

5 Reasons American Men Struggle to Find Their Purpose

Many men I come across are depressed and have an inordinate desire to be fulfilled in sports by vicariously living their lives through other men they set up as heroes. This is because in sports, there are clear winners and losers, thus satisfying a man's desire to conquer through mastering a skill.

Also, because these men feel purposeless, they need to live their lives through other men or through a team they can identify with, attempting to fill the void in their hearts.

Part of the reason we men struggle is because of the American cultural way we view manhood, which is based on an individualistic concept of destiny that we have embraced from the rugged individualism we have inherited from the likes of Thomas Jefferson. Also influential is the individualistic search for the perfect man or superman (e.g., Greek mythological heroes like Atlas) who conquers the world for good, a concept we have embraced in this country and see reflected in our movie heroes, like Superman, Batman, Daredevil and Spider-Man, all of which comes from Greek culture's influence on Western culture.

Adultery is another symptom of a man's boredom with himself, which comes from not having an overarching purpose that will guide his every decision.

In today's culture, there is an emphasis on one's nationality, with ethnic parades and ethnic academic studies, mainly because one's culture becomes the replacement for the lack of an overarching purpose that transcends this physical life. In my perspective, I am first a Christian, second an American (or Italian or Hispanic, etc.).

For us to understand how to biblically fulfill our purpose, we need to go to “Jerusalem” and read the Bible with the Hebraic mindset rather than interpret the world through “Athens” (the center of Greek culture 2,000 years ago and the center of apologetics with third-century Christian philosophers like Clement and Origen, who greatly influenced the church with a Greek view of the world).

The following are countercultural traits men need to have in order to fulfill their destiny:

1. Men need to be team players. Many men want their individual gifts to shine. But when it comes to fulfilling destiny, we have to be more like a basketball point guard, like Steve Nash of the Phoenix Suns or Magic Johnson of the old Los Angeles Lakers, rather than a professional golfer like Tiger Woods (golf, unlike life, is a one-person sport).

To be successful, men need to learn to leverage their lives by surrounding themselves with people who have strengths they don't have so they can compensate for their weaknesses. No one has all the gifts, wisdom, power, abilities and experience. God has stacked the deck in our lives a certain way so we are forced to depend on the “dream team” He has already given us, if we would just open our eyes of faith and find those team members.

First Corinthians 12:8 teaches that God has only given some a “word” of wisdom, another a “word” of knowledge; all we have as individuals are fragments. It takes a team that seeks God to have the whole picture by comparing notes and hearing and doing what the Spirit is saying.

2. Men need to walk in corporate destiny in order to fulfill their individual destiny. In American culture, we glorify action heroes like John Wayne and Rambo, who single-handedly walk into deadly situations and turn things around. But in real life, Rambo dies as soon as he falls out of the

helicopter, like when he was rescuing the POWs in *Rambo II*, and John Wayne gets shot to death when he walks into a bar and attempts to take out 10 armed men.

Only those who connect to a local church or some corporate body can actually fulfill their destiny because the Bible was written to a nation (Old Testament) and to the city churches (New Testament). In the Jewish mindset, it was unthinkable to be outside the camp and walk in God's promises. In Numbers 12:14, we see how being outside the camp was a sign of a curse, yet there are approximately 40 million American Christians attempting to serve God without connecting to a local church.

This would be as foolish as someone thinking they could go to Iraq and defeat terrorists on their own. James 4:7 and Ephesians 6:10-18 were admonitions for the local church—not just individuals—to resist the devil. Men must get to a place where they lay their extreme individualism aside in order to fulfill the mandate God has given the body of Christ. Jesus did not die merely for an individual but for His church, and it is only through His church that we can fully see our purpose fulfilled. What a far cry from the preaching we hear that emphasizes individual destiny and vision!

3. Men need to be vulnerable to other men and expose their weaknesses. Many American and Western men have a hard time showing their emotions or admitting when they have a weakness. It is almost unmanly to cry or admit that you cannot do something.

In regard to showing emotions, the greatest man that ever lived, Jesus Christ, was a person totally in touch with His emotions. In John 11:35, Jesus openly and profusely wept; in Mark 1:41, He was moved with pity; in Mark 3:5, He looked at people with anger; in Luke 10:21, He was filled with joy; and in John 12:27 and Matthew 26:38, He spoke about His soul (emotions) being exceedingly sorrowful.

Men need to learn that being in touch with and expressing their emotions actually makes them more capable as men instead of less of a man.

Also, wise men know they need accountable relationships so they can receive counsel from others and also encouragement to continue moving forward. Building and experiencing covenant among men who are vulnerable to each other in trusting relationships is one of the primary keys that will enable a man to persevere in his purpose. It was a liberating thing when I came to Christ and He began to show me that He has assigned others to me that will both minister to me and aid me when I am weak. I have noticed that those who isolated themselves when they began to struggle are no longer in the faith that I have kept by His grace for over 30 years.

4. Men need to honor aged men for their wisdom and experience.

The Bible teaches us to rise in the presence of the aged (Lev. 19:32). In the East, they seem to honor older people, but in American culture, the marketing for most products and television shows is for folks between the ages of 18 to 35 (except for pharmaceutical ads) because in this nation we glorify three things: sex, power and glamour. Older men are even encouraged by their peers to quit working and retire to Florida and spend the rest of their lives playing golf and watching television.

This mindset is even embedded in city and federal jobs in some places. I was recently with a man who was forced to retire from the New York Police Department just because he reached the age of 62, even though he was healthy and on the force for more than 35 years and had a wealth of experience to share with the younger men and women in blue.

Biblically speaking, the older you get, the more of God you understand and the more experience you have to share with others. In the Bible, there is no such thing as retirement! God showed me years ago that my greatest ministry is actually

going to start when I turn 65. I am looking forward to old age because I am looking forward to the greatest years of my life in regard to the impact I will have on this world. American men need to surround themselves with older men they can respect and honor so they can build upon their shoulders and do even better instead of disdaining them and setting them aside.

5. Men need to have a purpose they are willing to die for instead of living a life of indulgence. Men who have no purpose in life tend to indulge themselves with the lusts of the flesh and are the most miserable of all people. I have found my greatest joy is when I finish work the Lord has given me for a particular task. Then when I relax, I am filled with a euphoric spiritual feeling that is greater than any physical pleasure (John 17:4).

All men were born with an innate desire to nurture and protect their families, empower the helpless, and die for a cause greater than themselves. Those who are missing even one of these elements in their lives will walk around depressed due to feeling a lack of inner fulfillment or will be addicted to some pleasure because they are attempting to medicate themselves to drown out the powerful voice of God calling them to fulfill their vocation in life.

I pray that all who read this commit to following all of the God-given mandates in their lives and, like Jesus, glorify the Lord, having completed the work He gave them to do.

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