



## **The Need For Purpose In A Young Man's Life**

Young men need purpose. Robert Lewis says, “many of the social problems of our day (plummeting morality, rising crime, violence, abuse, reckless pleasure-seeking) spring from the soil of directionless, disconnected sons” (3). There seems to be an increasing number of young men in our culture today that are suffering from a lack of purpose. I intend to apply my life experience to the study of our current culture. With a good grasp of historical perspective, I also intend to show that many of our societal problems could be reduced by returning to Bible based curriculum that instills a sense of purpose and meaning in a young man's life.

I would like to spend a little time discussing my personal experiences. I've had a very exciting life. There are times in my life when I overcame great challenges and achieved great success, but there are also times in my life when I was only a second thought away from losing everything. Reflecting back on my walk, I can see that I was successful when I had a clear sense of purpose and meaning. On the other hand, during periods of time when my meaning and purpose were not so clear, I would seek only to please myself at any cost.

My father made a difficult and crucial decision as I was nearing high school graduation. I was a young man with absolutely no ambition other than finding the next good time. I was actively involved in drinking, smoking, drug use, and sex. I had very little concept of reality beyond what was being planned for next weekend. In fact, looking back, I am shocked at how completely unaware I was of the long term consequences of my actions. My primary concern was, “Will I get caught or not?” I saw school as something I had to get through, and I put forth only enough effort to get through without actually learning much of anything. My dad gave me a



choice: “You’ve got six months after graduation to find a job, start paying rent, and find some direction in your life, or join the Navy.”

Immediately following Navy boot camp, I started Opticalman service school. In less than a year, I learned Basic Electricity and Electronics, Tool and Die Machining, Optical Theory, and Small Instruments Repair. There was no grading curve or self esteem based grading systems. You had to obtain a 75% or better or you failed, period. The consequences of failing were not just a red “F” on your assignment but you had to spend the next three to four years in the most disgusting and unglamorous jobs the Navy had to offer. I made it through easily. I found the challenge invigorating, and my purpose was not to face the extreme consequences of failure.

My Navy career progressed like this for the next four to five years. I had risen well above my high school achievements. There was not a challenge I couldn’t handle, and when the pressure mounted, I performed all the better. Once the newness wore off, I began to fall back into old and destructive habits. I found myself, once again, without purpose or meaning. Reflecting on these events identifies a need for purpose and meaning, but without an overarching life purpose and meaning, my success and usefulness was short lived. I was continually searching for new purpose while expending energy on reckless and irresponsible activities.

To fill the void, I turned to academic pursuits. I found I had a real talent for technology and a passion for science. “Perfect,” I thought. I could just pour myself into an academic quest. I achieved great success at first. I maintained a near 4.0 GPA and thought I had intellectually figured many of the worlds mysteries out through science. I left the Navy and turned my academic knowledge of technology into a project at my new job as a systems administrator for an internet service provider. I accomplished another great success that saved the company hundreds of thousands of dollars.



However, once again it was a fleeting fulfillment. I had done such a great job that it now became routine and boring. I became frightened that I would never be satisfied. I was afraid that all of my life's efforts would be for nothing. I was in complete despair, because science taught me that I was nothing but a random occurrence with no value. I began to wonder why I shouldn't just pursue my own pleasure and selfish fulfillment no matter the cost to anyone else. Life seemed pretty hopeless, but I was about to experience a life changing event. In fact, most of the United States would have their lives altered. September 11, 2001, sets in motion a roller coaster of emotions. I began to really question my life purpose and meaning. I started researching world religions to understand why the terrorists killed themselves and so many innocent people. I turned my scientific studies into philosophical studies. One spring day, at the bottom of despair, I called out to God, and He answered me.

So what does it all mean? “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’” says the writer of Ecclesiastes 1:2. What it meant to me, and continues to mean, is that my selfish pursuits meant nothing. No matter how much wealth, no matter how much fame, no matter how much effort, I would still die just like everyone else, and my name would soon be forgotten. I realized that it is only through the hope of Jesus Christ that we find true eternal and transcendent purpose and meaning. We are told in Ephesians 2:10 that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” How awesome is that? God created us! God has prepared good works for us to do! How could I not desire to be a godly person?

How does this personal experience relate to our current culture? I’ve learned three important lessons. First, young men need purpose and meaning to channel their energy. Second, worldly purpose and meaning is fleeting and unfulfilling. Third, there is hope, and we do have



life purpose and meaning, and it can be found through Jesus Christ. Looking at the current state of our American culture through this understanding makes it abundantly clear that we are failing to give our young men the purpose they need. Stu Weber describes it this way, “Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. . . . C.S. Lewis summed it up years ago when he stated that modernists ‘castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.’” (vii). What can we do to reverse this troubling trend? First, we need to look at how we have arrived at this point, then we can offer suggestions on how to change course.

It is important to understand America’s godly heritage. Our cause to fight for freedom, and the foundation of our American government are built on Christian principles. President Washington, in his first inaugural address, acknowledges God’s divine intervention and blessings on the establishment of our free nation and goes so far as to say that every step advanced toward independence and freedom was distinguished by an act of God (George Washington Inaugural Address, Thursday, April 30, 1789). Another of our founding fathers, John Adams, said, “The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were . . . the general principles of Christianity . . . I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God” (qtd. in Barton 5). It is a tragedy that we don’t get a clear picture of America’s godly heritage in public school history lessons any longer. We will discuss this tragedy more a little later. What is important right now is that America was established by God’s provision, and it was established on Christian principles.

It is also important to note that American public schools were developed to teach Christian principles and to develop responsible and involved citizens. Dr. Benjamin Rush, often called the father of public schools under the Constitution, notes that, “Man is naturally an



ungovernable animal, and observations on particular societies and countries will teach us that when we add the restraints of the ecclesiastical to those of domestic and civil government, we produce in him the highest degrees of order and virtue” (Coulson). The first American textbook, The New England Primer, was Biblically based (Barton 6). Books could be written, and have been written, about Dr. Benjamin Rush’s influence on public education and his understanding of how important it is to inculcate purpose and meaning into a young man in order that he may become a successful patriot and servant to God. America’s educational system, as it was originally designed, was the envy of the world.

It is important to establish this historical perspective, so we can contrast where we were with where we are. A critical turning point in America’s culture took place in the early 1960s. Two judicial decisions critically altered America’s public education, and new liberal idealism in social policies altered family values.

In 1962, the Supreme Court ruling in *Engel v. Vitale* “completely separated Christian principles from education; the case struck down school prayer” (Barton 17). Two important trends started with this ruling. First, this was the first clear case of judicial tyranny in America. As Barton describes, “it was the first case in Court history to use zero precedents – the Court quoted ‘zero’ previous legal cases” (18). Second, it removes the truth and eternal purpose from public schools.

A similar case in 1963, *Abington v. Schempp*, banned public school Bible reading (Barton 17). These court rulings have now completely altered the purpose and intent of public education in America. Further, it removes all cultivation of transcendent purpose and meaning in students. George Washington warned us that we would fall into moral decline if we tried to separate morality and religion, “Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be



maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” (qtd. in Barton 22). We will discuss further the impact of removing purpose and meaning from public schools, but first let’s take a look at the liberal social policies of the 1960s that have fostered a lawless culture.

The social programs that were advanced in the 1960s, commonly referred to as welfare programs, demolished any sense of personal or national pride and forced a moral change of dependence on God to dependence on the government. Now young men are no longer given any sense of purpose or meaning for life, and have no outward reason to work hard. Woods notes:

The incentives introduced during the 1960s made it less and less likely that people would consider it worthwhile to follow [basic lifestyle steps] . . . The resulting family instability, and the fact that modest economic security was, thanks to the government, now available outside of marriage, led to an explosion in out-of-wedlock births, and with it all the pathologies that social scientists have found among children born outside of two-parent households: poorer academic performance, much greater propensity to crime, drug addiction, and the like. (221-222)

No purpose. No meaning. No incentive. No doubt that the 1960s changed America’s course along the moral compass.

What impact have these events had on our culture today? Barton points out that “every moral measurement which exists for students breaks violently upward with the separation of religious principles from the lives of students in 1962-63” (23). SAT scores dropped sharply for eighteen consecutive years (24). Just recently Rhonda Robinson notes, “our [Illinois] State Board of Education has just lowered math requirements to allow another 32,000 eighth-grade students



to meet the state's math standards" (Robinson). Divorce rates that were declining are now increasing rapidly (23). Violent crime has increased between four hundred and six hundred percent. David Barton sums up the effects of these events best this way:

Since 1962-63, the United States . . . [has become] the world's leader in the most unenviable categories. The United States is now #1 in the world in violent crime, #1 in the world in divorce, #1 in the western world in teenage pregnancies, #1 in the world in voluntary abortions, #1 in the world in AIDS cases, #1 in the world in illegal drug use, and #1 in the western world in illiteracy (of all industrial nations, we have the highest illiteracy rate). (27)

It is kind of hard to say, "I'm proud to be an American" after digesting those facts. How can we possibly turn this course back to true north?

As noted, the moral and academic decline in America can be traced back to removal of God from public schools and social policies. Scripture confirms that this is the problem in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline," and in Ephesians 6:7-8 "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." Without fear of the Lord we can not obtain knowledge, and our work is pointless. In order to avoid immorality and depravity in my own life, I had to continually seek purpose and meaning. I found temporary purpose and meaning but was not truly satisfied until I found the transcendent purpose and meaning in Jesus Christ. There was hope for me, and there is still hope for America.

Throughout history, times often had to get worse before they would get better. Lewis offers this "What's even more encouraging is to remember that the light of knighthood arose in



the suffocating moral darkness and social chaos of the rough-and-tumble Middle Ages” (12). I weep for my country. It feels like things are going to have to get much much worse before the majority will wake from their apathetic slumber. However, in light of my personal experience and historical review, I think there is something we can start to do today to turn things around. We need to give our young men their purpose back!

First, we must return the glory to God. We must allow prayer and Bible reading in public schools. As I mentioned earlier, the Supreme Court cases in the 1960s were decided with zero precedent. All cases that came before the Supreme Court prior to 1962 upheld the intentions of our Founding Fathers. In one ruling by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1892: “No purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people . . . This is a Christian nation” (qtd. in Barton 11). Furthermore, Barton goes on to note that, “the Court provided 87 different historical precedents to support its conclusions” (11). With out any doubt, our nation is a Christian nation, and it was most successful when its citizens acknowledged this fact. God will not bless those that do not acknowledge Him.

Since we can not bring Bible reading and prayer directly into the public school curriculum right now, the immediate step to take is to continue supporting the work of groups like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Boy Scouts of America, among others. These clubs reach out to kids in public schools to provide them with the purpose and meaning that is centered on Jesus Christ, which is lacking in secular education programs. In the long term, we need to support elected officials that understand this fundamental need, continue to fight in the court rooms to regain our religious liberties, and prayerfully petition for God’s forgiveness of our nation’s sins.



Second, we have to return to cultivating purpose and meaning in boys' lives so they can become men. We live in such affluence in America that it is hard to challenge our young men. It seems to me that if young men do not fall into state custody, they are staying home and living with their parents until their late twenties or early thirties. They have no incentive and no ambition to strike out on their own. Instead of adventuring, producing, saving, or solving, they are partying! All of their energy is spent on self, or as Lewis describes, "the unrestrained passions of masculinity, which can tear at the fabric of society" (45-46). If it were not for my Dad pushing me out of the nest, I would have been one of them. Dr. Kennedy proclaims:

They seek to cram empty hearts with money, fame, fun—everything but God. For that, they pay an enormous price. Suicide, mental disorders, depression, despair, and hopelessness all ensue from hollow and unsatisfied human hearts. (Kennedy)

Robert Lewis understands this problem intimately. He contends that, "Sons are looking for the substance of life" (40). It is our responsibility as parents, teachers, mentors, and neighbors to put them on the path to the substance of life, even if it means making heart wrenching decisions like my father did.

Again, we find ourselves looking to fill young men with purpose and meaning. This time it is to guide them to the substance of life. If we are already teaching them the eternal purpose and meaning to life found through Jesus Christ, then the substance is the set of values or integrity that will guide them through their lives. Substance gives them the understanding that their choices have consequences beyond themselves, and that they will be held to account for them. Lewis illustrates this by describing "Knights of Christ":

They believed they bore responsibilities to the kingdom of God and to society as a whole, not just to the lords they served. This chivalric code of honor formed the moral and



societal bedrock of noble life; it gave order and **substance** to an age otherwise in chaos and confusion. [emphasis added] (15)

It is hard to do this in America today. Anyone that holds to a strict set of values is considered “in-tolerant.” We have nurtured a culture that considers being bad as “cool” and being good as “lame.” It is going to take a lot of prayer and effort to return to the noble portrayal of manhood epitomized by the Knights of the Dark Ages. First, we must set an example of living by a code of conduct. Second, we must pass this code of conduct on to our young men and hold them accountable to it. Finally, we must challenge them with adventures that promote a moral and just society and bring honor to God.

My experience has taught me that I need purpose in my life, and I found true purpose in Jesus Christ. Looking at society through this understanding, we can see that many of our social woes can be attributed to the removal of God from our public school system. Contrast the state of our culture prior to the 1960s with the current state, and it seems to confirm it. It is going to take many years of hard work to reverse what has taken forty years to produce, but we must stop the current advance toward self destruction. The solution is simple, young men need purpose.



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