

Mr. Average

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Abstract: The American male is under fire. He experiences his life as a set of constantly escalating demands at both work and home, some of which he does not understand. Often he hides his insecurities under a mask we call "macho." Beneath this façade is often a mass of pain and insecurity. This article takes a good look at "Mr. Average" and encourages him to embrace who he is, and who God has made him to be.

Meet Mr. Average. According to *Men's Health* magazine, the average American man is:

- *Five feet 9 inches tall and weighs 175 pounds.
- *Married - 1.8 years older than his wife and would marry her again.
- *Earns \$28,605 per year.
- *Prefers showering to taking a bath.
- *Does not know his cholesterol count, but it's 211.
- *Watches 26 hours and 44 minutes of TV a week.
- *Takes out the garbage in his household.
- *Cries about once a month - one-fourth as much as Jane Doe.
- *Will not stop to ask for directions when he's in the car.

This typical American man is neither a hero nor a serial killer. Rather, Mr. Average is living quietly, going to work, taking his kids to soccer games, and generally just trying to get by. His life seems sedate, perhaps even boring. But on an individual level, Mr. Average is in deep trouble.

The American male is in a sea of confusion, tossed about by messages telling him he needs to be someone else. In short, Mr. Average has no idea what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, "Act like men" (1 Corinthians 16:13, NASB). He is not sure

whether this means to be hard or soft, a tough competitor or an empathic companion. Everyone tells him what to do to adapt to the complexities of life, but no two suggestions seem alike.

With rigid gender roles collapsing, men have lost the safety of their traditional place as sole-breadwinner-head-of-household. Already 20 percent of working wives earn more than their spouses. Moreover, even women with moderate views on feminist issues make it clear they will no longer tolerate male domination.

Having lost his cultural and spiritual moorings, Mr. Average searches to make sense of his life. In this quest he can come up with visions of who he is to be. The typical man finds himself pulled toward a widely practiced set of rituals called the *American Dream*.

In his book, *The Great Divide*, Daniel Weiss reported that, on a scale of 1 to 10, the males surveyed felt their position on the road to the American dream was about 5.7. If the dream is defined as the belief that ultimate happiness will result from an endless series of upward economic moves, Mr. Average feels he is about halfway there. Sixty percent of men think their greatest achievement is still ahead.

Jesus told a story about a typical man, a farmer, whose labors produced such a surplus that his dream became one of demolishing his barns to build bigger ones. (See Luke 12:18-19) He said to himself, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years, take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." The farmer was sure that enough wealth would satisfy his soul. Similarly, many American men pursue one thing: bigger barns.

Unfortunately for Mr. Average, the American dream will never provide him with what he is seeking. Why? Because it is a materialistic dream, an earthbound vision drawn from the pages of *The Wall Street Journal* rather than the Word of God.

Could the cruel hoax of offering Mr. Average happiness in exchange for his whole life be one reason why there is a 7-year difference between male and female life expectancy? Could it be why 17 of the 19 people arrested every minute are men? Could this be why there are five male alcoholics for every female alcoholic? Could it be one reason men commit 26,000 of our 31,000 suicides each year? Mr. Average may be killing himself to have more of the things that he cannot hang onto anyway. His hope is that one day, if he gets enough, he will be a *real man*.

The fact that Mr. Average is working hard does not prove he is getting anywhere. "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase" (Ecclesiastes 5:10, NKJV). When all we want is *more*, the one thing we will never have is *enough*. Mr. Average will never find a healthy definition of manhood nor fulfillment for his soul in the American dream.

By steeling himself for economic competition Mr. Average may become successful, but he also may become a cold husband, a distant father, and an apathetic church member. Macho men can make good competitors but lousy human beings. Sadly Mr. Average

often hides in this strong, silent role because, lacking direction, his only refuge seems to be this parody of real masculinity.

Mr. Average's role-playing, however, is becoming increasingly destructive of his relationship with Ms. Average. A Roper poll recently compared women's attitudes toward men today versus 20 years ago. Gary Langer explained the results: "American women see most men as lecherous, egotistical slobs.... The national poll ... found increasing numbers of women expressing annoyance at sexism and describing men as manipulative, oversexed, and mean." Forty-two percent of women called men "basically selfish and self-centered."

When Mr. Average compares how hard he works with the fact the Ms. Average seems not only unappreciative but downright hostile toward him, he becomes frustrated and even more desperate for answers. Competition in the rat race has twisted his positive male attributes into ugly caricatures that alienate the people he cares for most. But how to escape this dilemma?

Today American men are being told they need a complete overhaul. This new edition of manhood rejects his macho cousin as laughably crude, a throwback to a more primitive time. By contrast the *new man* is deeply sensitive and highly verbal. He is warm, empathetic, endearing, tender, and above all a good listener. Yet in the work world he is still expected to compete and produce. In other words, this kinder, gentler man is a lot more like a woman.

Often in counseling I've listened to men pour out their brokenness and frustration. They weep as they tell me of their abysmal failure to be what their wives and families need them to be. Many express a desire to be different, but they just don't know how to be both tender and tough, compassionate and competitive, charming and challenging, and other seemingly contradictory things the role of new man seems to demand.

The root cause of this dilemma is that the macho man may be what the boss wants, and the new man may be what the wife wants, but neither addresses what *God wants* for Mr. Average. The beauty of God's plan is that it offers real hope for ordinary people. Without an identity that comes from his Creator, Mr. Average will be pulled into roles that are defined by the world, and what the world can give it can take away.

The typical American male need be neither a macho man nor a new man. His most profound need is to be a godly man. Proverbs encourages Mr. Average: "A good man will be satisfied from above" (Proverbs 14:14, NKJV). Each man needs to humble himself before his Heavenly Father and confess his utter dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit. Only in a relationship with his God will a man be satisfied. A godly man *is* a real man.

Take heart, Mr. Average. Your God loves you and has the power to create the character of Jesus in you. Our nation, our families, and our churches need real men, changed men. When your heart belongs to God, macho facades and new man pretendings fall by

the wayside and the character of Jesus emerges. As God's power transforms your life, Mr. Average, you can become Mr. Extraordinary.