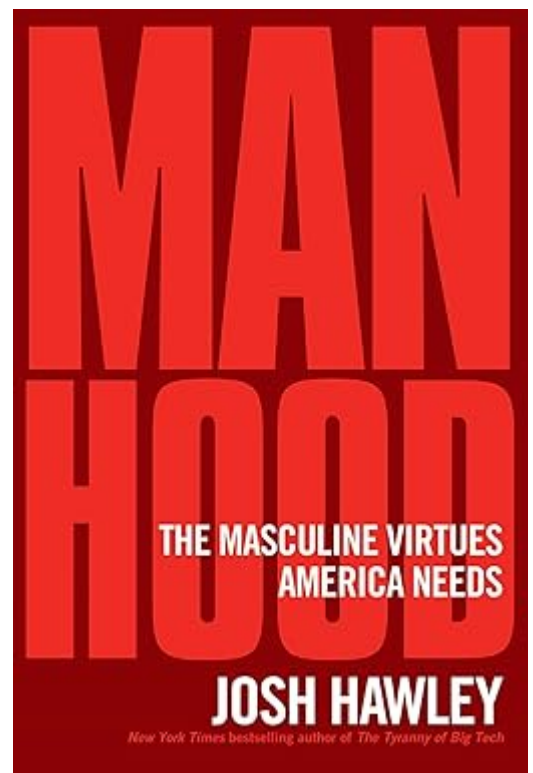


Making Men the Old-Fashioned Way

Lots of politicians running for higher office write books—or have them ghost-written. There they tell readers, which means prospective voters, what they've done and what they intend to do. Most of these are mere chest-pufferies that probably find few readers.

Josh Hawley's [*Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs*](#) is different.



Here the Missouri senator lays out in detail a plan for restoring the battered status of American men in our culture. Not only that, but his prescription for this restoration of a healthy masculinity is one largely based on biblical principles.

Hawley begins with some personal reflections on the insecurities of the male students whom he taught as a law professor. He then quickly introduces a litany of dire

statistics with which many of us are by now familiar. By eighth grade, for instance, only 24 percent of boys earn proficient scores on reading exams. Men now make up [only 40 percent](#) of college students. Overdoses and suicide kill [tens of thousands](#) of men of all ages every year.

Hawley next examines the factors leading to this disturbing picture of diminished male accomplishment: the plethora of [absentee fathers](#), the ongoing attacks from the left on patriarchy, the stigmatizing in our schools of ["toxic" masculinity](#), and the utter disregard shown by politicians and our culture at large for our floundering boys and our 20-something men.

"The warning signs of trouble," writes Hawley, "are becoming too glaring to ignore. Amid the suicides and drug abuse and epidemic of absent fathers, amid the collapse of work and explosion of crime, even some on the left are now expressing alarm. Men feel it. Those with sons know it. We cannot go on like this."

And it is here that Hawley directs readers to the Bible and to some of the classics of ancient Greece and Rome. He begins with Genesis and the story of Adam, which "encourages every man who struggles to see the point of his life." He demonstrates how the cultural pursuits of pleasure, self-gratification, and materialism are poisons to true masculinity, which traditionally emphasized mission, character, virtue, and self-sacrifice.

Hawley then spends the greater part of his book reflecting on men acting in their biblical capacities as husbands, fathers, warriors, builders, priests, and kings. These roles, particularly the last four, are broader than their names might suggest. In his reflections on the "Warrior," for instance, Hawley contends that all good men are engaged in metaphorical battles with enemies. "The man who makes war on the evil in his life," he writes, "and sacrifices his own pride opens his

life, in the end, to something far more powerful. ... The warrior loves something dearly and passionately more than himself. He loves his wife and children. He loves his nation. He loves God. And that love makes him strong."

To offer another example: In "Builder," Hawley reminisces about his Uncle Bruce, his father's brother, who founded a concrete company in Arkansas, pouring sidewalks, driveways, and patios. Contrary to the dismissive and even disdainful take of contemporary culture on such [manual labor](#), Hawley shows us the honor earned by a man who built a company by the sweat of his brow, whose "work has sustained three generations of family—himself, his children, and now his grandchildren." Hawley continues, "By his honest labor, day in and day out, he has shaped generations of lives and worked upon the fabric of the world."

Throughout *Manhood*, Hawley returns to such men, the workers and the doers who generally dwell far from the corridors and offices inside the D.C. Beltway, and who want personal agency over their lives. In the chapter titled "King," for instance, he explains that men have a choice, that they can turn off their screens and take responsibility for themselves, that "they can, in sum, get their character in order and reclaim their independence as men. Or not. And if not, the American republic as we have known it will cease to exist."

One lesson in *Manhood* that should not be overlooked is the importance of older men acting as mentors to the young. We read the statistics about adolescents and males in their 20s, and even older, not "manning up," but in many cases they lack the role models to do so. Hawley frequently mentions men like his grandfather, his father, his coaches and teachers, all of whom had a hand in shaping him, passing along the lessons they'd learned from the men in their lives. In this way, then, *Manhood* calls on men to become leaders and teachers of the young.

In his "Author's Note," Hawley writes: "In the fall of 2021, I gave a speech on the plight of men in America that became the germ of this book. I have been asked many times ... when I first became interested in the topic. The answer is easy: when I became a father."

Hawley is passing on the torch that his mentors handed to him. We should all be doing the same.

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