

Fully Alive: The Call of Men

by Stewart Ruch

Men are called to provide presence, name and bless others, and protect and provide for them, living out their identity in Christ.

Duration: 37:01

Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:15, Genesis 2:18, Genesis 3:17, Matthew 1:21, Matthew 6:33, Luke 2:19

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of prioritizing our time and attention. He questions how much presence we give to sports, hobbies, and video games, emphasizing that while these activities are not inherently wrong, they should not overshadow our commitment to God. The speaker uses the story of Joseph and Mary's journey to highlight the need for concern and caution in our own lives. He also shares personal anecdotes about spending quality time with his children in nature and the significance of engaging in meaningful actions for the sake of others. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the need to awaken from a spiritual amnesia and remember God's presence in our lives.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon, entitled, Fully Alive, The Call of Men, is by Bishop Stuart Ruck and is part two in the series. Probably one of the top five Ruck family favorite films would be a really beautiful film made several years ago called The Nativity.

As a matter of fact, it is part of our Christmas traditions which begin on the eve of the eve of Christmas Eve. What's happened is we have so many, we had to back them up to get ready and get everything done in time for Christmas Day. So on the eve of the eve of Christmas Eve, we almost always watch The Nativity together.

It is, as you might imagine, a story about the birth of Jesus. But in that story of the birth of Jesus, it really tells not only the story of God, but it tells beautifully in the figures of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. It tells the stories of Mary and Joseph, the story of male and female.

The movie, in significant part, chronicles the journey that Joseph and Mary take from Nazareth, their hometown, to Bethlehem. And there's a scene on that journey where Joseph and Mary come upon a party that's been stopped and is in crisis. It appears that the donkey, who's been carrying the mother and the family and carrying the supplies needed, has come to a place of starvation, dehydration, and can no

longer function.

And the donkey has its head back, and it's braying, and it's kicking up. And you can see that this is a journey in crisis. Joseph, who looks at his donkey and sees these circumstances, has a look of incredible concern on his face, as in, that could happen to us.

The next scene is Joseph and Mary at a campfire. They're having dinner. And you see Joseph very quietly, very carefully, take his, all of his food, and just put it behind him while he and Mary are there together.

Mary doesn't notice. She goes off to bed. And then while Mary is sleeping, Joseph takes his entire meal, and he does this now night after night, and feeds the donkey.

The donkey has the strength to carry Mary, who's carrying the Lord Jesus. Such a captivating picture of manhood, such a captivating picture of the call upon men to sacrificially provide and to sacrificially protect. This morning, I want to look at this call upon men to provide and to protect sacrificially in such a way that women, that children, that other men are actually able through their sacrifice to profoundly flourish, to be in Jesus fully alive.

I recently had a 20-something male good friend say to me, I just want to give my life, to sacrifice my life for something greater. I just want to hear the whistle blow, and I want to go out, it's kind of an image from World War I, go out over that trench and into a battle where it means something, where I'm doing something bigger than myself for the purpose of others. And that cry, that kind of call of the heart stayed with me after he said that.

So how do we, referring back to last week's sermon, if you've not yet listened to last week's sermon, and you're going to be tracking with us, it's really important. They're built successively. So do listen to last week's sermon, please.

And then Catherine, in her introduction, talked about an insomnia plague, a kind of amnesia that comes upon all of us where, frankly, we forget God, and we forget, as we forget God, the image of God made male and female. How do we awaken from that? How do we re-member, which is to say re-member, re-embodiment, understand in an embodied way, in a profound remembrance who God is and who God has made humanity to be. There's two kinds of humanity, male and female.

First, we remember by Scripture. Scripture is given to us as a medicine of remembrance. In Scripture, we read of how things are supposed to be and how things will be, and we read by the power of Jesus, by the power of the cross, how things can be now.

It's called the kingdom of God. And in Scripture, we remember these things. We're ministered to by the Spirit a picture of things.

Now, in Scripture, when we think about manhood and womanhood, here's what appears to be a challenge. I think it's actually a gift, but it appears to be a challenge, and it's this. While the Apostle Paul made many, many lists.

He'd list out gifts of the Spirit. He lists out gifts of the Spirit. He chose, and I find it very challenging when I come to a sermon like this, not to give us any list on here's what men are.

Here's what women are. Here's what men do. Here's what women do.

Now, there's some talk about that, but it's never listed out like he listed anywhere else. He's hardly prescriptive. Somewhat in the case of the church, but certainly not in this massive universal way does he list out these things.

Indeed, what we have in the Scriptures is less of that and far more lives to imitate. Not so much lists, but lives. And even in that reality of how we know who we are as men and women, we learn that has something to do with being embodied.

And it's something to do, rather than just laying it out there in an analytical way, we need lives to imitate. Note that throughout the New Testament, different leaders of the New Testament who were writing say, imitate this. Imitate me.

It's actually a way of learning. And to learn manhood, to learn womanhood, is an imitative exercise. It's an imitative remembrance.

So what do we do if us as women, we haven't had women to imitate? Or for us as men, we haven't had men to imitate? Well, certainly we do in Scripture, and we're given that gift. And I want to put in front of you today are two men, one that comes from the beginning, Adam, and one that comes from the second beginning, or the new beginning, Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. We see one in the dawn of creation, and we see the second in the dawn of re-creation, as Jesus came to recreate male and female by the power of the cross, by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the resurrection.

So we're awakened by Scripture. Second, and this is very important, and we mentioned this last week as well, we're awakened sacramentally, and by that I mean in an embodied way, in a way that matter matters. We're awakened in the church.

As we live our lives in the church, in relationship in the church, in partnership in the church, we're awakened, as Scripture has revealed to us the call of men and the call of women, we're awakened to actually live that call out. We're awakened men with men, women with women, women with men, men with women. It's extremely important that this happens in the life of the church, because men will never understand who they are apart from women, and women will not understand who they are apart from men.

Brothers and sisters, we are from the very beginning bonded together. We are a unity with distinction, which means if we seek to push back from the other gender in a kind of absolute way, I understand there may be seasons where we're working through things in our lives, but in an absolute way, we will only create greater confusion about our identities in Christ as male and female. We understand our maleness in relationship to female.

She understands her femaleness in relationship to male. We are not, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, independent of one another. So be remembered by the Scriptures.

We're remembered by a life together in the church, which is also to say that for our women, this sermon is as important for you as it is for our men. And next week, for our brothers, Catherine's teaching on womanhood is as important for our women as it is for you, because we are bonded profoundly. We need to grow biblically to understand what is the call upon women, brothers, so that we can provide and protect and release that call.

Sisters, we need you to understand the call upon us. Catherine will say more about that next week. It struck me that this 20-something male friend of mine said, not only I desire to be called into something greater to sacrifice, the second thing he said is, and I would love to know that women would be okay with that.

I would love to know that wouldn't be seen as a threat or a desire to somehow not bless women, but that I could go for it and yet would also be a blessing. And I think that's important. For both men and women, we both need to know we can bless one another in the callings God has given us.

So as men, we're called to live by providing. We're called to live by protecting. That's not exhaustive, and I'm aware of that, but they're emphases that are part of a calling that we see throughout Scripture.

By the way, I just, to be clear, I fully hold that Adam was a historical figure. I think Adam existed. I think he existed as Adam.

I think he was created as Adam. I think he actually existed. I think Eve actually existed.

I think they were historical and as historical as Joseph and his marriage. I think that really matters. They were embodied beings created by God.

So let's look at this. Let's look at live by providing. Okay, this outline is really full, so I'm actually standing here more than I usually do because I need to track with my own sequence.

Okay, so under live by providing, if you're a note taker, here's what you've got. There's three points under live by providing. Provide your presence.

Provide names. Provide by the provider. In Genesis chapter 2 verses 21 to 22, we read that the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs, closed its place up, and from that he made woman and brought her to the man.

This seems rather unusual. Think about something as glorious, as phenomenal, as critical to all things in the image of God being made from man's rib. It just seems unusual.

So it's important to understand what's behind that term. It's the word used, rib, but the context and understanding of that is that when it says that Eve was made from man's rib, what it's saying is that Eve was made from man's side, from man's self, that God brought Eve from him in a profound way, and that he gave something of himself for the creation of Eve. So from the very beginning, we have something of profound unity and union as Eve is made from the side of Adam.

He gives his presence in his self. It's important to understand that when it comes to the call to provide, it is not first and foremost a financial provision. On one hand, in an incredibly energized, monetary-based culture like America, we merely think provision.

We think money. That's not what's being said here. Adam's not talking about a paycheck.

It's something far harder to give than a paycheck. It's presence. At the heart of our manhood is giving presence, of being present, of living as talked about last week by an openness that all of us are called to in our identity in Christ.

That said, certainly one application in our culture that is based on a monetary system in profound ways is that there is a place for men to provide financially, to be responsible financially. I'm not discounting that, but I don't think it's the thrust of this. We see then Joseph also called to provide presence.

In Matthew chapter 1, verses 19 to 21 there in your bulletin, read that Joseph, who's called Joseph the Just in church history, and her husband Joseph being a just man, was unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. As he considered these things, behold, pay attention, so the script is what the text is saying, pay attention, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife. No, this child is not your biological child, but do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

What is God saying? Provide for Mary your husbanding. Provide for Mary your name. Give her and provide for her your presence, something of yourself.

So both Adam, both Joseph are called to provide and primarily to provide their presence, their person, the gift of their lives. So to apply that very tangibly is very important for us, brothers, to plan our presence. If our presence is one of the great gifts of self we have to give, if being present in conversation, being present in crisis, being present in the mundane every day, being present in relationship, being present in the life of the church, if being present is the heart of our calling as men, then we must be intentional and have a kind of presence plan, whereby we have thought through carefully our days and our weeks and our months and how it is that we will in a cycle of life regularly plan to be present.

Indeed, our temptation as men is for such a great passivity and an escaping from presence that unless we actually create some structures in our life, as the Lord has given us in so many ways, we will then default not to presence but to a passivity, to a kind of disappearance. So plan your presence. I'm so thankful I had several really great male mentors when I started out in ministry and they taught me how to plan my ministry week, which included how I planned my time with my family, and they modeled that.

So very, very early on, not because of my credit, because of what these older men imitated or taught me for me to imitate, is I said, okay, Fridays, first of all, I give to the ministry five days a week. I'm not doing six like a lot of pastors are doing five, and Fridays I'm with my kids. Fridays we go out.

We almost always walk in the woods. We walk in the wilderness. We get out.

Now, this is not always a glorious time. Please don't see us skipping through the fields. Please don't see Stewart in profound moments with light surrounding me.

See lukewarm tea that I made too late, stale snacks, but see me on a path with Jillian, my 14-year-old daughter. And all of a sudden she starts to talk about stuff she hasn't talked about all week. See me with my boys going hard wrestling in the snow, and see my 17-year-old bruising one of my ribs and causing me pain for an entire month.

I had to plan it so I'd be present because fatigue, anxiety, shame will all so quickly overwhelm my presence. So some questions for us as men. And by the way, I think this is important to be clear.

This is all of us as men. Joseph in his fatherhood was not a biological father yet. So he was coming in actually at this point as a celibate, engaged to be married, but not married yet.

So for our married men who do not yet have children, or for whatever reason the marriage has not brought forth children, or for our celibate guys, this is absolutely supplicable. And Joseph is a model of that. So let me ask these questions.

How do you relate to your phone? How much presence do you give to your phone? Because you have presence. You have to decide how you're going to give it. How much presence do you give to the observing of sport? How much presence do you give to what may be interesting and actually engaging, edifying hobbies, but how much do you give to that? How much presence do you give to contending in video games? I suppose another kind of contending I'm going to talk about later.

Again, this is not to say that we don't need recreation, not to say that these things intrinsically are wrong. I don't think they are. The question is for us as men who are called to give presence, where is their Sabbath and where is their escapism? And only you and sisters in your life and brothers in your life can help you to get clear on where that might be, but you need to be clear.

How much of your presence do you give to inappropriate images on screens, where you actually engage in a false presence of a woman or of a man? You're engaged in a false presence, and you're giving your real presence to that false presence. I'm trying to take from that false presence something as well. How much of your energy, your strength, your hours are given back and forth? We want to, by the way, pray into that reality, and I'm not using the specific language for it because we have some younger ones, so actually we'll go and use that word and type it in.

I hope you're tracking with me, and we want to pray into that more. By raising it, I don't mean to leave it. In our healing service, we will, both for our men and for our women.

It's increasingly an issue for our women as well. Finally, and this came specifically as I was praying, how much of your presence do you give to alcohol, to beer, the whole culture of beer, the whole culture of bourbon, the whole culture of scotch, the whole culture of mixed drinks, the whole culture of wine? Again, I'm not saying that a glass of beer between a couple of brothers is a wrong thing. I don't believe that it is scripturally.

My question has to do with your presence and even the group presence sometimes of men. How much are you giving away there? How much are you using that for a place to escape from the call to be present? I'm speaking of one too many. I'm speaking of drunkenness.

As we provide our presence in that then we are providing naming. This is a unique thing in the Scriptures, and it's given prominence in the book of Genesis. After Adam is created, he's placed in the garden to protect the garden, to cultivate the garden.

We'll get to that under protection in just a moment. Then he's given this amazing and unique job. He's supposed to name the animals.

Again, please don't, don't make that cute. It's way too important to be cute. It's consequential.

It really matters because it actually sets off what we'll see as a naming dynamic throughout the Scriptures. And we'll see it in Joseph as well. And at the heart of Adam and his call to provide and to provide himself is actually is to look at other selves, to look at other realities, to come out of himself to look at other realities in a kind of robust external agency, which helps to define kind of how men work.

We're robust external agency. And to see outside of himself and say, there's something in there. There's something in that animal.

That's a giraffe. Perfect. And in naming, and actually the Hebrew behind the idea of naming is to draw close.

So I'm actually drawing this reality close. I'm engaging this reality. I'm present to this reality, and I'm naming and blessing this reality.

Jewish scholars say that the creation follows a kind of moving up to a very top apex, which is the creation of woman. And there, Adam is given the incredible and profound honor of naming woman. He does it in a song.

You'll see there in Genesis. It's actually almost like a psalm. It's like maybe the first psalm, where it's kind of set apart in brackets.

Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman. And there's a naming of woman, a seeing of woman. So often, women have been profoundly misnamed by men.

They've been utterly ignored by men, except for a few purposes. And yet, here we see a man naming woman. This is who you are.

Later, he'll specify it even more, Genesis chapter 4, and call her Eve, mother of all the living. Please hear that in this naming, there's not a control. There's a closeness, an ascending.

There's a release. There's creativity. There's perceptiveness.

Oh, for men that will name younger men in the Lord. Oh, to be named by a discipler, a boss, in a way which you've been seen and known. I will never forget.

Four or five words spoken to me, my sophomore year of high school. It was early in the cross-country season. I had worked really hard all season to prepare for the season.

I had a really good practice. My coach didn't even take me inside. He literally just said in front of everybody, very, very quickly.

He said, Ruck, you're strong. Boom, there was no filter. It was right inside.

And I have proof texted that for years to come, taking it completely out of context. It had to do with running in 1983. But I've applied it to my life forever.

Remember what Coach Heisky said? Ruck, you're strong. And of course, how wicked it is when we as men take our call to name. We pervert, we abuse, we wrongly name.

We use that power given to us by God to not bring blessing, but to bring curse. This can be lifted in the power of the cross. And for us as men, it must be lifted if we've been misnamed.

And for us as women, it must be lifted where we've been misnamed. Naming is so important. We then see Joseph, who in chapter 1, verse 21 of Matthew, is given a charge.

By the way, everything that these men do, they're told to do by Jesus or by God. So I know it seems overwhelming, but it's not that bad, because you're never ever alone. And the Scriptures and the supernatural hearing from God, we can know what to do.

So Joseph is told, this is my son. You're to name him Jesus. Isn't it amazing that in providing presence and providing names, the name he gives him is God with us, Emmanuel.

He'll be called Emmanuel, God with us, God present with us. His name is Jesus. I think it's really important to note in the dynamic of male and female, how Mary and Joseph, male and female, interact with the Lord Jesus, and how they have relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Both called to have their identity in Jesus. Both called to live in union with Jesus. But isn't it fascinating that Mary, the female gender, was given the privilege and the honor of carrying the Lord Jesus in her body under her heartbeat.

How the Lord heard Mary's heartbeat. Every one of us, like the Lord, raised under our mother's heartbeat. What a privilege.

What an honor for a woman, a robust internal agency. And what an honor for us as men that we got to name the Lord. We got to name Him.

That's part of our calling, part of our life. A robust external agency. This is Jesus, and Joseph names Him.

Okay, at this point, if you're thinking, wow, I mean, provide presence. There I felt guilty. Provide naming.

Now I feel perplexed. I'm guilty and perplexed. I'm probably feeling some shame.

If you have any man qualities at all, you're already in shame. So one of the things we seem to do best in our sinful nature is just feel ashamed. I've already fallen so far short.

How do I even keep up with what Stuart's saying? Even if it is true, it's very, very important that in the pattern, when we are called to provide, and the same as when we're called to protect, we provide through our provider. The first and foremost, you have to understand you cannot gain your masculinity. You can't win your masculinity.

You can't perform your masculinity. That is exactly the opposite of what's happening here. When Adam gives his rib to Eve, what's he doing? Sleeping.

He's not like, I got to get my rib. Remember, get my rib. I'm giving it to Eve.

Get my rib. Get my rib. Ah, here's my rib.

Ah, a great moment of masculinity. He's asleep. What's that saying? It's important.

When God places him in the garden, the word put or place in the Hebrew has to do with Sabbath rest. He's saying, here's your rest. Here's what I made you to do.

Provide and protect in the garden. What this gospel says to us, the good news of God in Christ is, become who you already are. I've made you a provider.

I've made you a protector. Yes, you may be marked by shame. Yes, you may be marked by a sense of physical weakness.

Yes, you may be marked by an incredible anger. Yes, you may be marked by a kind of sloth. Yes, you may be marked by a profound same-sex attraction.

The Lord would say, I am your provider. Indeed, core to walking in Christ, living in Christ is, receive the gender he gave you. It was a sovereign decision.

He wanted you, man. He wanted you, woman. He sovereignly decided, so we receive this.

It's a gift. And then it's regifted in the recreation on the cross of Jesus Christ. God breathes into Adam, makes him a living being.

Our Lord Jesus breathes upon his followers, his breath in John 20, one connection after another. Not only has he given us the gift of our gender and the gift of his spirit and his power, he has given us the other gender as a gift. The church is the one place where the sword between the sexes can be removed and a kind of partnership in the Lord, imaging God, can be redeemed and actually lived.

It's not only has he given us the gender, I mean, given us Jesus, he's given us the other gender. The one place in the creation where it is not good is that Adam is without Eve. That's the one place, verse 18, chapter 2, where it is not good.

By the way, after one of my, sort of, somebody had named me and given me a challenge as a leader, I went to Catherine. I said, wow, I got this great challenge, you know, and it's so funny because, like, I had this guy name it, but I actually needed Catherine's companionship. I needed her affirmation.

I needed to know if she thought I could do it. So I went to her and said, man, Catherine, like, I've been called to do this. It's really going to be hard.

I'm kind of, you know, remembering Coach Seiske, you know, Rutgers strong, but it's not enough right now. And so do you think I can do it? And it was a really important one. I said, do you think I can do it? And she's like, no.

It was a big one, by the way. It was a really, really big challenge. No, Jesus can.

We live by this providing. Then we live by protecting. When Adam is put in the garden for his Sabbath rest, he is called in that place to keep the garden, verse 15, chapter 2. Keep there, in the original language, has to do with protection.

And he needs to protect by cultivating. The part of the call of men in spiritual fatherhood, biological fatherhood, and discipling in our work is to cultivate or create a context or cultivate or create a culture by which others can absolutely flourish, to rejoice when the women that were called to serve and the children that were called to serve and other men can actually flourish and grow. And we see Adam put in this place.

Then when we actually do that, even though it may be hard at first, or seem contrary to our desires at first, it's actually what we were made to be and to do. Joseph is called to do this, not in our text this morning, but in Matthew chapter 2, where Herod is murdering all the boys under age two trying to find the Messiah, trying to find Jesus. And an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, take Mary, take Jesus, go to

Egypt.

And when he does that, he protects by cultivating a kind of small microcosmic culture of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and they flee to Egypt. Indeed, to be a protector, to be a cultivator will require contending. There is an element of spiritual battle where weeds come into the garden to choke out the truth of who God is, the truth of who male and female is, where when we name, we may name at great cost.

There is a kind of proper spiritual call to arms, to contend, to rightly, spiritually battle in the Lord for the sake of the flourishing of others. It will cost us. You were made for it to cost you.

Even prior to the fall, it cost Adam his side. Even prior to the fall, it cost Adam his strength. Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, gives up his reputation, gives up his future, gives up everything he has to properly, not in a controlling way or demeaning way, but to properly protect Mary and the Lord Jesus.

I had a friend who processed a situation with me where his college-age daughter wanted to transfer to another school. And she wanted to transfer primarily because there was a relationship with a guy that she wanted to pursue that my friend and my friend's wife were convinced was not healthy. He talked to me.

He prayed with his wife. And rather than getting too complicated, here's what he did with his daughter, who he spent a lot of time with. He had been a very present dad.

He'd built a lot of trust. And he went to her, and this is what he did. He said, no, no, you can't go out there.

She was disappointed, as you can imagine. And he had the courage to bear her disappointment. He didn't shame her for being disappointed.

He showed connection and love, but he just said no. I can't let you do that as your dad. That would be a very unhealthy relationship.

She did thank him two years later. When we're called to protect, we protect from God who has protected us. Brothers, when we're called to provide, we provide out of what God has provided for us.

When we call to protect, we protect out of how God has protected us. In the garden, right after Adam is called to keep the garden, to cultivate and protect the garden, he is then told, I give you a commandment. You may eat of any tree in this garden, but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God says it to him clearly. God speaks to him a commandment. He tells him how to protect.

And when the devil approaches Eve to draw her in, and Adam is present there, we see nothing from Adam. Whereby he says, we can't eat of that tree. I was told by the commandment of God, we can't eat of that tree.

We see there the crisis of protection that every one of us as men knows can be our own crisis as well. He holds back, he pulls back. But he was given a commandment.

He knew what was happening. It wasn't a confusion and a fog like, I don't know which tree is it. I can't remember which tree it is.

He knew exactly which tree it was. God had already spoken a commandment to him. When Joseph is called to protect Mary and the baby Jesus, he's told in a dream how to do so.

He's told exactly what to do. The pressure of knowing what to do is not on us. The call to obey is absolutely given to us.

We see how important protection is when we actually are under leaders, especially public leaders, especially male leaders who don't protect. The incredible pain it can be when a leader, for example, speaks in a denigrating way about woman and who woman is. That kind of comment can spread and multiply throughout an entire community as men were called instead to protecting by cultivating, to protecting by the commandment of God.

Your Christian manhood is gained by the scriptures and by the Spirit of God, by him who breathed life into you in the beginning and by Jesus who breathed life into you even now, creating and recreating us, male and female in his image. Close with Joseph. Pastor Matt Woodley has a framed picture of Rembrandt's flight to Egypt.

And in that beautiful image, you have Mary with Jesus. There's dark all around them as they're fleeing Egypt. There's dark all around them.

But Mary is with Jesus, and she's looking at Jesus and kind of looking down, pondering these things in her heart, as the Bible says. Joseph is out in front. He's got the reins, the donkey.

His feet are actually enlarged as if to say, I'm here. I'm right here. And he's looking around, out and forward.

May we receive the call, brothers, to sacrificially provide and protect. May we receive the blessing of our sisters as we seek to be those men given to us in the scriptures and lived out in the life of the church. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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