
Ordinary Blokes Finding Peace

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I'm Andrew, I've been married to my wife Caroline for 23 years. I've got three teenage sons, and I've been working at the same job for 20 years. I've watched my mother die, I've watched my father grow old. What a bore, I can hear you thinking. This guy must really be in a rut! Let me tell you something. I'm still crazy about my wife even after 23 years of marriage, I love my three sons, I'm passionate about my work, and I enjoy some rich friendships. Does this mean my life's been a breeze? Absolutely not. Life has thrown some pretty tough stuff my way, and like all of us, I've had to make choices about how I respond to these challenges. And most of all, I know I've still got lots to learn.

Listen to the voices of men in Australia. It's common to hear men say, whether young guys through to old men:

- I'm nothing special
- I'm going nowhere
- I'm in a rut
- My life lacks purpose
- I don't love my wife any more
- My teenage kids are driving me crazy
- I'm lonely
- I'm frustrated and angry
- No-one appreciates what I do
- What have I got for all my hard work?
- I'll never have enough money to do what I want to do
- Isn't there more to life than this?

Many Australian men are feeling real pain. Many ordinary blokes are not at peace with themselves. Some blokes appear to have it all together, at least superficially, but when they lie in bed at night and are faced with the stark reality of who they really are, I suspect they also lack peace. But there are other men who have faced life with sufficient openness, honesty and courage to know that life can be rich and worthwhile, despite the many challenges that life brings. These men possess a sense of dignity and integrity, born from years of experience. From asking the hard questions, and from seeking authentic answers. These blokes know that there is hope – not an idealistic hope based on fantasy, but a deep sense of hope born out of maturity from weathering life's storms.

I am a man in the middle of my life. I am at that stage of life that terrifies many men – mid life. I am old enough to know which of my youthful dreams have been realised, which have not, and which will probably never be. But I am a man who is at peace with himself - most of the time anyway. I haven't arrived. I certainly don't know all the answers. But I'm enjoying the journey.

Tonight I want to speak briefly about the seasons of manhood. I want to use the analogy of a football game to explain the stages of life. In terms of Rugby Union or League, the game has two halves. In Aussie Rules, the halves are further divided into quarters:

- Foundation years that prepare you for the main game (0-25)
- The First Quarter (25-35)
- The Second Quarter (35-45)
- Half-time
- The Third Quarter (45-55)
- The Fourth Quarter (55-65)
- Over-time (65 +) and for many men this can be the most rewarding time of their life.

Life is a journey of self-discovery. But first, how do we define "success" in life? I think success is about defining our core values, aligning our lives to those values, and hence contributing to society.

What are your core values?

The most important thing for me as a man is my character. My character should reflect the core values on which my life is based:

- Integrity
- Courage
- Dignity
- Compassion
- Patience
- Humility
- Fidelity
- Faithfulness
- Determination
- Industry
- Simplicity
- Kindness
- Generosity

There are a mixture of attributes there that I really admire in people. It's probably rare to find all of them in one person.

Where can we learn about such values?

- From the examples of others, e.g. Nelson Mandela (Long Walk to Freedom). would rate that as one of the best books you could read if you want to learn about dignity and integrity and about a person having a mission.
- For me, I've learnt these values from my faith in God, the teachings of Christ
- The point is, you will need to get these core values from somewhere
- The power of choice (be pro-active). I read a story about a guy called Victor Frankl. He was a Jewish psychiatrist. During the Second World War he was imprisoned by the Nazis and they gave him a tough time. He spent time naked in a cell, they tortured him, basically he had nothing. But whilst in prison he realised that he still had something that they didn't have and that was the power of choice. So when he was lying there he realised he could choose how he could be going to respond to the situation. Remarkable. He was a teacher and had lectured students so when he was being tortured he would with his mind say, "Okay, I'm going to learn something, I'm going to dream about what I'm going to teach my students about this place." So he realised that every situation we face in life we choose how we are going to respond. Isn't that a remarkable truth? Every day you go through situations where you have to make hundreds of decisions. And the power is in the choice of the decisions that we made. And he lived through that. He got out and he wrote about it and he lectured about it and it became one of the fundamental truths that he was able to pass on to other people.

Align our core values to our dreams

- Begin with the end in mind - So it's important to have some core values but you have got to think about what you really want to do.
- What are you passionate about? Where do your gifts and abilities lie. I'm a scientist and one of my friends who is a scientist said to me at a meeting a few years ago, our problem is we suffer from the cant wait til Monday syndrome. What he meant was that most Aussies love their weekends but scientists actually enjoy going to work on a Monday because they have got data sets and things to discover. And its true, most scientists love their work and they are passionate about it and because of this discovery thing they actually want to get to work on a Monday. So it's important to be passionate about what you choose to do. It's aligning your core values with your dreams.

Making a difference

- Follow your heart
- Choose your life work because you're passionate about it, not because you'll make lots of money. If you are younger, think about your gifts and abilities. Which is not necessarily doing something that's going to make you a lot of money, because that's not going to lead you to contentment necessarily. So I would say the highest priority is to do what you love doing, where your gifts and abilities are. The money part, it flows.

- Rather than working for money – get your money to work for you. So there are other ways to do it as well. Do what your passionate about. You can learn about finances and even if you're not in something where there is high remuneration there are other ways to make money.
- Money allows you to make choices which is a great thing, but will not make you content.

Now back to the Seasons of Manhood. The first 25 years are foundation years. I want to ask you a few questions about this stage of life:

- What did you dream of as a child?
- What were your natural gifts and abilities then?
- What happened to your dreams during adolescence?
- Did you lose them?
- Did you change them?
- What were your dreams as a young man?
- Were they aligned to your dreams as a child?

It's worth noting here that as humans we're incredibly complex creatures. Every human is a combination of genes and environment. It is not 'nature' versus 'nurture' – it is both. Any parent who has more than one child knows the profound effect of genes on their offspring. How can the same parents produce children that are so vastly different in appearance and personality from each other, and from them? Genetics! My point is that we need to appreciate the uniqueness, complexity and richness of every human being, instead of trying to make them like us.

It's also important to realise the transition that occurs during adolescence. Recent scientific studies on adolescent males published in Science in July 2004 show that their brains are virtually re-wired during adolescence. At 17 years of age young men do not think very clearly – they tend to do crazy things. There is a reason for this! The frontal lobe of young men's brains matures last, and may not be completed until they are at least 21, sometimes 25 years of age. This can lead to reduced capacity for reasoning, judgement and control of their impulses. The extent to which young men are affected by these factors is determined by both genetics and environment. The good news is that most young men will get out the other side of this difficult stage. The lesson for parents and community is that we need to provide support and understanding for our young men, not simplistic "black and white" statements. We're dealing with complex issues and we need authentic long-term solutions. There are no quick fixes.

The most important thing about these foundation years is that your core values are determined at this time.

The First Quarter (25-35 years) High Energy Years

- Self discovery
- Aligning your life to your core values
- Marriage

- Fatherhood
- Developing a career
- Developing a financial foundation
- Following your dreams with energy
- The Invincible Years – these were the years I was climbing in the Himalayas. I thought I was invincible. It wasn't true, but that's how I was.

The Second Quarter (35-45 years) High Achievement Years

- Still learning
- Maturing via marriage and fatherhood
- Significant responsibility
- Mortgages, teenagers and ageing parents
- Assessing achievements
- Asking questions (mid-life crisis)
- Have I achieved the dreams of my youth?
- Will I ever achieve my dreams?
- A time for re-setting goals

Stability required. Last week I was in Taiwan. There was a professor there by the name of Professor Lur. He is my age and he told me that in his house he has 4 generations there, parents, grandparents and children and he has the responsibility of looking after them all as well as managing his career. It's the stage I am also at with both ends of the family to look after. So it's a time when men have to hang in there even though they may feel like running away because it gets so tough.

Patience, dignity, integrity, courage and determination are needed at that time.

Half-Time (45 years)

This is about where I am at. There is a change the focus from 'taking' to 'giving back'. Maturity takes time. One of my mates is a high school principal and he said to me "Twenty years experience, you know what it takes?" I said "No". And he said, "It takes twenty years". There are no short cuts. No quick fixes. Development of character takes many years and many lessons. We live in a society where everything has to be now. But some things just take time. It is the hard times that make us strong.

One of the most wonderful things for a man to possess, I believe, is a sense of dignity that flows from deep within. Again I think of Mandela here. Even when he was in prison, he controlled his situation with a tremendous sense of dignity.

More than anything else, fatherhood has matured me. It has taught me a tremendous amount about the richness of life. I also realise that some circumstances are under our control, while others are not. However, how we respond to these circumstances is our choice. Be proactive.

The Third Quarter (45-55 years) Consolidation Years

- Re-focus on core values and dreams
- Begin to give back
- Contribute in a way that aligns with your values
- If more time is available e.g. kids have left home, then use it well
- Aim to achieve financial independence
- Expand to the big picture
- Don't compromise (treasure your integrity)
- Be a mentor and role model

The Fourth Quarter (55-65 years) Wisdom Years

- A wealth of experience. Wisdom doesn't come unless you learn from your mistakes.
- Much wisdom, but body may be failing
- Keep fit
- How do you want to give back?
- How can you leverage your efforts?
- Grandchildren. In Indonesian culture they say once you have grandchildren you can die peacefully.
- Richness of long-term relationships

Overtime (65 + years)

Depending on your health, vision and financial independence, these can be I'm told, extraordinary years. Some people say these can be the best years. Don't vegetate!

Conclusions

- Determine our core values and live by them
- Pursue excellence, but don't take ourselves too seriously
- Life is about balance. Last week I also met a Japanese scientist Professor Kokubun. He is a famous scientist in Japan. He was telling me that he works 7 days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day. His life is totally science, he doesn't do anything else. I thought wow, he never gets to do anything else.
- Make choices about our lifestyle (we don't have to work 7 days a week)
- Accept responsibility for your choices (don't blame others)
- Simplicity beyond complexity. In being a man there is a fair level of complexity. But I think there is a simplicity there as well. But these basic principles such as knowing our

core values and aligning our lives to them should allow us to navigate through this maze of life.