

FROM THE HEART

Our culture has provided us with _____ we need, with the exception of what we need most.

Unfortunately, the Church in our era has not filled the gap.

SOME STATISTICS FOR COMMITTED, CHURCH-GOING CHRISTIANS:

___ out of 10 say they do not feel that they have experienced God's presence or a real connection with him during their weekly worship service.

Half say they have not entered into the presence of God or experienced a genuine connection with him in the past year.

The typical church member will die without leading _____ person to a lifesaving relationship with Christ.

And at any given moment, a majority of believers do not have a specific person for whom they are praying that he or she will come to Christ.

When asked what constitutes success in life, few believers define success in spiritual terms. Most talk about professional achievement, family solidarity, physical accomplishments, or _____ acquisition.

In a typical week, only one in four will allocate some time to serving others, and most of that is serving other members of the church, not needy people outside of the congregation.

The typical American Christian would much rather _____ to an organization than do something personally that would alleviate the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, though they give only 3% of their income to charitable causes.

Being a Christian is less about attending church and more about _____ for a cause.

And being a disciple is not the same as being a good guy; it's being God's guy whose heart breaks over the things that break the heart of God and whose _____ is given to what God is doing in the world to spread his Kingdom.

The male heart was created to be a reservoir of _____ and the calling upon every male is to use that strength in a cause worthy of who we are as the sons of God.

1 Kings 2.1-3a: When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires ..."

You have a God-given right to live from the heart that God placed in you.

And you have a _____ to give the strength that is within your male heart to a cause that honors God and spreads his Kingdom.

And if you don't, a part of you will die.

“When a great love births a great commitment to a great cause, the result is a great life.”

The commitment God will call you to make to the cause of his Kingdom will speak to the depths of your heart – both to your individual heart and also to the male heart that is within you.

WHAT DID GOD CREATE MEN TO BE AND DO?

1. MEN WERE CREATED TO BE _____.

It is our nature to initiate and to take the lead in providing what others need for the fullness of life.

Genesis 2:15: The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Job One for Adam: **provide care and oversight for the world** that God has created; and later, use creation to **provide for those who will depend upon him**.

Ephesians 5.25-27: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ... and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish ...

In the same way that Jesus took the initiative and through his life and death gave the church all we need to become radiant and blameless and holy, **husbands are to provide what their wives need** so they can flourish and fulfill their potential and become who God created them to be.

Ephesians 6.4: Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Provide instruction and direction for your children – give them what they need to follow God’s call on their lives.

There is a need within us, it’s part of our nature, to provide protection and security and direction and _____ for others.

Moore and Gillette: It looks upon the world with a firm but kindly eye. It sees others in all their weakness and in all their talent and worth. It honors them ... it guides them and nurtures them ... it is not envious because it is secure ... in its own worth. It rewards and encourages ... others.

This is the part of our nature that wants the world to be just, and the innocent to be protected, and those who try and work hard to be rewarded.

This is in your heart because it’s in God’s heart.

Jeremiah 29.11: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

2. MEN WERE CREATED TO BE _____.

Two Questions on Our Final Exam:

A. Where are your scars?

B. Was there nothing worth _____ for?

Before God created humanity, evil already existed.
 And God knew that battles would have to be fought.
 And so he created men with a heart to fight battles that _____.

Erwin McManus in The Barbarian Way: It may seem counterintuitive, but the more civilized we seem to become, the more detached from the pain of others we end up finding ourselves. The most civilized churches have really no practical concern for people outside their congregations. The brokenness of a lost and unbelieving world is not enough to inspire the painful changes necessary to make the church relevant to the world in which we live. One of the tragedies of a civilized society is that no one wants to get involved. What becomes appropriate is to mind our own business. When we join a community that lacks a passionate heart for the world, we soon find ourselves acquiescing to apathy. It is a painful tragedy to see a brand-new follower of Christ alive with a barbarian spirit conformed to the status quo.

The forces of evil and poverty and spiritual darkness are warring against the children that God loves and they're saying, "I dare you to do something about it."
 And the question is: How are we going to respond?

2 Timothy 4.6-7: ... The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Your male heart is looking for a battle that matters.
 Deny it and your life will be safe and comfortable – but it will never experience the “more” that you were created to be and do.

3. MEN WERE CREATED TO BE _____.

Men have the sense that they are supposed to _____ stuff.
 And men have a desire to pass that knowledge on to others.

Middle-age: when you quit setting a bad example and start giving good advice.

Most of us want to be a source that helps others _____ by sharing the lessons and the wisdom we have gained through our life experiences.
 And most of us who have enjoyed some success in our professions can point to one or two individuals who formally or informally served as a guide and a teacher.
 And most of us see that personal investment in our lives as a _____ of incredible value.
 And the real point of being a mentor, especially a spiritual mentor, is to teach someone how to _____.

Being a mentor doesn't mean having it all together.
 As a matter of fact, you'll often do the most good when you share how you've _____ it, how hard the journey has been, and how you have learned through your mistakes and your struggles.

I am a friend of Rob Renfroe and he told me about your cancer diagnosis. Although I don't know you, I know a little of what you are going through right after you hear the news that you have cancer. It certainly raises a lot of questions. I think I asked them all... some not very reverently. I don't think you feel very reverent when they tell you you have cancer. Shocked. Disappointed. Angry. Sad. Confused. Depressed. But I don't think you feel reverent. At the time that really worried me. I wondered if maybe I really didn't have faith... or at least I didn't have the faith I needed to stand up to this challenge. I wondered if God would be mad at me if I asked a bazillion questions and at the tone of my questions. I wondered if God would be angry with me if I was angry with Him, because I was. To make matters worse, I felt terrible physically. I didn't really have the energy to go on some grand "quest" for faith. I felt kind of stuck. I couldn't move forward emotionally or spiritually. I didn't want to read Christian books that try to answer the question of why bad things happen to Christians. I didn't want to read obscure Bible passages that some of my friends said helped them. I didn't want to listen to Christian music. I didn't want to spend hours in prayer. I didn't want to go to a Christian counselor. I appreciated my Christian friends sending notes, cards, e-mails and visiting me. But their visits didn't answer my questions, allay my fears or really "fix" anything.

One day I remembered a story I heard my pastor tell back in High School. He said that as a young man he had worked in the oil fields. Sometimes he helped dig ditches. One day, after a huge rain, they were digging a 10 foot trench and it caved in on a man. They all started trying to dig him out. You couldn't use the machinery because it might hit him and do further damage. But someone got a pipe and ran it down through the mud. Then he connected the pipe to an air pump and they pumped air into the mud. It seems that the mud separates from someone's face when they are buried and the air percolates through the mud and somehow, don't ask me how, they can breathe down there. My pastor said that sometimes life caves in on us and we feel like we're buried under the mud. He said prayer is the lifeline that keeps us alive and helps us breathe spiritually. So, he said, when you feel buried keep praying. It doesn't matter, he said, if the prayers are deep or correct. Just keep the lifeline open.

So, I decided to pray. I found that to be very difficult. Before I had cancer, it seemed easy. I prayed every day, sometimes several times a day, sometimes for long periods of time. Suddenly, I couldn't really seem to pray at all. It almost felt as if God had deserted me when I needed Him most. I always saw prayer as a "conversation". I seemed to sense that God was listening and responding to my prayers. Then, when I had cancer and needed that sensation, it wasn't there. I felt like I was talking out into the darkness and there wasn't even an echo. But, I resolved to go on praying. I decided to pray the Lord's prayer every night. That was all I could do and I didn't feel anything when I did it.

I also decided to read some Scripture from time to time. I mostly read and re-read the passages that we all know. Psalms 23. John 3:16. Psalm 121. John 14. Nothing new or shocking. I just read them. They seemed a part of keeping

the lifeline open. But it didn't make me feel better or answer any of my questions. I just made myself do it.

Both Rob and Dr. Hinson were very kind to me during this time. I remember Rob sitting on my den floor and crying with me when I told him I couldn't pray. Rob said that we can't separate the physical from the spiritual and he could understand why I couldn't pray since I was throwing up about every 30 minutes for weeks on end. Dr. Hinson came to my hospital room at about 11 PM one evening. He said that when he had cancer he found it very difficult to pray too. I remember thinking "Wow! A spiritual giant like him?" I guess misery loves company because I took comfort in the fact that he had trouble praying too.

I felt like I was hanging on to God and my faith by a thread. It seemed to take all the spiritual energy I had just to hang on to what slight relationship with God I had. This went on for several months and the questions kept coming.

It was probably around Christmas (about 4 1/2 months after my diagnosis) that I remembered another sermon. In that sermon the pastor said that God was as tenacious as a bulldog in holding on to us. It seemed important to me to visualize that God was holding on to me. I didn't have to do all the holding. So I prayed, "God, I don't know if I can hold on to you. I guess you'll have to hold on to me." I think that was my first little breakthrough. I relaxed a little for the first time. No, I didn't suddenly start praying like mad and having great insights into my deepest questions. I just relaxed a little and trusted God to hold on to me when I couldn't hold on to Him. It was just a little breakthrough.

Well, I have probably written too much. You don't know me and I don't know you. You may not feel like I felt and our questions may be different. I would be glad to correspond with you via e-mail if I can be of help. You have to know that any question you raise or anger you feel would not upset me! It will be a couple of weeks before my next round of chemo and I hope I will be feeling well enough to answer you if you write during this time.

I have also had to learn some things about cancer through all of this. If you have regular old, non-technical, cancer questions I would be glad to try to answer some of them. Or, I will try to direct you to some resource at least.

My offer is sincere. I feel best when I am of help to somebody and I would like to be of some small help to you.

Brad Ramsey