



State of Manhood

2024

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DR. ROBERT LEWIS
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After I turned 40, I decided it would be a good idea to start having an annual physical. The sudden heart attack of a good friend had startled me and gotten my attention. So, I began to use my birthday as my yearly reminder to make an appointment for a thorough health checkup. Looking back, it has proven to be one of my smarter moves. Though in most years I get an encouraging “*all clear*” sign from my doctor, there have been a few times, even after coming in feeling good, that red flags went up: skin cancer, a serious heart arrhythmia, high cholesterol. Each of these discoveries sounded an alarm calling for immediate medical attention and long-term life adjustments.

That, of course, is the value of a physical checkup. It's objective, eye-opening, and, best of all, proactive. With a checkup, you can often find ways to take action and make adjustments that help you remedy a current, but perhaps unknown, health situation or escape a more serious one up ahead.

Similarly, today, the church urgently needs another kind of checkup. A manhood checkup. Men, by everyone's account, are currently struggling, and questions on how best to engage them abound. One thing is clear: the church needs a comprehensive, objective report on where men are and, with it, a practical, engaging action plan for what men need in light of those findings. We need a checkup to step up.

For over 30 years, I have had the privilege of working with men both as a pastor and national men's leader. Over those decades, I've seen time and time again the dramatic, life-changing effects that are unleashed when men are inspired in their manhood by spiritual leaders and provided creative ways to connect honestly and deeply with one another around the truth of God's Word. It's been an amazing journey with even more amazing stories.

But as much good as I've seen over this time, I've also found myself increasingly alarmed. I honestly expected more progress with men overall and certainly more “*buy-in*” from church leaders. Much more! But it hasn't happened. Even with the countless times I and others have encouraged pastors and leaders with proven results and practical how-to's for helping them impact their men, it hasn't happened. In fact, despite these “*wins*” with men over the years, godly manhood in the church today actually seems to be in retreat. And manhood generally has become increasingly troubled, taking with it the best of our American culture. Social critic David Brooks of the New York Times warned: “*Everyone should be worried about the state of America's men.*”

So what should we do? As the church? First, we would be wise to take a hard and reflective look at the state of American manhood. That's what this report seeks to do. We need the objective perspective of this overall manhood evaluation as a checkup with our present reality. With it, we have the opportunity to ponder, measure, evaluate, and readjust our thinking to better reach and impact men. One thing, however, should already be obvious. What we're presently doing as churches isn't working! We're losing men.

Second, with these facts in hand, we need to radically step up to man-building. Yes, man-building! Make men a priority in the church and repent of what they often are today, the last in line. The facts are screaming at us to make major changes as churches in how we engage our men. And we need to start now. And we need to start young. With teens. It's not too late.

But it has to start with where we are. So, let's be willing to face the facts of today's state of manhood and embrace what they are telling us. Then and only then can we, as churches and leaders, make the radical changes these facts are calling for and change both men and our world.

DR. CHRIS HARPER

Dr. Chris Harper [aka Harp] is an Amillennial, Calvinistic, complementarian, disciple of JC Ryle, who loves his wife, his four children, books, basketball, and thinks Shawn Carter is a genius. King Jesus is his Savior, Andrew is his hero, and he believes Jordan is better than Lebron.

Harp holds multiple advanced degrees and has studied at the University of Louisville, Dallas Theological Seminary, and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Harp serves as Chief Storyteller & CEO of BetterMan, a leading men's organization that has equipped 3,000+ churches and encourages countless men around the globe.

DAVID CHASE

David is passionate about men's responsibility in the building of culture and the Kingdom, specifically around the intersection of faith & work. He desires that men would have their identity squarely rooted in Christ, transition well through each season of life, and make those transitions without relational regrets.

Beginning work in public school education, David has served organizations in educational technology, the Texas electricity market, a beef cattle ranch, the local church, a nonprofit (BetterMan), and the university classroom teaching business and worldview.

Husband to an amazing wife of 20+ years, and father of two wonderful teens. David earned a Bachelor's degree (Go DBU Patriots!) and an MBA.

DR. JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Dr. Jonathan Williams is the founder and executive director of Gospel Family Ministries. This ministry focuses on strengthening family ministry in the local church and cultivating family worship in the Christian home. Jonathan is the author of *A Practical Theology of Family Worship and Gospel Family*. He also teaches as an adjunct professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX, and is the managing editor of the *Southwestern D6 Family Ministry Journal*. Previously, Jonathan served for 10 years as the senior pastor of Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, TX, a multi-ethnic church of more than 50 nations. He lives in North Texas with his wife and three children.

MALEX FUGET

Malex Fuget is the Ministry Assistant and Lead Researcher for Gospel Family Ministries. He is a passionate ministry leader and a committed member of his local church, FBC Irving, TX. Malex is a graduate of Dallas Baptist University. He has served in preschool ministry, children's ministry, family ministry, men's ministry, and more.

A Man & His Faith

“A CHURCH WILL NEVER RISE BEYOND THE
COMMITMENT OF ITS MEN...”

The religious landscape of North America has shifted. As a nation, we are experiencing the most significant and fastest religious change since the Civil War. What is deemed the era of the “*dechurched*,” nearly 40,000,000 people who formerly attended worship/religious services no longer attend. For the first time since modern tracking and reporting, more adults in the United States don’t attend church than attend church.¹ As Jim Davis points out,

“What we’ve witnessed in the last 25 years is a religious shift about 1.25 times larger in the opposite direction. More people have left the church in this period than all the new people who became Christians from the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening, and Billy Graham crusades combined. This alarming phenomenon has rapidly increased since the mid-1990s.”²

People are leaving the church, and men are *leading* in *leaving*. It was once said the mark of a healthy church is “*crying babies and singing men*.” Today, most churches are void the voices of men. In our day, automation is telling men their skills are worthless. Artificial Intelligence is telling men their wisdom is fruitless. Activists are telling men their gender is hopeless. And the church, with its conscious and unconscious catering to youth and women, is telling men their presence is useless. The typical U.S. Congregation draws an adult crowd that’s 61% female and 39% male. This gender gap shows up in all age categories. Today, churches are not engaging men, and men are not engaging the church.³ This lack of engagement greatly hinders a man’s faith. It is as one man said, “*I don’t hate the church, I just hate that my wife is better at it than me...*”



1 in 4 Men

are not sure about their belief in God



1 in 3 Men

believe religion has no real bearing or importance on one's life



LESS THAN

1 in 3 Men

regularly attend religious service

70% OF MEN

seldom, if ever, participate in any structured prayer, scripture study, or religious education group

70% OF BOYS RAISED IN CHURCH

will leave the church during their late teens and twenties

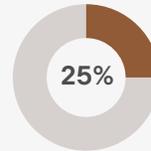
THERE ARE

13 Million

more adult women than men on any Sunday in America's churches



The landscape of the future Church will be female dominant—the typical Christian college in the U.S. enrolls almost two women for every man.



Almost 25% of married, churchgoing women will worship without their husbands this Sunday.

The man-size void in religious life in the West has devastated homes and churches, the cornerstones of any community. Fewer than 10% of Western churches can establish or maintain a vibrant men's ministry. Meanwhile, 80% of all Western churches have a functioning women's ministry. Midweek religious activities often draw 70% more female participants.⁶

In my [Chris] 20 plus years of ministry experience, I've observed that engaging and equipping men is the activity most often missing from the life of the church. Beyond an occasional golf outing or quarterly breakfast where an ex-NFL player talks about "*faith and football*," the church has largely forgotten about men. The result? Men who are called to *serve* and *lead* the church are instead *leaving* the church and are worse off for it.

A Man & His Family

“TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO—BUT BE SURE YOU GO THAT WAY YOURSELF.” — *Charles Spurgeon*

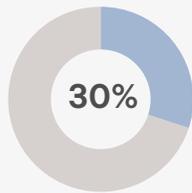
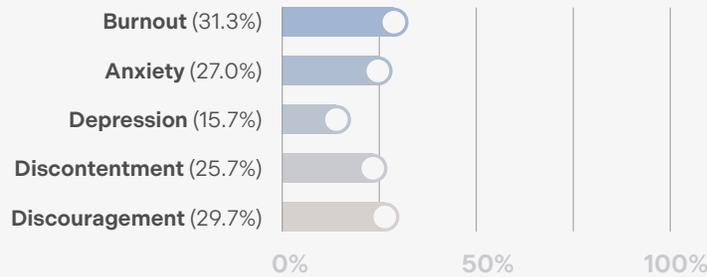
John Piper defines spiritual leadership as, “*Knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God’s methods to get them there in reliance on God’s power.*”

The chief proponent of spiritual leadership in the home is the man (husband/father). Like the priests and prophets of old, the man of the house is directly responsible for ushering his family into the presence of God, while speaking on behalf of God. Be it singing, serving, or reading the Word of God, the man of the house is responsible for consistent, prayerful, Spirit-led family discipleship. The most popular passage for family discipleship is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Deuteronomy 6 carries a command for parents to teach the Word of God diligently to their children. However, before parents are called to lead in this family discipleship, they are commanded to, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might,*” and they are commanded to “*keep the Word of God in their hearts.*”

Before a father can teach the Word of God to his children, he is to love God and delight in God’s commands. Only then can he lead his children to do the same. Many have said, “*You can’t give someone what you don’t have.*” This resonates with us as we recognize that, as men, we cannot lead our families to seek the Lord if we are not seeking the Lord.

This section of the *State of Manhood* gives us a glimpse into the hearts and homes of men, beginning with our own burdens, temptations, and faith before moving toward our call to be shepherd leaders in the home.

Nearly all men report carrying one or more emotional burdens. These burdens include:



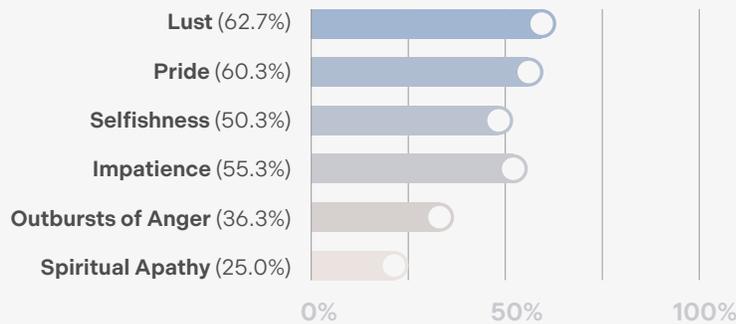
A significant number of men reported feelings of loneliness and isolation. Nearly one-third of the surveyed men revealed a “Lack of Genuine, Male, Godly Friendships” (30.0%), which resulted in feelings of despair and loneliness that directly impacted their spiritual health.



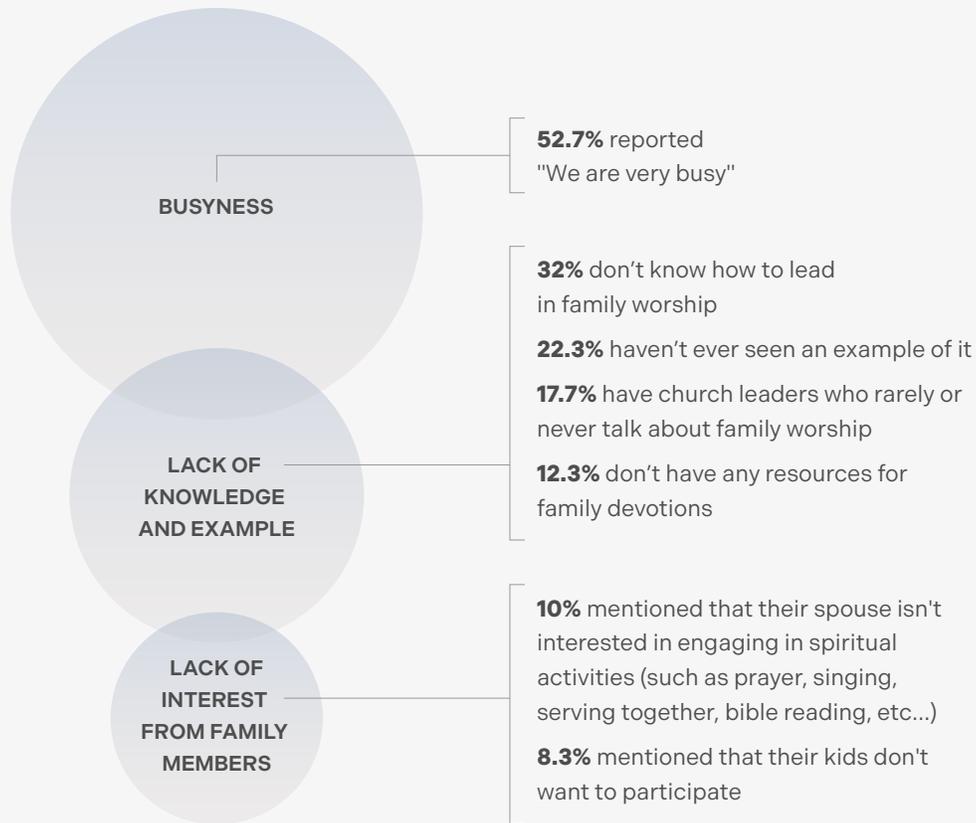
1 in 4 Men

admitted their passivity in spiritually leading their families

As husbands, fathers, and grandfathers seek to lead their families, they confess that, along with these emotional burdens, they face temptations to sin daily. These include:



The emotional and physical burdens men carry directly impact their ability/want to lead their families spiritually. Most of the men surveyed felt inept concerning leading their families spiritually. The challenges they cited were:



I (Jonathan) have this vivid image in my mind from my childhood, palpable memories of me coming down the stairs in the morning to find my father in prayer. I can still see his mug of coffee sitting on the end table. I can hear the pages of his Bible crinkling underneath his folded hands as he knelt in front of that old blue armchair, his face buried in the cushion, lifting up prayers for his family.

That's a Joshua. That's a shepherd leader. That's a husband longing to lead his wife. That's a father aiming to disciple his children. And we need more men like this. Our homes need shepherd leaders. Our homes need men who will lead, love, serve, and disciple. As Husbands, fathers, and grandfathers, men must embrace the privilege and responsibility of spiritual leadership—willing and wanting to point their families to Christ.

The need for spiritual leaders is great. The danger of not having them is even greater.

A Man & His Work

“THE ONLY CHRISTIAN WORK IS GOOD WORK,
WELL DONE.” – *Dorothy Sayers*

The Bible offers a perfect design for work; a purposeful, relational, creative, fulfilling, complete, and beautiful design (Exodus 28:40). We see the Trinity (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) living out a perfect working relationship in the creation story (Genesis 1 & 2). In this story, we have a God-given vocational blueprint that the Creator calls us to follow. God created man and established him as a vice-regent and a co-creator in developing the world. Man, created in God’s image, was created to work—there is goodness in work, and we were made for it (Genesis 2:5).

Today’s work seems a long way off from the description above.

Many American men of prime working age – between 25 and 54 – are not working, creating a major hole in the American economy. In 1953, 98% of men in that age range had a job or were looking for one. That number has fallen ever since.⁷

While men generally participate in the workforce more than women, trends for the two groups have diverged: women are surging into jobs while men are running from them.

TODAY

7.2 Million Men

have dropped out of the workforce

this number does not count another 2 million looking for work but haven't found it

↓ **8%**

A man’s participation in the workforce has fallen more than eight percentage points in the past six decades

7

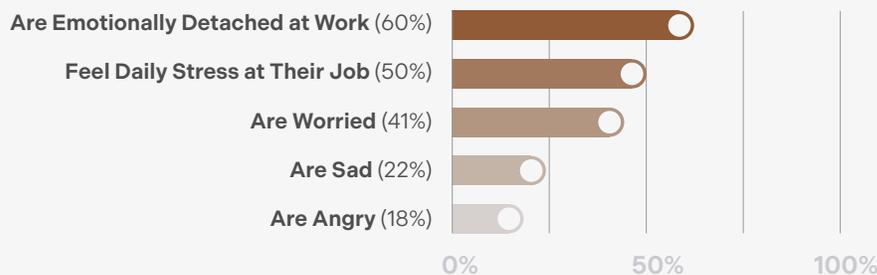
How are non-working men between 25 and 54 spending their time? On average, nearly seven hours each weekday are dedicated to leisure time – relaxing, playing games and watching TV.

The COVID pandemic brought an increase in hybrid teams and companies, allowing many employees to work from anywhere. This job flexibility has made it easier than ever to switch jobs, a phenomenon known as “*job-hopping*.” As a result, job devotion has all but disappeared as more and more men jump from job to job.⁸

Average Job Length:



Where does this lack of “*stickiness*” with a job come from? Men are experiencing staggering rates of both disengagement and unhappiness at work.⁹



Work has been a struggle since Genesis, chapter 3. What’s new is the major shift in workers’ attitudes and actions. The pandemic exacerbated the tension between men and their work. The tension between working conditions and employee treatment and what is frequently called life-work balance was mounting, and some level of reform was needed; however, the pendulum swing is further and longer than expected. The typical worker has been in a pressure cooker, and the pandemic has exposed many problems for today’s workers. But make no mistake, men have had a love/hate relationship with their work since the ground was cursed.

State of Manhood Summary

What is the state of manhood today? To say it succinctly, men have stopped going to church. Men don't want to go to work. And men feel ill-equipped to lead at home. To quote G.K. Chesterton, man has lost his address.

“Man has always lost his way: He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but he always knew, or thought he knew what he was looking for. For the first time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his address.”

In order to right the ship, we must set a course. We must show men a better way. An ancient way. We must hold a generation of men together on an intentional journey in and through manhood. It's not a new journey. It is not a short journey. Calling men home will be slow and arduous, like wind carving stone. But when you finish, you'll have something solid and magnificent, something to behold.

This journey has been tested, tried, and affirmed. It is a journey that is rooted in Scripture with Christ-likeness as its end. Discipleship has never been a destination—it's a direction—a direction toward King Jesus.

Discipling Men— A Path Forward

What men need today runs through a historic series of stages. **First, men must be invited into a gender based, multigenerational relationship.**

Men need an invitation to journey with a more mature, established man or small community of men. Traditional religious events may be the starting place, but they cannot be the end. The days of stadiums full of men keeping promises are over and, to a large degree, proved ineffective. We must get back to gender based, multigenerational discipleship.

Once the group is established, the man needs a clear and concise vision of what it means to be God's man. You can't become what you can't define. Men today aren't just passive; they are ignorant. So much of what is wrong in the world today is due to confused men.

Two generations ago, men were confident in their masculinity and manhood. One generation ago, men began to compromise their masculinity and manhood. And today, men are confused about their masculinity and manhood. They do not know what it means to be God's man. To put it another way...

In the 1970s, the predominant culture said, *"I don't need a man."*

In the 1990s, the predominant culture said, *"I don't want a man."*

In 2024, everyone is asking, *"What is a man?"*

An entire generation of men today do not know who they are in the Lord. They do not know what it means to be God's man. They had no guide, no example. 40% of young men today grew up in a home without a father. This does not include the functionally orphaned, or what is called the half-orphaned, men who grow up with a father in the home who is physically, mentally, or emotionally detached. In some ways, the half-orphaned man experiences greater trauma. The man who is orphaned from

birth, can come to some sort of resolution that he was abandoned—unwanted even. There is greater chance he can move on from this pain, at the very least, forgetting what he never knew. The half-orphaned man does not have such a luxury. Every day the half-orphaned man must come face to face with his real, visible father. And every day he is reminded that this very real father, really does not care.

Be it orphaned or half-orphaned, neither man was given a definition. Men must be given a definition, a vision of manhood based on God's good and timeless Word. God's Word teaches us that:

A real man, God's man, courageously follows God's Word.

A real man, God's man, loves and protects God's woman.

A real man, God's man, excels at the work God has given him.

A real man, God's man, betters God's world through his children, church, and community.

Once the community has defined what it means to be God's man, the man is called to put to death childhood thinking and relating. This begins a season of transformation and training in an encouraging space. The community of men will speak into every aspect of the man's life. His home. His doctrine. His vocation. Nothing is hidden. His life is exposed, open for encouragement, correction, and rebuke. As he journeys, these more mature men teach him lessons centered around God's Word, God's woman, God's work, and God's world.

As soon as the lessons are learned, they must be tested. The testing of the lessons prove that the man has what it takes to hold his own in the world. Does he know and rightly apply God's Word? Does he know how to love, honor, protect, and steward God's woman. Does he know how to excel at the work God has given him? Through his church, his community, his children is he ready to better God's World?

Once he has proved himself in these areas, the man is recognized and blessed by the community of men. This affirmation is central to the health and prosperity of every man. The blessing is more than an encouragement, it is a rite of passage. The man has emerged as a new man, no longer a burden to the world, but a blessing. He is ready to take his place in the company of men for the good of the world.

A MAN & HIS FAITH

1. U.S. church membership was 73% when *Gallup* first measured it in 1937 and remained near 70% for the next six decades before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century. In 2020, 47% of U.S. adults belonged to a church, down more than 20 points from the turn of the century, primarily due to a rise in Americans with no religious preference – Jones, J. M. (2021, March 29). *U.S. church membership falls below majority for first time*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>
2. Davis, J., Graham, M., & Burge, R. P. (2023). *The great dechurching: Who's leaving, why are they going, and what will it take to bring them back?* Zondervan.
3. This number is derived from the *Faith Communities Today* study and *Gallup*. Faith Communities Today studies trends in the religious landscape and conducted the largest national survey of congregations in the history of the U.S. (2020). According to Gallup, women were only slightly more likely than men to report attending a religious service in 2019. Still, when the pandemic hit, that gap grew as men's participation dropped more than women's. While women's attendance has since recovered completely, men's is significantly lower than it was pre-pandemic:

<https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Faith-Communities-Today-2020-Summary-Report.pdf>

Brenan, M. (2021, June 2). In-person religious service attendance is rebounding. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/350462/person-religious-service-attendance-rebounding.aspx>
4. The 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study [Pew] is based on telephone interviews with more than 35,000 Americans from all 50 states. This is the second time the Pew Research Center has conducted a Religious Landscape Study. The first was conducted in 2007 – *Religion in America: U.s. religious data, demographics and statistics*. (2015, May 12). Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/gender-composition/men/>
5. David Murrow, author of *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. David is an award-winning television producer whose work has been seen on ABC, NBC, PBS, CBS, Discovery Networks, and the BBC World Service:

Murrow, D. (2011). *Why men hate going to church*. Thomas Nelson.

Quick facts on Christianity's gender gap. (n.d.). Davidmurrow.com. <https://davidmurrow.com/quick-facts-on-christianitysgender-gap/>
6. "ibid"

A MAN & HIS FAMILY

The data points in this section are derived from an independent study conducted by Dr. Jonathan Williams (*Ph.D. Southwestern Theological Seminary*) and his assistant, Maxel Fuget (*Dallas Baptist University*). In 2023, Dr. Williams instructed more than 4,000 families concerning family worship in 25 different churches. From those 4,000 families, his ministry (*Gospel Family Ministries*) surveyed 300 Christian men.

A MAN & HIS WORK

7. 7,000,000+ men, recognized as NILFS (Not In the Labor Force), are not working, creating a hole in the American economy, as reported by the Brookings Institute, Milken Institute, Bureau of Labor Statistics, USA Today, the New York Times, CBS News, and various other sources:

CBS News. (2023, January 26). *Millions of men in their prime working age are leaving the labor force, creating a hole in the market*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/millions-of-men-in-their-prime-working-age-are-leaving-the-labor-force-creating-a-hole-in-the-market/>

Reeves, R. (2022, October 1). *Why American boys are failing at school—and men are losing in life*. *New York Post*. <https://nypost.com/2022/10/01/why-us-boys-are-failing-at-school-and-men-are-losing-in-life/>

Wessel, D. (2016, October 6). *Men not at work*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/men-not-at-work/>

8. As reported by Forbes — Paulise, L. (2021, October 26). *Why millennials and gen-Z are leading the great resignation trend*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/luciana-paulise/2021/10/26/why-millennials-and-gen-z-are-leading-the-great-resignation-trend/?sh=10baf21d44fe>
9. The average male worker spends 81,396 hours of his life working and, according to Gallup and CNBC, he is deeply dissatisfied: Clifton, J. (2022, June 14). *The world's workplace is broken -- here's how to fix it*. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/393395/world-workplace-broken-fix.aspx> Collins, L. (2022, August 12). *Job unhappiness is at a staggering all-time high, according to Gallup*. CNBC.

This project is a collaboration between Gospel Family Ministries & BetterMan



Gospel Family Ministries exists to strengthen family ministry in the local church and to cultivate family worship in the home. This ministry seeks to equip families with a biblical vision of family ministry, a biblical passion for family ministry, and biblical resources for family ministry. We partner with dozens of churches and thousands of families every year through workshops, conferences, retreats, and small group Bible studies. This is a movement to bring the Gospel into hearts & homes as we pray for a revival generation.



BetterMan exists to help men win by pointing them to the perfect man, Jesus Christ. BetterMan produces biblically rich, theologically sound, super practical content for the church and men's groups/organizations. Since 2018, BetterMan has equipped 3,000+ churches, launched 5,000+ groups [across 76 countries], and shown countless men God's good and timeless design for their lives.



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