and favor with God and people. We want you to become a godly man, husband, and father—but even before then, we hope that you will deepen your faith and walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Even today, you can begin to explore questions about the God of the Bible.



Where do you go for advice when you are not sure what to do?

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Why did God give us the Bible? What do you think is the purpose of the Bible?

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Is your dad available to talk with you about adolescence and the journey to manhood?  
If he is not available, who could you talk to about this important topic?

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**QUESTIONS**



# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Take your time and read carefully. This is your flight plan for the exciting and challenging adventure ahead. Before you begin, here are some suggestions:

- Read each chapter carefully (more than once if necessary).
- Underline, write notes in the margin, and write down any questions you might have.
- Take your time to think about and answer the discussion questions honestly.
- Discuss the book with your friends (it helps to have more than one opinion on something).
- Make sure you talk about each chapter with your father, mentor, coach, or someone you respect—with someone who has completed the mission.
- If you have the book ***The 7 Virtues of Manhood***, flip back through it—those virtues will come up a lot in Flight Plan.
- Use the notes page at the end of the chapter to summarize what you have learned and memorize the key verse.



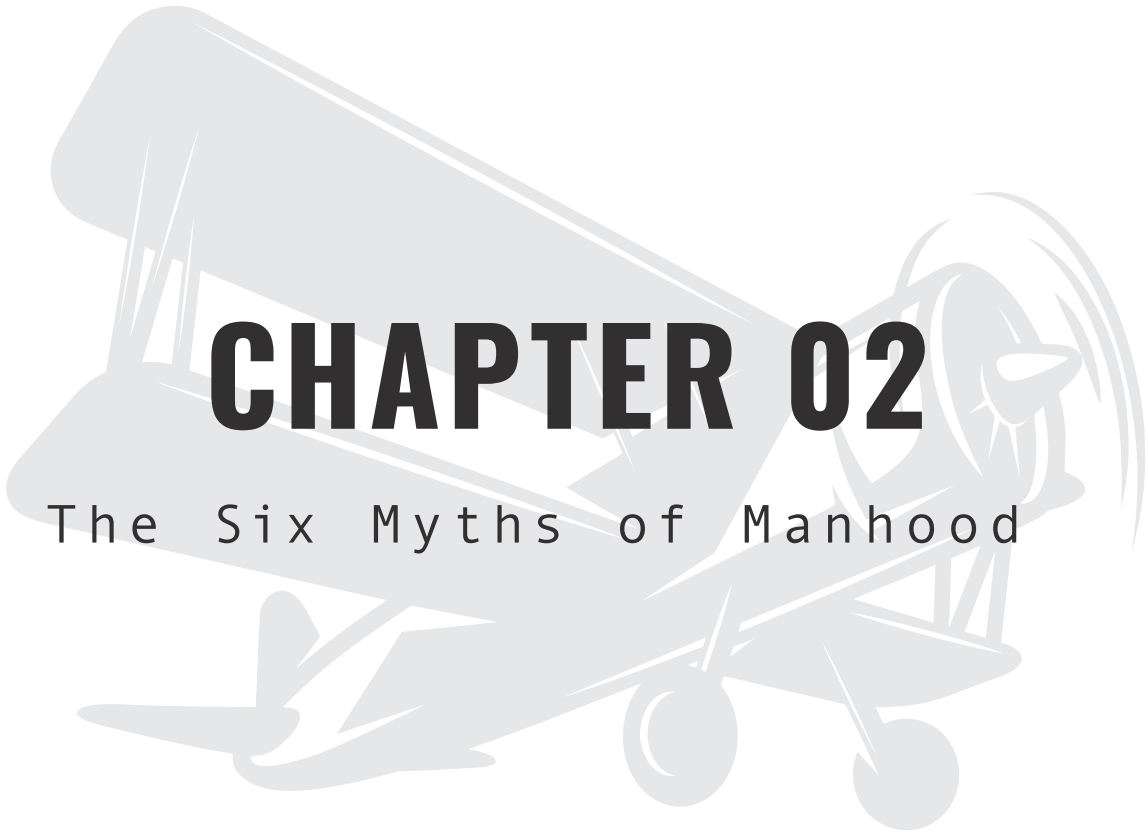
If you don't know where you want to go, then it doesn't  
matter which path you take.

Lewis Carroll, Author

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting.  
It has been found difficult; and left untried.

G.K. Chesterton, Author





# CHAPTER 02

The Six Myths of Manhood

In 1945, Flight 19 took off for a routine training mission. But what started as routine soon became a disaster.

Today, it is difficult for a plane to get lost. If we use GPS and other navigational technology, they will always get us back on the right path. But this technology was not available back in 1945. Pilots had to figure out their location based on where they had taken off, how long they had been flying, and how fast they were going. One little mistake in any of these calculations, and you could be lost.

Led by Lieutenant Charles Taylor, Flight 19 was the last training exercise for 13 airmen before their graduation. Six of the airmen were teenagers. The youngest airman had lied about his age to sign up for the Navy—he was just 17.

The five bombers took off from Florida and completed their exercise over the Atlantic, their last assignment before the pilots graduated. On their way back, about 90 minutes into the flight, Lieutenant Charles Taylor sent a radio transmission that his equipment was not working. He thought he was flying back to land, but his calculations were off. Instead, he was leading the five planes farther and farther out to sea.

The other pilots on the training mission tried to get Commander Taylor to change course, but he did not. Radio transmissions eventually lost the planes' signals as they kept flying in the wrong direction, and no one could ever find the planes again. Being off course cost the lives of 14 people.<sup>1</sup>

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?**

The journey to manhood can be confusing, and the landmarks our culture provides can get us off course or even lost.

Boys today are put in a difficult situation. They are being asked to begin the journey to manhood without a clear definition of what it means to be a man. We've asked many twelve-year-olds, teenagers, and even men what it means to be a man. Not many can answer the question. Many boys today are being sent on a mission without a plan. It's no wonder that many boys end up making poor choices during their teenage years.

The world we live in offers us a selfish view of manhood. Television, videos, social media, and music teach you that you are the most important person in the world. They urge you to do what feels good, what is popular, and what makes you successful, happy, or cool.

They put athletes, musicians, and movie stars on a pedestal as our examples for what it means to be a great man. But no human is perfect, and we see more negative examples than positive. And when we base our view of masculinity on what these men do or don't do, we get a selfish and inaccurate picture of manhood.

## **SIX MYTHS ABOUT MANHOOD**

We need a vision of the man God designed you to be. But to see that, we have to start by clearing away our wrong ideas about what it means to be a man.

We call these wrong ideas the myths of manhood. Myths are stories or ideas that aren't true, even if many people believe them. Before you can understand what real manhood looks like, you have to recognize and reject these myths of manhood. It's like becoming a good tennis player: you have to unlearn the habit of hitting a backhand the wrong way and then you can learn the proper backhand stroke.

### **MYTH 1—MEN DON'T SHOW EMOTION**

As you grow into a man, your physical strength increases a lot. You'll probably look in the mirror as you flex your muscles. Teenage boys and men often care a lot about their strength, or at least about how strong other people think they are.

Because we care so much about our strength, we sometimes think that we are weak if we show any emotion. Just because we are tough on the outside, we feel like we have to be tough on the inside also.

Many men refuse to let anyone know they are hurting or afraid. Men often don't talk about relationships or love, believing the lie that only girls can talk about those things.

This myth can also get in the way of friendships. It's hard to develop deep friendships when you don't share the important things running through your head.

Our need for strength can even get in the way of our relationship with God. We can think we don't need anyone, including God. We might believe we can get through the day just fine by ourselves. Too many men think of loving Jesus as something weak or something women do. But that is not God's intention for you. He invites each of you into a relationship with him—a relationship where you can ask him for help, tell him what's difficult or scary, and receive forgiveness and love.

## MYTH 2 - MEN ARE DEFINED BY THEIR OUTWARD ACHIEVEMENTS

Our culture judges men by outward success and achievement. We look past a person's heart and base our definition of success on grades, wealth, popularity, and athletic performance. Dr. Tim Kimmel makes some great points about the difference between success and true greatness:

- Success looks inward; true greatness looks upward, then outward.
- Success is about my agenda; true greatness is about God's agenda.
- Success is about receiving; true greatness is about giving.
- Success worships what it sees in a mirror; true greatness grieves over what it sees through its windows.
- Success pays off for now; true greatness pays off forever.<sup>2</sup>

Don't confuse success with true greatness. Your achievements won't give your life meaning; neither will having a big house, a prestigious job, or the "right" possessions. That stuff is how the world defines who you are. But the Bible talks about you differently. Here's what David says in Psalm 139:13-14:

For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.

**PSALM 139:13-14**



God doesn't make mistakes. He knew what he was doing when he made every part of you—even things you dislike about yourself. He knows exactly how many hairs are on your head (Matthew 10:30). He knows every thought, even if you never say it out loud (Psalm 139:2). And God loves you more than you can imagine—not because of what you do, but because of who God is.

Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

1 SAMUEL 16:7



What do you think success looks like? How does the Bible define success?

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What accomplishments or activities do you use to describe yourself? Look back at the difference between success and greatness—what would it look like to be great in those areas?

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**QUESTIONS**

### **MYTH 3—MEN SHOULD ONLY PURSUE CERTAIN “COOL” HOBBIES AND INTERESTS**

In some people's eyes, some passions and activities are more important or more masculine than others. Shooting a basketball is not inherently better than singing a solo. Whether you love sports or music or something else entirely, God can use your passions for your good and for his glory.

Sometimes, boys and men shy away from God-given passions and interests because of how we think other people will judge us. We may think that real boys and men don't do those things. But God is the one who gave you your talents and gifts, and he gives us the ultimate definition of manliness. Don't ignore real talents God gave you just because they don't fit some fake idea of manliness. Instead, look for ways you can use all of your talents and passions to glorify God and serve others.

As a teenage boy and man, pursue passionately the things God has put on your heart. Real men do many different things, depending on their interests and gifts. They cook and play the piano. They read and write poetry. They draw and paint. They compose music and act in plays. They play chess and go rock-climbing. They enjoy cooperative activities as much as, or more than, competitive ones. So don't listen to this myth. Discover ways you can use your gifts to love God and serve others.

### **MYTH 4—MEN MUST GIVE UP GREAT ADVENTURES**

At your age, you have incredible adventures ahead of you. As much as you love adventures, God loves them even more. He gave boys and men with adventurous spirits. We men often enjoy exploring, taking risks, and playing games that challenge us and push us to the edge.

This sense of adventure, however, can create trouble during the teenage years. Some adventures lead down a path towards alcohol, drugs, vandalism, and sex outside of marriage. You want to avoid these destructive paths—they lead to disaster, not adventure. They can hurt you in ways that keep you from enjoying life's real adventures. So when your parents and school tell you that certain things are out of bounds, obey them. They are giving you guardrails to keep you safe.

But staying on the right path does not mean there are no adventures left to enjoy now. As you follow God, you'll have opportunities to try new things and take on new responsibilities. Maybe you can serve people in exciting ways. Maybe you can explore God's creation. Who knows where