

The Raw, Restless Energy of Men

Luke 8:4-15, Matthew 22:29

Good morning, men! How is everybody doing? I was talking to a friend of mine who is middle-aged. He is a gym rat and he was telling me about this. He has these 16-inch arms. He finished his work out and he was making his way to the door as a young, 22-year-old, really cute girl was making her way to the door too. He saw that she saw him, and he didn't have any ill intentions, but it made him feel really good that she noticed him being so buff. He felt really good about himself so they got to the gym door at about the same time and she said, "Here, sir, let me get the door for you."

OOPS! THIS ISN'T WHAT I WAS EXPECTING

This morning we are going to talk about the raw, restless energy of men. You know, ever since you were a little boy, you have always had this raw, powerful, restless energy. You have always wanted to do something with your life. You have always wanted it to count and make a difference. And you dream of harnessing this powerful energy into a satisfying life, but – oops! This isn't what I was expecting. Something happened along the way. I would say that most men would feel they are half alive. They feel like life is passing them by.

I've been doing this for over four decades and I have met with literally thousands of men, one-on-one: after the Bible study here, over at the restaurant for breakfast, over coffee at lunch in business meetings, and many, many places where I've met men one-on-one. When men try to describe or put into words what they think is holding them back, they invariably mention one or more of these seven symptoms....

- I just feel like I am in this thing alone.
- I don't feel like God cares about me personally.
- I don't feel like my life has purpose. It feels like things are random.
- I have these destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.
- My soul feels dry.
- Many of the most important relationships are not working.
- And finally, I just don't feel like I am doing anything that is making a difference and leaving the world a better place.

Now, most men believe, or at least strongly sense, that they were created to lead a powerful, transformed life. It is a sensation that you have this raw restless energy as a man and you have that intuition that you were created for a powerful life. And yet, something is holding men back. So don't answer out loud or raise your hand or anything, but do you see yourself on this list? Do you have these inner aches and pains? Do you have *some of* these inner aches and pains?

Well, these seven symptoms correspond to seven primal, instinctive, God-given needs that all men have. By primal I mean that as men we have this raw, restless, powerful energy that is different from women. It needs to be channeled; it needs to be chiseled; it needs to be transformed; and yet most men—and in fact I would estimate 90% of Christian men—lead stagnant, often defeated lives, and they hate it.

The statistics are jarring. For example, one researcher found that 80% of men are so emotionally impaired that—not only can they not express their feelings—they cannot even identify their feelings.

And the collateral damage is staggering. I've given plenty of statistics over the years here... and the greatest area is family and what happens. The greatest cost is the physical absence of the father and the practical absence of the mother, because now the woman must do the work of two people. One young woman who lost her dad when her parents got divorced [said], "I lost my dad [but] I lost my mom too, because she had to go to work to support us. So I lost both parents." So the collateral damage is staggering.

So there are these presenting problems, but presenting problems are actually symptoms of deeper problems, yes? So if you have shortness of breath you go to the doctor and you say your problem is shortness of breath, yes? Yes, that's your presenting problem. It is really a symptom of a deeper problem, and you know that. When you have a broken relationship do you think of that as your problem? Well, yes, that's a problem, but it is a symptom of a deeper problem, right? If you are in tune with your spirit, and you have a bitter spirit, you know that is the presenting problem and it is the symptom of a deeper problem.

I have a friend that I haven't seen for three years. I've known him for six or seven years. Let's call him Steve. He has a beautiful family – a delightful son and daughter, lovely wife, a great marriage. Great job. Lots of success. Then I heard two years ago that he got cancer. So I sent him an email and told him I was praying for him. He sent back an email that said he didn't need prayer and the doctors had everything under control.

Last week I heard that the cancer was not gone, he filed for a divorce with his wife and he will not speak with either of his two children. He has been fired from his very big job. He spends most of his day drinking and playing cards, living a life of dissipation. He's lost a lot of weight and he is a very bitter person. I just heard this.

How does that happen? How do these presenting problems spin out of control, and how do we get them under control? These presenting problems men have... what is really going on and what can we do about it?

WHY DO SOME MEN LEAD POWERFUL, TRANSFORMED LIVES WHILE OTHERS DON'T?

Let's answer this question: why do some men lead powerful transformed lives and why do some men not? Turn to Luke 8. We're going to look at Verses 4 through 15. This is a very well-known parable about

the sower. The parable begins with the sower going out to scatter seed. Some of it lands on the rocky path, some in the stony ground, some in the thorny soil, and some on the good soil.

Jesus explains what the parable means, beginning in Verse 11. So the question we want to answer this morning is why do some men lead powerful transformed lives while others don't? Jesus explains the answer to that question in these next few verses. This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the Word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the Word from their ears so they cannot live and be saved. So the purpose of the thief is to steal and to kill and to destroy. The purpose of the thief is to steal kill and destroy. Anytime the devil gets a chance to take away the Word of God, then he's going to come like a little vulture and peck away and take it away. That's the first verse. That's the first soil.

The second type of soil is in Luke 8:13. Those on the rocky soil are the ones that receive the Word with joy when they hear it but they have no root. They believed for a while but in the time of testing they fall away. And so you have seen men who walk the aisle, pray the sinner's prayer, but then they return in the same old seats and resume their former lives and they wonder why things don't change. That's what's going on here.

In Verse 14, the third soil, the seed that fell upon thorns, stands for those who do hear the Word of God. But as they go on their way, that Word gets choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

Finally, the seed lands on good soil, the fourth soil. It stands for those with noble and good hearts, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering, produce a crop.

Well, what's the point here? The point is that Christianity is not about receiving Jesus and then doing what you want to do. It's about beginning the process of a transforming renewal process through the Word of God. And so you know, despite their good intentions, these men who walk the aisle pray the prayer and then return to their former lives. They don't take the next steps. Almost imperceptibly, one disappointment at a time, the world sucks out their newfound joy and faith in Christ. So men lose heart, they withdraw, they anesthetize their pain, and then they either drop out, burn out, or just slowly drift away.

Jesus gives us an insight into why this happens. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus is speaking to a group of confused religious leaders. He says the problem is, "You are in error because you do not know the scriptures, and you do not know the power of God." The word power is the word *dunamis*, from which we get dynamite. So you do not know the scriptures and you do not have the dynamite of God in your hand. This is the kind of power that Jesus envisioned when he was actually moving things — the power to actually make things happen.

Here's the big idea for the day. Digging into the Word of God is easily the number one factor that differentiates men who have tapped into God's power. Digging into the Word of God is easily the number one factor that differentiates men leading powerful, transformed lives from their lukewarm counterparts.

Now there are other factors involved, too. As we get into this series we'll be unpacking those. And we're going to be looking at differentiating success factors. We've talked about this here before. In business you could ask the question, what do men who live powerful, transformed lives do? You would start out with: they go to church, they send their kids to youth group, they serve on committees. What's the problem with that question? Well, there are lots of men who do not lead powerful, transformed lives who do the same things – they go to church, they send their kids to youth group and they serve on committees. So asking what do men who lead powerful, transformed lives do is not the right question.

The correct question is – What is it that men who lead powerful, transformed lives do differently than their lukewarm counterparts? Now in business, we call these the differentiated success factors. I don't know what they call them in ministry, so I'll just call them differentiated success factors. The point is that if you look at a man who is leading a lukewarm, stagnant, often defeated life even though he hates it, you will find inevitably he is not digging into the Word of God.

It is impossible for a man who regularly looks into God's Word not to lead a powerful, transformed life. If what I just said is not true, I quit. I mean it. If God's Word, what we just read, is not true, I want nothing to do with it. Well, I have little risk there because I am personal evidence, and I see lots of you as evidence that this is the truth of God. **Digging into the Word of God is by far and away the number one thing that differentiates guys leading powerful lives from guys living lukewarm, stagnant counterparts.**

MOVING FORWARD AT THE SPEED OF GRACE

Let's talk about moving forward at the speed of grace. There is a rhythm to all of this "powerful transformed life." The Bible is truth, but it is also an urgent call that demands an immediate response.

One of the men who does the Internet Bible study told me a story about Carlos. Carlos heard that this man was a part of a Bible study at his church. Carlos approached him and started attending the Bible study for a few weeks. Then he stopped coming. The man heard that Carlos had returned to South America and got involved in drug trafficking. A long period of time went by. He got a call one day from Carlos asking if they could have coffee. He agreed. They met at a restaurant and Carlos told this story.

He had moved down to South America and gotten involved in drugs and gambling and he had lost his family in the process. He had left them and lost his family in the process. His father wouldn't speak to him and he'd been completely estranged from all of these people. They wanted nothing to do with him.

He had moved back to the States, and he had remembered how he had felt the presence of God when they would study the Bible together. He started coming back to church, started reading the Bible for himself, and began to try to mend his ways. Things started to turn around a little bit for him. He got a good job making good money, found a new girlfriend, and then in the process of digging into God's Word for himself, one day he decided to stop praying just that God would bless him, but he began to pray that he would understand the will of God.

Within a matter of a few weeks, he had lost his job, his finances had crumbled, his car was repossessed, he borrowed a car from his new girlfriend, she found out that he was married and demanded that he give the car back, and basically his world crumbled and fell apart. There he was now at this coffee shop telling this story. Carlos decided that he would get back involved in the Bible study. Over the next several months, the changes began to become apparent – at least, to everyone around them.

Carlos began to have a deep yearning – a deep desire to be reconciled with his family. They were still in South America, and the problem was they wanted nothing to do with him. So he decided that he wanted to take the step, but he didn't know what to do. As soon as he made the decision to make the step, he also decided that he wanted to, if he could, meet on neutral ground. He has a wife and two beautiful girls. I have a picture of them. He didn't know what to do.

A week later, he finds out that his two girls have won a cruise in a school contest that will be docking in Miami in two weeks. But he didn't have any money to do anything about it. One of the men in his Bible study had some frequent flier miles so he arranged a ticket for Carlos to go to Miami. Just before he left, to his horror, he discovered that his mother-in-law would also be on the trip — his greatest enemy and opponent for a long, long time. But then he found out that one month earlier she had become a Christian. So when he was sharing with his family in Miami the changes that were taking place, she changed from being his biggest opponent to his biggest ally. He begged his wife to give him another chance. She said if you will come back to South America and live in the same town we can work on this...we can work on this.

With that ray of hope, he now has no place to stay in South America, and his father won't talk to him, but he calls his father anyway. After his father hurled many insults and much abuse at him, his father agreed that he could come and live with him in the town where his family was. Carlos moved in. His father had become an alcoholic and his health was failing. He didn't get out of the house, and for all intents and purposes, he was a shut-in. But Carlos began to take care of his father. His father had a heart attack and he nursed him back from that. Carlos began reading the Bible to his father every day. Carlos' dad went from being a virtual recluse in poor health, to a very outgoing, vivacious man who barely would stay at home anymore. Carlos was there when his father died knowing the Lord.

The way that Carlos lived with his father said more to his wife and his girls than any amount of words would have ever been able to say. A softening began to occur there. And then the man he knew who told me his story began to get photographs of Carlos and his two girls at the beach. And then one day the photographs were of Carlos, his two girls and his wife at the beach. He was able to invite his wife to come to a Bible study and she agreed to do that. She became a Christian too. Then they got back together again. Just two or three weeks ago the whole family went on a missions trip together.

The difference between a man who leads a powerful, transformed life and one who doesn't is [that the former] is digging into the Word of God. The power of God is found in the Word of God. **Easily the number one factor that differentiates men who have it together from men who don't is that they are digging into the Word of God.** Carlos is going to be okay. He is moving at the speed of grace. You can't

push this. That's our American mindset. We want what we want right now. God had His own speed, and it's called grace.

PREVIEW

Let's take a minute to tell you about this series. The promise for this series—and it's not from me, it's from God's Word—is the rest of John 10:10. The purpose of the thief is, "to steal, to kill and to destroy," but Jesus said His purpose is that you might have a rich and satisfying life. That is the promise. The promise of the whole series is that you don't have to settle for half of a life. You can lead a powerful, transformed life. You can be the good soil.

Listen, it is not self-indulgent for you to become the man God created you to be. Instead, it's actually your destiny. It's your destiny to lead a powerful, transformed life – not without problems but trained and equipped with the power to prevail. That's the deal.

What's ahead? We are going to look at each of these seven primal needs...

- First is to feel like I don't have to do life alone.
- Second is to feel like God really does know, love and care about me personally.
- Third is to know my purpose in life.
- Fourth is to be able to conquer these destructive behaviors.
- Fifth will be how to understand transcendence, awe, and communion to God, and to have a healthy soul.
- Sixth will be to be able to love, and be loved, without reservation and to have healthy relationships.
- Seventh is to understand how you can make your mark in the world – how you can leave the world a better place.

These will be the seven primal needs that we take a look at in this series. We are going to expose how it feels when it is not going right, what makes it so difficult, and what you can do about each of these needs. That's what our series is about. This is an introduction this morning. Let us pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our dearest Father,

We come to you humbly this morning. We know that we do have this raw, powerful, restless energy. We've always had it. We've always wanted our lives to count and make a difference, and Lord, thank you that it doesn't have to be that we are half alive – that we can be man alive, that we can experience transforming power in our lives, that it's our destiny to lead powerful, transformed lives.

We pray that as we do each of these next seven sessions, that you have put on the hearts of some of the men guys that they know, who really need this transforming encounter with you, and they might drag some guys through the keyhole.

I pray for each of the men who are hearing this that you would take that amorphous kind of pain that we carry around with us and that you would release it. I pray that by the end of this session there would not be anybody left who really does not understand and believe that you want them to have an abundant life. I ask this in Jesus' name.