

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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What Is the Future of Young Men?

Jim Hamilton

Throughout history, we have thought of our young men as restless, healthy, and built for activity. Words like *driven*, *hard-charging*, and *adventurous* come to mind. The possibilities for young men are endless. They can bear the yoke in their youth and lay the foundation for the rest of their lives. They can marry, have children, and provide for a family and for others — or at least get the training, education, and experience that will enable them to provide.

We are eager to see young men exert energy because we all know what happens when you put testosterone together with capacity to work for the kingdom. *And* we also know what happens when you mix the same testosterone and capacity with idleness. The ancient saying proves true: “the devil finds work for idle hands.”

Single, Childless, Idle

Picture this: one in five less-educated young men are not working and not seeking marriage, and they seem happy about it. No one wants to see that, but we're looking at it. According to University of Chicago economist Erik Hurst, young men between the ages of 21 and 30 without a college degree worked far fewer hours in 2015 than in 2000, and in 2015, eighteen percent of these men reported not working *in the last year* (up from eight percent in 2000).

Hurst describes this as almost one-fifth of the population *simply being idle*: not in school and not working. Seventy percent of these young men live with their parents (up from fifty percent in 2000). These young men are not married, not having kids, and not earning an income. They are young, single, childless, and idle.

One-fifth of young men are jobless and wifeless and happily passing their lives playing video games.

Virtual Happiness

What, then, are these young men doing with their lives? According to Hurst, they are playing video games. Leisure time, largely spent playing games on computers and consoles, doubled from the early 2000s to 2015.

When Hurst relayed these statistics to *Econtalk Podcast* host Russ Roberts, Roberts could scarcely believe the numbers or accept the idea that so many young men would *choose* to live with their parents, and not work, so that they could play video games.

In response to the incredulity of Roberts, Hurst pointed to “happiness data,” which indicates that the reported life satisfaction of these “less educated young men” *has gone up*.

These guys are not married, not working, playing video games in mom's basement, and *loving it*.

Hurst speculates that if these young men were out on the street, they would be forced to work, even for relatively low wages. But because of what he calls “private transfers,” which refers to the way their parents fund their lives, they don't need to work. So they don't.

Hard to Love the Idle

The apostle Paul has a simple solution for such a dilemma: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

He won't get a job? He wants to sit in the basement on the Playstation all day? Stop stocking the fridge. Cut off the food supply. It's time for him to provide for himself.

Does this seem harsh? It actually would be a great kindness. And what feels or seems kind is often cruel.

Proverbs 19:18 admonishes parents, “Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.” Let's not make it easy for young men to be lazy, for them to take at no cost, for them

to remain dependent upon their parents, training them to look for every loophole out of having to work.

Low Expectations, Soft Bigotry

God created man to work, provide, lead, and protect. And making man in his own image and likeness, God created man to bring the very character of the one he reflects to bear on all creation. God creates, provides, protects, and leads. And God doesn't do any of these because *he* needs them, but for the sake of others.

A former U.S. president once referred to “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” To expect a man in his twenties to remain jobless, uneducated, and unmarried while devoting his energy, employing his ingenuity,

and exercising his creativity surfing the web or playing video games is to expect nothing from him. And to expect nothing from someone is the worst kind of insult.

But to expect him to provide, protect, and lead is to highlight his worth and potential as a man made by God. It is to assume that he has dignity.

Finding something to do is as simple as paying attention. But our society doesn't expect boys to do that anymore, and we have all kinds of excuses we make for them. If we don't train boys to pay attention to others, make sacrifices, take risks, and work hard, we'll rob them of the full and fruitful lives they are capable of.

The New Testament casts a better vision for young men in the church than our society does today. We do not accept their immaturity, or look down on their youth (1 Timothy 4:12), but encourage them as brothers (1 Timothy 5:1). We do not give them a pass, but expect them to grow in self-control (Titus 2:6) and "flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). We stand ready for them to handle the Scriptures for themselves, that they might have the word of God abiding in them (1 John

2:14) and — mark this — *overcome the evil one* (1 John 2:13), which is immeasurably more satisfying than winning at video games.

Overcoming the evil one is immeasurably more satisfying than winning video games.

Let's adjust our vision first, and then train our young men to realize their purpose and potential. Let's help them see the good in God's design for work — how work contributes to the world and makes us more like Jesus. Let's inspire them to dream bigger dreams than conquering the next level on the screen. Most of all, let's show them that happiness is not found in entertainment, food, or freedom, but in the God who has drawn near to us in Christ.



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Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/expect-more-from-young-men>

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