

Men With Purpose

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by Peter Window

‘Give a boy a task, and you will build his skills. Give a boy responsibility, and you will build a man with a sense of purpose’

There is a measure of truth in this statement. Men do find purpose through responsibility. He shoulders the responsibility and through this understands the direction he should go, the path he should take. Men are husbands, fathers, serving brothers, speakers, Youth Group committee members; the list goes on. And within these roles and responsibilities, we find purpose.

But if this is the only means through which we build purpose, it is a path fraught with danger. If the responsibility is taken from us, our sense of purpose goes with it. The sole provider for the family who can no longer work due to illness – where’s his purpose? The father whose children grow up and leave the house. He is still a father, but there has been a significant shift in what that responsibility looks like – where’s his purpose? The dutiful ecclesial recorder or committee secretary who finishes in the role – what is his purpose?

Herein is the issue. When we attach our sense of purpose to the roles and responsibilities we have, our purpose is only as sure as the role and responsibility we carry. And worse: when we fail in our responsibility, our purpose fails with it. And we risk becoming rudderless. Our true purpose must stem from something deeper. Not from our various roles and responsibilities which we find ourselves in, and which are transient and move like the shifting sand. But from our **identity**. If we have an identity that is rock solid and sure and steadfast and immovable, the purpose that stems from that will possess the same qualities. But our identity is sometimes harder to pinpoint. Compared to roles and responsibilities which seem so concrete, an identity can seem almost intangible.

I recall an incident at work a few years ago. One of my colleagues (let’s call her Jane) had a daughter who was turning 4. Jane was planning a birthday party for this auspicious occasion, and conversation in the tearoom had been dominated for several days by the planning phase. Jane had everything organised: a cake (unicorn with fairy dust), a location (by the water at Scarborough on the Redcliffe Peninsula), gifts, invites, decorations, food, everything had been planned to the last detail. There was just one element that was outside Jane’s control that was dominating the conversation within the team on this particular morning as the weekend drew closer: the weather.

The forecast was not good. The BOM [*weather bureau*] was suggesting 50-60mm was going to fall across the day. It was a pending disaster. Accordingly, the team were dutifully offering support and suggestions for contingencies in an effort to address the potential crisis. Mid-conversation however, Jane turned directly to me and said (her words):

“Pete, you’re a man of God. Can you send a prayer upstairs and ask Him to hold off on the rain?”

I was a little taken aback, for several reasons. For starters, while I didn’t hide my faith at work, I didn’t recall having specifically discussed it with Jane. Second, being the centre of attention is not my comfort zone, and at this point, all eyes were on me. Third, I felt that such lofty a title seemed at odds with such trivial a need. But most importantly, I was taken aback because I felt deeply uncomfortable with being called a man of God.

Who, me? A man of God? I don’t qualify for that title! Sure, it’s something I aspire to, but it would be presumptuous to assume it. That title is reserved for the highest echelons of spiritual men – Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah. Not me.

But, in the middle of the conversation, there was no time to articulate these nuanced concerns. Instead, I managed to stammer *‘I’ll see what I can do’*, and the conversation thankfully shifted to gazebos and tarps.

I suggest that this is a central issue for us all. How can we accept an identity that we feel unqualified to hold? But we must.

The title '*Man of God*' is used 78 times in the Bible, of various individuals. There is one man, however, who is given this title as his sole identity. We're not told his name or his specific lineage. We're not told his occupation. We're not told the town or city he came from. We're just told he was a man of God. It's the fascinating story of the man of God from Judah, who is commissioned by God to deliver a message of judgement against Jeroboam and the apostate worship he had established. 17 times in scripture and 15 times just in 1 Kings 13 he's referred to as '*the man of God from Judah*'. He delivers God's message and commences his journey back to Judah under strict instructions from God not to stay in Israel but to return to Judah another way. But tragically, he believes a lie. He is deceived by the prophet of Israel into returning to his house. And because he disobeyed the Word of God, he failed in his mission. There were catastrophic personal consequences, killed by a lion as he returns home. And there were catastrophic consequences to the man of God's failure for the nation of Israel. Jeroboam saw this event unfold, and the record says, '*after this, Jeroboam returned not from his evil way*'. His apostate worship continued and would turn an entire nation away from God for over 300 years.

But here's the point. We read in 1 Kings.13:26 that people see the lion standing over the dead body with the donkey standing by, and they tell the city:

*'And when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, "**It is the man of God** who disobeyed the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word that the LORD spoke to him.'*

Our personal failings do not strip us of our status as men of God.

330 years later, after generation upon generation of Israel had been brought up in idolatrous worship due to this man's catastrophic error, King Josiah enters Bethel to destroy Jeroboam's system of worship. He pulls down the altar at Bethel, he burns bones from the adjacent tombs upon it. And then he sees a monument above a tomb, as yet untouched. He asks after it and is told "*It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel.*" And he said, "*Let him be; let no man move his bones.*" (2 Kings.23:17)

Our personal failings can have catastrophic effects on the lives of others, but they do not define our status as men of God.

Being a man of God is not an identity that we assume for ourselves on the background of our personal success. It's a title given to us by God that is independent of our mistakes. If our identity were fixed solely on our capability to represent the man of God perfectly, none of us would ever assume the title.

This is how identity fuels purpose. It's both **being** and **becoming**. We are Men of God (being) and we are becoming Men of God (purpose).

If we lose sight of our being, we'll lose sight of our becoming.

Paul highlights this idea in his letter to Timothy. Timothy was facing issues around disrespect shown to masters, around pursuing harmful desires and lusting for wealth. And Paul makes it clear to Timothy that 1) he is a man of God (in title); and 2) his purpose was to become a man of God (in behaviour)

"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." 1Ti 6:11-12

You are a man of God. So, pursue godliness. Strive for it. Take hold of it. And as we do this, collectively we build up THE Man of God – Christ in all of us.

And so, men:

When you're at work and there's a temptation to disrespect your boss: *I am a Man of God*

When there's potential to spread gossip or slander and fuel envy and strife: *I am a Man of God*

When there's an urge to strive after wealth and harmful desires: *I am a Man of God*

When life's circumstances have left you no longer in the role or responsibility through which you had found purpose, and you're struggling to find direction and meaning: *You're still a Man of God*

When you're in a pit of depression and the word of God is not a constant companion in your life: *You're still a man of God*

When you've fallen into addiction that is leaving you a shadow of who you should be and who you desire to be: *You're still a man of God*

When you've tried to follow God but in weakness you disobeyed God's word, with catastrophic consequences for you personally, and for a whole nation for generations to follow: *When the righteous king comes to restore the house, he will see a monument that has determined you as a Man of God who proclaimed God's word. You're still a man of God.*

Fuse yourself to that identity. Accept it and all that it entails. Because from that identity your purpose to become a man of God, will flow. You might be called upon to heal a general from leprosy or bring a widow's son to life. Or perhaps just to hold off some rain for a 4 year old's birthday party. *You're still a Man of God.*

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Further reading...

[*"How the Bible can help with Mental Health"*](#) Gary Steel

[*"Let's talk about mental health"*](#)

[*"Loneliness"*](#) Kylee Mingham

[*"Useful resources around loss and grief"*](#)