

To the Men: A Letter from Mark Hart

It's not easy being a man.

"Amen!" every man replies, noting that "amen" is, obviously, a masculine term in and of itself. (Not really, given its Hebrew derivative, but go with me here.)

Think about it:

Who gets alerted when the spider needs to be killed or the weeds whacked? The man. Who gets awoken out of a dead sleep when it's time to fix a leaky roof, plunge a clogged toilet, wet-vac a flooded basement, or stop a ninja from burglarizing the house? The man. Who gets called and asked how to work the universal remote so not to miss recording a crappy romantic "dramedy" (dramatic comedy, that is) which he will later be forced to watch under the threat of perpetual married celibacy? That's right, the man.

My upbringing and story, my brothers, is much like your own. Allow me to explain..

I slept on a bed of thorns with a rock for a pillow... because I'm a man.
I built my house using only a Swiss Army knife... because I'm a man.
I flossed with barbed wire and I peed turpentine... because I'm a man.
I showered in acid rain and I use chlorine for mouthwash... because I'm a man.
I wrestled gators for morning exercise and then ate them for breakfast... because I'm a man.
I shaved with the fang of a cobra and swam with a piranha when I needed my hair-cut... because I'm a man.
I knelt on shards of glass when I prayed, reciting the Scriptures from memory... because I'm a man.

And that one time that people thought I cried in public (after the police must have obviously dispersed invisible tear gas) in the delivery room, moments after my daughter was born... those weren't tears, they were beads of sweat from having to do the hard part during delivery.

(We pause the blog at this point to apologize to my wife for that last comment. Obviously the doctor had the hardest job that day. Just kidding, again, honey. Yes, I'll go sleep in the guest room now.)

To my brothers who are still reading this (and to any sisters in Christ who are creeping on this blog obviously written just for men), allow me to speak realistically and sincerely for a minute.

The world has given us a jacked-up vision of "true manhood." We live in an age where men get applauded simply for "showing up" inside a church or for not being addicted to pornography. Praise for such things is just ridiculous. I love my wife and kids and am not ashamed to say it. I love being married, too, which I don't believe we hear men utter enough publicly. Additionally, I believe

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that if you have to tell someone how hard you work, you don't. I believe that if you have to tell someone a joke is funny, it's clearly not. I believe the designated hitter is a far greater sports travesty than a mulligan and that if you didn't get choked up during either "The Natural," "Hoosiers," or "Brian's Song" then not only are you not a man, you need to consult your cardiologist to see if you even have a pulse.

Most importantly, I believe in a God who believes in me. I kneel before a Saviour – your Saviour – Jesus Christ who died for me, who looked through my unworthiness and declared worth. And I follow a Spirit who, daily, sets before me a steep, treacherous and often unpopular path of virtue. Most days I fail; some days I don't. What keeps me walking and ascending the spiritual mountain is not only my love for Christ but also my spiritual brothers who don't let me settle for less than I am designed to be. I need accountability. I need guys who are willing to kick me in the butt when I'm lazy in my prayer, my exercise, my marriage, or my fatherhood.

And I need to go on retreat at least once a year. To take a weekend or more when no one "needs" anything from me. No early morning emails or late night texts. No stress of deadlines or frustration when others miss theirs. A weekend where I can just be a son of God and not fulfill all the earthly duties that come with being a husband and father, boss or co-worker. Ironically, I need to retreat in order to advance. If you're anything like me, if you're a man seeking to become a better man, I'd like to invite you to retreat, too. Find a retreat near you. Get out of the office and get back to God. In fact, there are a few spots currently remaining for our annual Life Teen Men's Retreat. It is a weekend that has the power to forever change your life and vocation.

Like with anything in a busy life, there are always a hundred other things you could or "should" be doing but it's when we make time for God, the Author of Life, that life, in general, will make better sense and actually become what it's designed to be.

I go on retreat because I'm a man (pursuing God). I encourage you to retreat, too.

Your brother in Christ,
Mark

P.S. Confession – there was no tear gas in that delivery room any of the times, nor in the basilica in which I was married, nor at the innumerable Conferences or Retreats or Ordinations or Weddings in which I've seen young people fearlessly give their hearts and pledge their lives to Christ. Yes, I've wept publicly on those and many more occasions – and so did Jesus, so back off (John 11:35).

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Proverbs 27:17.