

Why Aren't More Men Leading Powerful, Transformed Lives?

Early in the history of The Man in the Mirror Bible Study, a Table Leader at one of our leader meetings presented a bizarre situation.

He told us about a man at his table who faithfully attended every Friday morning. But then on Friday nights he hit the topless bars and partied hard all weekend.

The aforementioned Table Leader said, "I would like to put together a group of Table Leaders, take this man to lunch and confront him about his behavior."

My heart sank! As I was fumbling around, the Holy Spirit prompted these words. "I don't think we should do anything. God has called us to show men Christ, not to fix their behavior. If we try to get him to clean up his act, it will probably drive him away."

By God's grace, everyone nodded in agreement. Chuck, the wild man, kept coming back each week. After attending for about three years, his daughter's boyfriend one day put a pistol in her mouth and pulled the trigger. Chuck was completely devastated. He asked me to perform the funeral because he didn't know who else to ask. Her friends wanted a rock 'n' roll funeral, but he insisted on a Christian service.

Through his daughter's tragic death, God graciously brought Chuck and his son to faith and their lives were radically transformed by Jesus Christ. How frightening to think we might have driven him away by trying to fix his behavior.

That's not to say behavior isn't important. It is. But good behavior isn't "sustainable" unless it comes out of the overflow of a changed, or transformed, heart.

Unsustainable Change

When you look around today, do you see many men leading powerful lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus? There are inspiring exceptions, but for the most part, we don't. Most men lead tepid, lukewarm, defeated lives.

If I asked you, "Why aren't more men leading powerful, transformed lives?" what would you say?

Because guys like to "fix things," our answers gravitate to a list of things a man "ought" to do. You know the list, and you can no doubt add to it.

- You ought to be in a small group.
- You ought to read your Bible every day.
- You ought to be in an accountability group.
- You ought to be in church.
- You ought to go on a mission trip.
- You ought to work at the homeless shelter.
- You ought to stop smoking.
- You ought to stop drinking wine.
- You ought not to look at pornography.
- You ought to be more humble.

After working with men for nearly 40 years, I can say without hesitation that these may be great ideas, but they just don't work by themselves. Telling men what they ought or need to "fix" about themselves is not powerful enough to bring about authentic change. A lot of men get the impression that if they just do the "right things," then they will be OK.

Oh, it may work for a while—even for a few years. You can shame men or challenge men to live "better" for a time, but that lacks transformative power. Eventually, the man who relies on his own desire or effort to live up to his religion will fail. It's unsustainable. Unless a man is drawn to his disciplines and good deeds by a compelling desire to love, know and please his God, he will always burn out and fall

away. It's an iron law.

Transformed by a Piece of News

Not long after our wedding, it became clear that my wife, Patsy, and I had an ambiguity of terms about what it meant to be a Christian. On the one hand, I was committed to a set of Christian values. I grew up in a religious home.

I was surprised to learn that my wife was committed to a person—to Jesus Christ. She spoke of a personal relationship with God. That was completely new to me. She was and is the best example of a Christian I have ever known. She radiates peace and contentment.

Since I am a determined person, I made up my mind that I would emulate her. You know what happened, of course. The harder I tried, the further away I strayed.

No matter what I did, no matter how many promises I made to myself, no matter how much self-discipline I exercised, my life constantly tumbled backward. I was miserable.

One day I pulled out my white flag and surrendered. I realized that no amount of desire or effort on my part would ever be enough. My life changed when I caught a glimpse of the unfathomable love of God the Father in the face of Jesus Christ illuminated to me by the Holy Spirit. It was the Good News that transformed me from darkness to light, from death to life.

Early 20th-century reformer J. Gresham Machen noted that Christianity is about a moral change, but it never comes about by telling men how they ought to live. He said,

The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation but by the narration of an event. It is no wonder

that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? But the strange thing is that it works. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.

Clearing Up Men's Confusion

Men, and especially younger men, have become one of our largest neglected people groups. Men are confused about what it means to be a man, much less a man of God. How did they get so confused?

They've run the wrong race (Gal. 5:7). As a result, they've conformed to the values and customs of this world (Rom. 12:2). As a result, they've been taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophy (Col. 2:8). That yeast has worked its way through the whole batch of dough (Gal. 5:9). As a result, they've exchanged truth for a lie (Rom. 1:25). And now it has become a crisis. How do we clear up this confusion?

Some men really *don't* know how to live their lives. They don't have the *knowledge* to grasp what it means to follow Christ—not really.

For others, they already know what they need to do; that's not the problem. Their problem is that they lack *power* to do what they already know they should do.

In Matthew 22:29, Jesus told some confused religious leaders, "The problem is that you do not know (*oida*) the Scriptures and you do not know the power (*dunamis*) of God" (paraphrased).

So why aren't more men leading powerful, transformed lives?

1. "*You do not know the Scriptures.*" One of the most practical things we can do is disciple men to understand (*oida*) the Word of God. The core reason men are so confused is that they have

never been disciplined in how to be godly men, husbands and fathers. They don't have a good "picture" of the ideal Christian man in their brains.

2. *"You do not know the power of God."* We also must help men find power. How do we get the power of God to men? Jesus said, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power (*dunamis*) from on high" (Luke 24:49). And later, "But you will receive power (*dunamis*) when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). Of what benefit is this "power" to a man? "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26).

A great opportunity stands before the church like an elephant in the living room. This is our moment. The cause is great. The stakes are high. The battle is fiercely contested. We must not fail.

Although they are still too young to know, my four grandchildren are counting on us to get this right.

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