

How Are Men Doing in This Day and Age?

Demographically, men are quite different. They are black, white, Hispanic, rich, poor, rural, suburban, urban, white collar, blue collar, conservative, liberal.

For every man who sits on a board, another lays on a jail bunk. Some like to ponder over chess; others prefer screaming at touchdowns.

Yet whether I am speaking with men from Alabama or Alaska, at the Pentagon or in prison, executives in New York City or Mennonite farmers in Pennsylvania, cowboys in Texas or Chinese businessmen in Malaysia, I have found that our similarities dwarf our differences.

You've heard the numbing statistics about men and the havoc they have created. Instead of recounting those stats, I want to give you a psychographic profile of how men are doing. How are men doing, really?

1. Tired. First, men are tired. If there is one thing you can know for sure about your men, it's that they're tired. You know the words that get tossed around: *stressed, slammed, weary, in need of relief, wasted, fragile, short-fused*. They are all synonyms that add up to "tired."

The average Christian male is up to his gold cross in debts and duties. He has a picture in his mind of what it means to be a "good Christian." He believes in this picture—it's what he thinks he "needs" to do to be a "good boy"—to be happy:

- "I need to spend quality time with my wife."
- "I need to be a super dad to my kids and attend (maybe coach) all their activities. My dad did (or didn't) do this for me, and I'm going to be there for them."

- “I need to make lots of money so my family can live in a beautiful home in a better neighborhood, my kids can wear the right labels, there is less pressure on my wife to work, and I can become financially independent.”
- “I need to join a men’s small group where I can grow with some brothers.”
- “I need to attend a weekly home growth and fellowship group.”
- “I need to have a daily quiet time for fellowship with God.”
- “I need to keep the Sabbath and have my family in church to worship God.”
- “I need to serve God through a personal ministry—probably through the church.”
- “I need to be a good citizen and neighbor.”
- “I need to be a star at work if all this is going to happen.”
- “I need a successful and satisfying career.”
- “I need some time for myself.”

No wonder men wince when you ask them to do something. No wonder men plop down in front of the television to vegetate instead of reading a book or conversing with their wives. We have created a culture that requires more energy than men have to give. Sometimes we call this the rat race.

2. A lingering feeling. Second, men often have a lingering feeling that something isn’t quite right about their lives. This is the inevitable result of running the rat race. A woman told me she was having difficulty figuring out how to offer support to her husband. He loves his work. Occasionally, for stretches of months at a time, he will work 12-hour days. Then suddenly his mood will swing, and he will mope around for months.

“What is it that you want?” she asks him. He cannot articulate an answer.

She said, "I can chart these cycles on paper. They're completely predictable. I just don't know what to do for him anymore. He is extremely successful. He has the job he always wanted. We have a beautiful home and two lovely children. What's his problem?"

It does beg the question: How can a man get exactly what he wants and still not be happy?

3. Life is not turning out as planned. Third, men's lives are not turning out like they planned. Each week, on average, four to eight new men visit the Man in the Mirror Bible study I teach in Orlando, Fla. Our average visitor is typically friendless, overextended in most areas, has at least seen his Bathsheba, is up to his eardrums in debt, lacks meaning and purpose, feels under a lot of pressure and is generally miserable.

All of this is carefully masked behind a game face because the man knows that if the sharks smell blood, it's over.

Many of these men have made a profession of faith in Christ, but they have not been trained (discipled) to integrate their faith into their daily lives. As a result, they get caught up in the rat race—the conflict between who they are created to be and who they are tempted to be. When they lead unexamined lives, men tend to be Christian in spirit but secular in practice.

4. Unglued. Fourth, a lot of men feel like their lives are coming unglued. The problem is not that men are failing to meet their goals. In most cases they are meeting them. The problem, it turns out, is they're the wrong goals. A man in his 30s said, "When I got out of school, I made out a list of everything I thought I would need to be happy. Fifteen years later, I have everything on my list. Now I realize ... it's the wrong list." How does a man give his best years to a system that never had any possibility of satisfying the hunger of his

soul?

5. Nobody cares. Fifth, most men feel like nobody, with the possible exception of family, really cares about them personally. A pastor invited one of his businessmen—a prominent one—to lunch one day. The man took the pastor to his private club. After 45 minutes of eating and exchanging social pleasantries, they finished their meal. The man set down his napkin and said, “So, tell me. What’s on your mind? What can I do for you today?”

The pastor said, “Nothing, really. I just wanted to spend some time with you and get to know you better as a person.”

“Well, there must be something I can do for you.”

“No, not really.”

“Are you sure? How are our finances?”

“No, really. I just wanted to get to know you better—man to man.”

Two or three more similar exchanges took place.

The man sat there incredulous. Belief slowly crept across his face, and tears welled up in his eyes. He struggled to maintain control of himself. A minute went by. The man regained his composure and said, “In my entire career, no one has ever asked me to lunch unless they wanted something from me.”

Conclusion

No man fails on purpose, but most men are under a lot of pressure. When a man fails, it sets powerful forces of bondage and brokenness in motion. It can take several generations to break the cycle.

As America staggers beneath the load of a hundred major

problems like divorce, fatherlessness, poverty, pornography, adultery, abortion, disrespect for authority, ethical failures, and truancy—where have the men gone? What has happened to our men?

At the root of virtually every problem is the failure of a man, ironically a man who got up this morning wishing that his life would make a difference. He's a man for whom Christ died.

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The preceding is an excerpt from Patrick Morley's book, Pastoring Men.