

Is the Sky Falling on Men in America?

You probably know the story of Chicken Little, who felt an acorn land on his head and began to tell all the animals he saw, “The sky is falling!” Of course, the sky wasn’t falling, and Chicken Little’s hysterics caused all sorts of mischief.

But what if the sky *were* falling? How would you warn the other animals?

In this article, I’m going to argue that in many ways, for men in America, the sky is falling. But I’m not going to scream hysterically in all caps. Instead, I’m going to present some of the data and let you decide for yourself. I won’t present a lot of conclusions; I’m hoping we can work to find those together over the next few months.

And in spite of this data, let’s believe God is at work. The Great Commission still stands, and it certainly applies to men. We have made our decision: By God’s grace, we will continue the fight until every church disciples every man—by the power of Christ alone, and to glory of God alone. This is a battle we must win.

Let’s take a look at some of the most significant areas of a man’s life and see how we are doing.

Faith

How would you say men in America are doing in the area of faith? Some research shows that in 1991, 42 percent of men attended a church service—other than an event such as a wedding or funeral—during the week prior to the survey. By 2009, the percentage was 36 percent. Volunteering at church during a typical week has also declined since 1991 from 24 percent to 18 percent.

More importantly, 39 percent of all men have not attended a church event—other than something such as a wedding or funeral—in the past six months. This is 9 percent higher than in 1991. And more men than women are disconnected from church; 56 percent of religiously unaffiliated people are men, and 44 percent are women.

All of this research depends on men self-reporting whether they went to church. Other research shows these figures are overstated by as much as half. Consider that the proportion of women to men in church is 45 to 34.

Also, using data about actual church attendance, one researcher found that in 2004, 17.7 percent of the population attended a Christian church on any given weekend. If accurate, this would indicate that actually 13.3 percent of men attend church every week, or only about 16 million men.

So the men who should be leading their families to a deeper and longer lasting faith in Christ are instead sitting on the sidelines or barely engaged.

Marriage

How would you rate men in America in the area of marriage? There's actually mixed data when it comes to marriage in America.

First, the good news. The divorce rate today—3.6 divorces per year per 1,000 married couples—is at its lowest level since 1970. Sometime in the 1980s, the rate of divorces peaked and then started to decline, and it continues to decline today.

While sociologists and statisticians debate all the reasons for this decline, at least part of it seems attributable to the bad news: Much fewer people are actually getting married today.

Among all adult Americans age 18 and older, the percentage

that are married dropped from 57 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2009. This is the lowest percentage since marital-status data was first collected more than a century ago.

And this is affecting young people and the poor in disproportionate ways. In 1960, two-thirds (68 percent) of all 20-somethings were married. In 2008, only 26 percent were. In 1960, the gap in marriage rates between college graduates and those with a high-school diploma or less were just four percentage points (76 percent vs. 72 percent). By 2008, there was a 16-percentage-point gap (64 percent vs. 48 percent). A total of 42 percent of women in America today would prefer to cohabitate rather than get married.

Why is it important for men to get married and stay married (unless called to singleness)? It is because the ripple effects of divorce and not marrying are devastating.

For example, more than 33 percent of America's 72 million children will go to bed in a home without a biological father. Also, the share of babies born to unmarried women has risen from 5 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 2008. Among African-American women giving birth in 2008, 72 percent were unmarried. This compares to 53 percent of Hispanic women and 29 percent of white women.

A lack of marriage gives rise to single parenting. The proportion of U.S. children who live in a single-parent household has more than doubled since 1970, from approximately 12 percent to 28 percent.

And single-parenting puts children at risk. While it's still true that most children of single parents turn out fine, research shows that 25 percent of youths from divorced families, in comparison to 10 percent from non-divorced families, have serious social, emotional or psychological problems. Other research suggests that the children of never-married single parents tend to fare somewhat worse than

children of divorced single parents.

For example, boys raised in single-parent households were more than twice as likely to be incarcerated than boys raised in an intact, married home, even after controlling for differences in income, education, race and ethnicity. The dropout rate for children in single-mother families is twice as high as the rate for children in two-parent families. These children also have lower grades and poorer attendance at school. As adults, they are less likely to graduate from college and more likely to become single parents themselves.

The real issue is that when fathers and families fail to transmit values and beliefs, future generations pay the price (see Psalm 78).

Work

How would you say men are doing in their work? Let's look at the data. In 1948, 89 percent of men age 20 and over were in the workforce. In 2011, that had dropped to 73 percent. What happened to that 16 percent?

Many of them are taking disability. In 1960, percent of economically active 18- to 64-year-olds received disability benefits. By 2010, it was up to 5.6 percent.

And the trend is going the wrong way. Between 1996 and 2011, the private sector generated 8.8 million new jobs, and 4.1 million people entered the disability rolls. Now it's getting even worse. Between January 2010 and December 2011, there were million new jobs but 790,000 new people collecting disability.

This is affecting young men in startling numbers. In 2011, 15 percent of disability recipients were in their 30s or early 40s.

Young men are also finding it harder than ever to break ties and function on their own. Nearly 20 percent of men ages 25 to

34 live with their parents today, which is five percentage points more than in 2005.

What Does This Mean?

Men are in trouble. And we believe that if men are in trouble, then our culture is in trouble. Many churches have difficulty connecting with men and showing how the gospel can change them and the world around them. We need a renewed focus and sustained effort to reach and disciple our men.

Suggestions for Further Discussion

Men from lower economic strata and who have lower educational achievements are disproportionately dropping away from Christ. This has devastating consequences for future generations. In an age where we tend to emphasize professional, educated orators and tight worship bands, are most churches really equipped to reach this demographic? If not, what can we do differently?

On every measure, from marriage to work to church involvement, young men are doing worse than the generation before them. The world's vision for a hedonistic, independent, carefree and prolonged boyhood is winning. Our nation is filled with boys with beards. That's no good for women, children, the church or Christ. How can we give these young men a new sense of vision for true manhood and gospel sacrifice?

The time for intervention is now. It's never too late with the power of God, but from a human perspective, systems reach a tipping point, where the momentum is so strong, it is very difficult to bring them back. When will we reach that point with American men?

At Man in the Mirror, we are committed to doing whatever it takes to see God bring about a revival of churches and men. We've launched the most audacious plan in our history—during a recession—to put 330 area directors on the ground to help

churches disciple men.

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