



Sample Reflections

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Masculine Identity Crisis

What does it mean to be a man? Today, that's not an easy answer. Hollywood has given us some popular images of manhood in the movies: the tough, isolated, misunderstood hero (John Wayne), the big, strong, handsome stud (Dwayne Johnson), the cool, chill, heartthrob (Brad Pitt), and the reckless, rebellious, risk taker (James Dean). None of these seem to work in everyday life.

These images have perpetuated an idea of manhood in which men must push their emotions aside and attempt to appear in command and in control at all times . . . to have it all together. Men who have bought into this kind of definition often feel a deep sense of loneliness and despair, or they default to acting out their stuffed-up feelings in passive-aggressive ways. This can quickly get out of hand.

Current culture describes over-the-top toughness as "toxic masculinity," defined by men who exhibit dominance, control, or anti-feminist behavior to assert power over women and others. Most of us can agree, this is not an image we want to identify with.

We don't want to be wimps, unable to defend our families and lead in our workplaces. But we also don't want to be overbearing, controlling, or dominant. The truth is, many of us don't know how to act, because we don't know who we are. We have lost sight of our identity.



So, who are we? Is there such a thing as a masculine identity? How can we embrace our masculinity and yet be relational, kind, approachable, and secure in who we are? How can we protect our family, stand up for what is right, and pursue our goals while still remaining connected, open, and tender-hearted?

Imagine your manhood in a way that both strengthens your masculine identity and also allows you to be vulnerable and engageable. A masculinity that allows you to be strong in maybe some new kinds of ways—to be comfortable in your own skin, to reveal your faults with honesty, and to maximize your strengths for the benefit of others with humility and grace.

This kind of authenticity is possible, but it takes introspection, emotional maturity, courage, and work. And it also takes having someone you can follow. Someone who models it for you. Jesus is my model and my inspiration for authentic manhood. The way of authentic manhood is the way of Jesus.

Action Step

- Write in your journal what you think it means to be a man in today's world.
- Write down how you would describe your own masculine identity.

What kind of images have informed my vision of manhood? How would those close to me describe me as a man and how I live out my manhood? How do I balance masculinity with relationality in a way that feels authentic and real?

Surpassing Knowledge

The apostle Paul prays in his letter to the Ephesians that the people would receive God's Spirit in their inner being so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith . . . and that they would know the love of God in a way that surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:16-19).

It seems to me that Paul is praying for a transformation. He's praying that Christ might dwell inside them . . . and that they may know His love so deeply that it "surpasses knowledge."

Much of my personal faith journey has been focused on gaining knowledge about God . . . learning about Him . . . knowing everything scripture says about Him . . . being able to defend both Him and my faith in Him. My journey was heavily focused on having all the right answers about God. Of course, there is nothing wrong with pursuing knowledge. I'm all for knowing as much about God as we are capable of knowing.

But Paul seems to be talking about something different and maybe even deeper than just knowledge about God. He prays for a comprehension that comes from inside . . . from God's Spirit in us. A comprehension of the love of Christ that "fills us with the fullness" of God.



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As you pray for and seek this for yourself, allow His Spirit to take you beyond your knowledge of God and into your heart, where Christ dwells. Knowledge is wonderful but is limited. Paul is giving us a glimpse of a love that exceeds knowledge . . . the love of Christ that fills us with the fullness of God . . . a love that changes everything we think about manhood.

Action Step

- Pray Paul's prayer for yourself, that you may experience this love.

Are you filled with the fullness of God? Do you enjoy His goodness in your inner being?

Seek and Find

Do you ever feel that your life is idling by? Or that you are moving along but going nowhere? Do you ever just feel empty and lacking hope in anything that really matters?

Many men find themselves feeling these things. We go through the motions of job, family, and community responsibilities but feel no passion or motivation, no joy or investment. We move along, pay the bills, take a vacation, have some hobbies, hang out with friends, but never really feel much meaningful purpose in life —something bigger, deeper, hopeful, eternal.

Maybe you're in a marriage that feels stalled or troubled. Maybe you're in a job that has lost its allure. Or maybe you feel trapped in a dead-end cycle of empty doing and achieving.

Whatever your situation, Jesus has an invitation for you . . . He invites you to walk through all of your situations with Him. . . . He says that He is the door you can enter to find green pasture (John 10:9-10). His way is the way to the bigger, deeper, hopeful, and eternal things in life. This was part of His purpose in coming to earth. He says He came to earth that we may be saved and that we may have life and have it abundantly. Those are His words. Did you know that? Have you forgotten that? Do you believe that? Have you gone to Him for that?



And He also makes a beautiful promise to you. He says that if you seek Him, you will find Him . . . that He will be there for you . . . that even in the midst of the hard and challenging times and all of the emptiness you feel, He has good things for you (Matthew 7:7-11). Maybe even bigger, deeper, hopeful, and eternal things.

If you're facing challenges or feeling empty or lacking hope, maybe a good first step is to admit that the life you are living now isn't the one you want to live. Admit that maybe you can't change things on your own. Remember Jesus' invitation for you to enter His door and walk with Him. Remember His promise to be there for you when you seek Him. This is the path to authentic manhood.

Action Step

- **Set aside time to meditate on the words of Jesus in these passages, both His invitation and His promise to you.**
- **Write down some things you would like to invite Him to walk with you in.**

Am I taking Jesus up on His offer—that if I seek Him I will find Him?