



EXCERPTS FROM MIDLIFE MANUAL FOR MEN

On Being a He-Man:

For most of us, the bottom line on being a guy—a boy, a teenage boy, a young man, a man, a middle-age man, an old man—is that it's almost always about...machismo. Being a Man's Man, strong and stoic. That is what we are, what we do. Or at least that is what most of us feel like we are supposed to be. It's an ideal that can hound us, insofar that we know we really can't live up to that intimidating Superman of a standard.... [It's] like a carrot forever dangling before us. And when you stop and think for a minute, we are paying a pretty high price to try to get that carrot—and carrots are not really all that great to begin with. Fortunately, middle-age is a really good time to finally grasp that particular carrot—and to then drop it like yesterday's old, stinky carrot. Because it's garbage.

On Depression in Midlife:

The depression a man in midlife can suffer is often fueled by his conviction that he is chronically and profoundly underappreciated, or underachieving, or only valued for what he achieves. It's truly a bad place to be.

On the Midlife Perspective:

The perspective of a man with some years behind him is necessarily broader than a younger man's. The man with experience is less inclined than a younger man to impose his will upon people and situations outside himself; time has taught him the pleasures of simply respecting and reflecting what is, rather than worrying so much about what "could" or "should" be. And an older man also knows what a younger man hasn't yet learned: time changes things. The older man knows that sometimes it's best to rein back one's will and let time work its transformative magic.

On Understanding Ourselves:

Sometimes we lie to ourselves. We insist to ourselves that we already are the kind of person we want to become. We adopt a persona for ourselves—and then block from our conscious minds (and from our behavior, if we can) anything that undermines or contradicts that persona. It's part of the process of how young people grow into their adult identities.

The truth is, when we're young, few if any of us do know much about ourselves. How can we, when we really haven't had that much time to learn about ourselves, find out who we really are, both in relationship to the world and our own personal past? All that stuff is extremely challenging to sort through and figure out. And the cruel truth about relationships is that the less you know yourself, the less you are prepared to be in a good one. (Of course, in this regard we Christians are especially fortunate: We have God to teach us who we are if we avail ourselves of his truth and open ourselves up in community. And hallelujah for that.)

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On Marriage:

A lot of us get married, and then to one degree or another continue, emotionally if not physically, to be alone. There are of course a zillion reasons why, but they can probably all be boiled down to a single cause: At the core of our souls most of us harbor a conviction that no one in this world except for maybe God himself can ever know exactly what it is like—and means—to be us.

On Being a Provider:

Asking us not to define ourselves by referring to our Actual Job is like asking a monkey not to define itself by referring to the fact that it has long arms, fur, and enjoys bananas.

The great thing about being middle-aged is that we have worked. Most of us more hours than we'll ever know. It's in our blood now.... Back then we had no idea what we were capable of. Now we do. And because we do—because we can look back over our lives and see how many times, and under how many different kinds of adverse conditions, we've accomplishing something important—we're not nearly as afraid of the world as we used to be. Yeah, the world can be a big, bad place. But next to us? And our will? And the way we know how to work? And with God on our side? Please. At this point, we should all leave our houses every morning with one hand tied behind our back, just to keep things fair between the world and us.