

Dude, Where's My Mission?

Can't seem to find a purpose for your life? It could be that you haven't embraced the muscular side of your faith.

Many men in the church today are missing something. They are unable to handle the blazing arrows that fly sizzling at their hearts. They are ill-equipped to handle the unsavory side of leadership, such as standing up for what is right when it is within their power to do so (see Prov. 3:27).

They lack the inner lion that needs to roar to protect others, the way the apostle Paul roared at false teaching that threatened to choke the early church. They lack the steadfast power they need to combat a world at war with truth.

These men are one-dimensional: too soft and pleasant for the challenges ahead that demand combat boots rather than penny loafers. Their personalities are all sweetness without any jalapeño.

And it is a real shame that stronger men who see this don't say something. But, then again, that's the problem with a lot of us Christian men today: We almost say something.

Fear is the enemy of masculinity, and a mission-driven life won't go far as long as fear's in the driver's seat. Fear makes you live life small. We are used to hearing how perfect love casts out all fear (see 1 John 4:18). But the opposite is also true: Great fear casts out love. Fear terrorizes our souls because it stops us from loving deeply, which is the greatest commandment. When fear's in control, you can't get to the best form of love because you're too guarded.

Many Christian men overdevelop their gentle side, based on a

caricature of Jesus that is actually a work of fiction. Jesus was good, but the record shows that He wasn't always nice.

When I saw this rugged side of Jesus, it changed my view of Him and of masculinity. I realized that I was missing something profound. It threw me into a period of soul-searching and fear-confronting prayer.

I was humbled, and admitted my weakness and need. That's one of life's biggest surprises, isn't it, to see your weakness turned into strength? (see Heb. 11:34)

I sought counsel wiser than my own. I began to feel optimistic, which is essential if you're going to embark on a mission. For the first time in my life I felt whole.

When men free themselves from the false expectation that says they should only behave in a pleasant manner, a way Jesus did not behave, they will likely see their missions grow, as did pastor Stephen Brown. In *No More Mr. Nice Guy: Saying Goodbye to "Doormat" Christianity*, he writes about the day he realized that he didn't have to be nice all the time:

"I found myself free. I didn't have to please everybody; I didn't have to be guilty all the time; I didn't have to smile at everybody; I didn't have to come up to everybody's expectations; I didn't have to be a kind, nice, sweet pastor."

Biblical masculinity is the engine on your plane called "Mission" that will help you gain greater altitude. Except, today there are two layers of thick tape over the switch that turns it on: one from a culture that vilifies masculinity and one from a church that fears it as well.

We believe for a number of reasons that we're not allowed to use that engine's power because somehow it may go astray. Someone may get hurt from its raw force. This is a legitimate concern, but one that also ignores that loads of people are getting hurt when the power isn't used.

This power must be run through a filter, otherwise we get stuff such as cable's The Man Show. Fruitful masculinity is not about feeding one's ego or sordid appetites. It's not about bagging more money or women, driving fast cars or covering bald spots—the empty-calorie appetizers that consume some guys' days and cheapen their lives.

This filtered and redeemed power leads to a mission-driven life that is marked by purpose, meaning, adventure and integrity. A mission that makes your soul soar because it's in harmony with God's will and blesses others with a life lived imperfectly well.

You'll know it's godly boldness because it shows courage, love, power and self-discipline (see 2 Tim. 1:7). It's not an excuse to push people around.

So how do you know that your mission is ignited by genuine masculine power and vitality? Here are some powerful indicators:

Does it challenge the status quo? Writes Rick Bundschuh, "An energy that breaks the status quo should be expected when the Spirit of the One who overturned tables pulses through the veins of men who serve him."

Does it work with the pain and passion in your (gulp) heart? We guys are so accustomed to ignoring our hearts that we forget—or maybe we don't even know—that we'll need the passion, insight and instinct that comes from the heart in order to help our missions grow.

The enemy wants to steal your heart, rendering you ineffective like a boat with a dead motor. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, your pain can be a redemptive force for good—if you allow yourself to experience it and learn from it.

But many guys don't want to really feel, and they think this debilitating condition is somehow masculine. We forget the

shortest and one of the most profound passages in the Word, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35, NIV).

Yet, if we could outsource our feelings the way we outsource payroll, we would. Our passion and pain can show us the truth we are meant to share, and this truth will come to us through our hearts, a vital source of masculine power and discernment.

Does it work with what’s at hand? There’s a practical side to masculinity that should be heeded, especially since the mind of a man tends to dispose him to live in the future, suspending his chances for a mission-driven life now. We sometimes believe that we must scale some grand summit in the future when the world really needs our redemptive mission—mistakes and all—now.

For most people, there will be no single act of greatness, but there can be great meaning and purpose when we acknowledge that ministry begins where Christ said it does: in loving God and our neighbors. There’s much room for blessing others.

Does it forego comfort? You will have to sacrifice to fulfill your mission. You will probably need to strip your life of some comfort, such as hobbies (which often don’t deliver the enjoyment they advertise, so buck up), in order to see your mission grow.

There’s something inside a guy’s heart that respects lean living that resides close to the marrow of life, which is in accordance with the simpler living advocated in 1 Timothy 6:9-11. If lean living doesn’t invigorate your masculine sensibility, then it’s probably dormant or neglected.

Reducing your material load is like smelling salts: it clears your head, leaving more room for ministry thinking. This truth doesn’t come from hippies. It’s from God.

If you’re low on the masculine traits that Jesus exemplified, don’t whip yourself. They are usually learned while you’re

young. If you didn't get them, it's not your fault. Ask God to supply them.

One of the ways He will likely do this is to hook you up with a Christian man who has them, either in person or through books and videos. But, I warn you; he may not behave in ways "good" Christian men do. He may seem a little odd at first, iconoclastic even (think John the Baptist), and he may recommend stuff you haven't heard before.

Masculinity is the key to forming your mission, and, harder still, completing it. It is that very side of you that most churches won't help you to cultivate. May God help you fulfill your mission by embracing the muscular side of masculinity ... the way Jesus did.

Paul T. Coughlin is a "recovering nice guy" and the author of *Secrets, Plots & Hidden Agendas: What You Don't Know About Conspiracy Theories* (InterVarsity Press). He has been interviewed by C-SPAN and *The New York Times* as an expert on conspiracy theories.