

KYLE IDLEMAN, bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and *One at a Time*, says, "Brant Hansen manages to be both hilariously funny and decidedly earnest for men to be exactly what God has created us to be and what the world is waiting to see."

THE MEN WE NEED

God's Purpose for the
Manly Man, the Avid
Indoorsman, or Any Man
Willing to Show Up

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BRANT HANSEN

“Brant Hansen manages to be both hilariously funny and deadly serious. *The Men We Need* is a blast to read, but Brant is decidedly earnest for men to be exactly what God has created us to be and what the world is waiting to see.”

Kyle Idleman, bestselling author of *Not a Fan*
and *One at a Time*

“This is not only the book every man needs, it’s also one every woman should read. In a time when everyone is asking, ‘What does it really mean to be a man?’ Brant Hansen gives a compelling, insightful, and deeply helpful response. I read this book in one sitting, and it made me nod, laugh out loud, and want to share it with every man and woman I know.”

Holley Gerth, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author
of *The Powerful Purpose of Introverts*

“Brant Hansen has done it again—this time with a funny, punchy book on manhood. Full of hard-won wisdom and simple, biblical truths applied across the spectrum of the masculine experience, *The Men We Need* is the book we need for our confused cultural moment.”

Jared C. Wilson, assistant professor of pastoral ministry
and author in residence at Midwestern Seminary;
author of *Love Me Anyway*

“Brant Hansen is a marvel in this modern world. Rarely do I meet someone with a voice that is equally insightful, comedic, and piercing. I invite you to dive in and experience Brant’s kingdom-centered, upside-down perspective.”

Mike Donehey, recording artist;
author of *Finding God’s Life for My Will*

“Read this book and start being awesome. We women are rooting for you.”

Lisa Anderson, director of Boundless.org;
author of *The Dating Manifesto*

“Brant gives words to feelings we have and purpose that we never considered. I was a young man during an era when Christian masculinity was defined by growing a beard and being one with the wild. Trouble was, I had little wild and only heart. And I still can’t grow a beard. This book is written for me and my boys. It’s probably written for you and your boys as well. It’s for those of us who love Jesus and are discovering that protecting the vulnerable, selflessly loving our family, and showing up for the hurting are evidence of being a man of God. Our world will be a more redemptive place as you rise to the challenge. We all hope you will!”

Justin Narducci, president/CEO of CURE
International Children’s Hospitals

“In a time of chaos, confusion, and even despair, when women and children around the world are as at risk as ever, Brant Hansen’s brilliant, insightful, funny, and convicting book is not only a breath of sane biblical reason but a balm to the internet-addled soul. The vision of masculinity he sets forth is within the grasp of any man at any stage of life, and his practical and gracious wisdom is enlivening. I’m planning to read the book out loud to both my sons, just as soon as I throw their Xbox into the river.”

Anne Kennedy, author of *Nailed It: 365 Readings
for Angry or Worn-Out People*

“Our societies send very confusing messages on what it means to be a man. Brant turns that all on its head. In his usual winsome style, he gives us a book that is relatable, convicting, and timeless. I’m fortunate enough to know Brant and to have been personally challenged by him to be the man I was designed to be. Those who benefit? My wife, my children, my community, and my colleagues. I’m excited others are now getting this challenge too. Whether you are in your teens or in those outer years, this book offers course corrections to help us be the manliest of men.”

Derek Johnson, head of US Operations & Strategy,
International Justice Mission

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THE MEN WE NEED

God's Purpose for the
Manly Man, the Avid
Indoorsman, or Any Man
Willing to Show Up

BRANT HANSEN



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Dedicated to all of us guys
who can't bench four hundred pounds.
And to the people
who somehow still love us.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Sherri Lynn 15

A Very Important Introduction 17

| Keeper of the Garden

The Poster 23

Masculinity Is about Taking Responsibility 28

We Need You Out Here, Man 32

A Quick Word about Toxic Passivity 38

The Ancient Art of Blaming Other People 40

The Scariest Thing 45

| The Six Decisions That Will Set You Apart

DECISION ONE: Forsake the Fake and Relish the Real

The Fake Life and Where It Leads 53

“That’s Not a Girl. That’s a Piece of Paper.” 57

Here’s Some Good News about Pornography.

No, Really. 62

A Tale of Two Men, and Every Single Woman 68

About Video Games: I Love Them, and They're Just Too
Awesome 71

DECISION TWO: Protect the Vulnerable

Your Neighborhood Should Be Safer Simply Because
You're There 79

Lessons from Mouse Utopia 83

What You Do Actually *Matters* 87

The Ultimate Betrayal 91

Yes, You Should Shelter Your Children 95

Setting the Tone for the Vulnerable in Your Home 100

The Most Vulnerable Person I've Ever Met 104

DECISION THREE: Be Ambitious about the Right Things

Reality Is What Hits You When You're Wrong 111

If You Feel Meaningless, It Might Be Because You're
Investing Time and Energy in Meaningless Things 114

Women Care about This a Lot, FYI 118

How to Be Incredibly Awesome and Somehow Less
Attractive to Women 122

Ambition and Work: Even Terrible Jobs Are Great 125

Relationships Require Bravery 129

"That's Awesome, and I Don't Have to Have It": The
Ambition for Contentment 133

Allow Yourself to "Lose" 137

Don't Be Afraid of Commitments—Be Afraid of *Not*
Making Commitments 141

***DECISION FOUR: Make Women and Children Feel Safe,
Not Threatened***

How to Treat Women: The Bridger Master Class 147

How to Treat Women: The Jesus Master Class 150

- Understand What “Love” Is and Isn’t 154
- Don’t Live with a Woman Unless She’s Your Wife 158
- Protect Them . . . from You 161
- If/When You Have a Wife and Kids, Remember, They Need
You Right *Now* 165
- More on Being a Husband and Father: Stay at Your
Post 170

***DECISION FIVE: Choose Today Who You Will Become
Tomorrow***

- Attention Is Everything 177
- Foolishness = Pain 181
- Walmart Shopping Cart Attack Guy Never Set Out to Be
Walmart Shopping Cart Attack Guy 186
- We Don’t Need More Needy Guys—We Have Enough of
Those 190
- Become a Man without Fear (Seriously) 194
- Don’t Follow Your Heart—Open Your Eyes 199

***DECISION SIX: Take Responsibility for Your Own
Spiritual Life***

- What God Is Looking For: Loyalty 207
- Angry Men Aren’t Attractive to Women, but Men of
Action Are 212
- Don’t Confuse Your Emotions—or Lack of Emotions—
with Spirituality 217
- You Know Enough to Act 221
- The Dangerous Myth of “As Long As I’m Not Hurting
Someone Else . . .” 225
- People with Self-Control Are More Interesting 229
- Boldly Ask God—Sarcastically, If Necessary 234

Contents

Conclusion: A Final Word about Adam . . . and Us 238
Discussion Questions 241
Acknowledgments 246
Notes 248

FOREWORD

Sherri Lynn

Brant's longtime radio producer and friend

Hunters. Fishers. Athletes. Steel mill workers.

That defines most of the men in my family. It was all I really knew. So when I met Brant Hansen, a guy who plays the flute and was the president of the Illinois Student Librarians Association, I didn't quite know what to make of him. Then one evening I went to his house for dinner. We had only been working together for maybe a week.

I was in his home less than ten minutes when I saw it. I saw what I believe to be the true definition of a man.

It wasn't him running around fixing things or watching sports. It was the way his daughter and wife looked at him.

There was love, yes. There was adoration, sure. But there was something I consider infinitely more valuable: safety. They were safe with him.

It's important to know that when I say safety, I'm speaking of more than just physical safety. You can get that from ADT. I mean they were secure in his presence. Only a deeply faithful man can provide women with that.

I grew up in a desperately unsafe household with a desperately unsafe father who was also an active, vibrant member of our church community. That has given me a better-than-average church-scoundrel radar. I felt sure Brant Hansen was *not* that, but because of my past I needed a little more proof.

Later, when we went out on the road for events, my initial impression of him was proven over and over again. When women in all of their splendor would pass us, attempting to garner some level of attention, they never had his. Never did I see him say or do anything he wouldn't have done in front of his family. There, away from his wife and daughter, he was still committed. He was still faithful. They were still safe.

In the almost decade we've worked together, I have had countless meals and events with the Hansens. The way they look at him hasn't changed. It is clear: He is still their protector.

I hounded him to write this book. For years I've watched young guys flock to him. I think it's precisely because he's not the culture's idea of "manly," yet he takes his role as protector seriously. Time after time, guys see that and want to know more. This book is the "more."

Lastly, to my sisters: *This book is for you too.*

It really is.

If you're like me and grew up with a less-than-stellar example of what manhood really is, this book will be like sweet, refreshing water to you. If you were blessed to be raised by (or are married to) a man with the attributes laid out here, you'll know to celebrate that man often.

There are so many people telling men what they shouldn't be. I truly believe Brant is the one to tell men the joy of all they could and should be—all God purposed for them when he uniquely made them men.

I'm so glad Brant has finally written this. I guess I can stop pestering him now.

A VERY IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION

Thank you for reading this. Most people skip over introductions in these sorts of books. And by “most people,” I mean me. But I need you to know a couple things from the outset.

First, it’s impossible to write a book about masculinity without tripping a lot of wires. And I tend to trip wires anyway without even really trying.

My friends are worried about me. “You’re going to be blasted,” they say.

I tell them, “Maybe. Okay, probably. But still.”

I realize I’m dealing with a cultural flashpoint, but I’m not here to write a social commentary or critique. There are plenty of other options for that. And while you’ll notice a lot of allusions and direct references to Scripture, this isn’t a theology book per se either.

I’m here to answer a simple (but not simplistic) question: What are men supposed to actually *do*?

This book is about a big vision for manhood. We’ve lacked that vision, and all of us—men, women, and children—are hurting because of it.

The vision is this: *We men are at our best when we are “keepers of the garden.”* This means we are protectors and defenders and cultivators. We are at our best when we champion the weak

and vulnerable. We are at our best when we use whatever strength we have to safeguard the innocent and provide a place for people to thrive. This is the job Adam was given: keeper of the garden.

So I'm hoping this book is immediately practical. I hope it's full of wisdom and it adds value to your life. If you're a man reading this, I hope it inspires you to be a source of security and life for everyone around you (including those who might hate my premise that this is what men are for).

Another thing I should tell you, in full disclosure: While this book is about how to be a man, it won't be a typical *How to Be a Man* book because . . . I'm not capable of writing that. I don't relate to most of those books. I'm not—how to say?—the most intimidatingly “manly” of all possible men.

Let's put it this way: I don't even hunt. I play the accordion.

I'm not good at grilling. I don't even really enjoy camping. I was in Boy Scouts, but not successfully. I seriously thought the other scouts would think I was cool if I brought my new flute to the campout. (Narrator: “But they did not think it was cool, and . . .”)

That's right, I play the flute too. I wanted to play sports, but since I was always one of the smallest kids in the class, our town obsession—football—was a no-go. That is, until my senior year, after I had a growth spurt and shot up to my current five feet ten. My mom then let me play high school football.

. . . Until I had to quit (and I'm not making this up) because they couldn't find a helmet big enough for my head.

I did use my oversized head successfully as captain of the Scholastic Bowl team and was all-conference. I was also the president—the *state* president—of the Illinois Student Librarians Association.

That's right. Let that soak in.

I don't know how to fix cars, though I have much respect for those who do. When I go into AutoZone, I try to play it cool, but I'm aware that they can tell I have no idea what I'm even looking at.

I'm pretty fit but not jacked. I have zero tattoos. I'm not against tats; it's just that I could never decide on one. I'm sure it would be

a *Lord of the Rings* character, but there are so many. I'd hate to go with Tom Bombadil and then wish it was Elrond. I can't live with that kind of regret.

I respect hunters but don't hunt because of my neurological condition called nystagmus that makes my eyes move back and forth rapidly. In order to see, I have to move my head rapidly too. Note: Rapid, involuntary head movement is not a plus for shooting. It's not safe. Except for, you know, the animals. It's very safe for them. Deeply safe.

I say all this because I want you to know this is not going to be one of those books that's all about how, if you want to be a *real* man, you've got to get out there and take down a moose bare-handed or free-solo El Capitan. I can't even free-solo stairs.

I'm an avid indoorsman. I own puppets.

But you know what? As much as, say, climbing rocks is impressive and a fine sport, the world isn't truly desperate for more people who can do that. Nothing against rock climbers. You're fantastic.

It's also true that the world's deep need isn't for more puppet-wielding accordion players. I've learned this repeatedly and emphatically.

If you do happen to be a jacked, tatted-up auto mechanic who spends his weekends spearfishing, I respect that. You're welcome here. This book is for you too.

But those things, cool as they are, aren't at the heart of what people are yearning for from us. There's something much deeper and much better. That's what this book is about.

I should also let you know that this book is written by someone who believes in God. That, of course, is not an odd thing. What may be out of the ordinary is that God is not a side character in this play. He's the central one, influencing (I hope) every page. He knows us, what we're made for, and why we're here.

Our world is hurting. People are waiting for us.

Here's hoping we can become the men we need.

KEEPER OF THE GARDEN

The Poster

“What’s the deal with the guy with the baby?”

I was asking this because a few of us were being given a tour of a women’s co-op house at the University of Illinois, where I was a student, and I kept seeing the same poster seemingly in everyone’s room. It was a black-and-white photo of a guy in jeans with no shirt on, sitting and holding a baby. That was it.

You’ve probably seen the poster. Turns out it’s one of the best-selling posters of all time, with more than five million sold.

Seriously, though, the guy doesn’t seem *that* muscular or remarkably exceptional. You can’t even see much of his face, really. He’s a model, sure, but the world isn’t short of models. So what’s the deal?

The female student giving us the tour answered my question. “The guy is handsome, but it’s not just the guy. It’s the way the baby is looking at him.”

Millions of women buy a poster because of the way a baby is looking at a guy? Yes, apparently.

“The guy has his hand cradling the baby’s head,” the student said. “The baby is safe. We all want a guy like that.”

Huh. As an eighteen-year-old guy who didn’t have a girlfriend, and had never had a girlfriend, I took note of this.

I mean, I knew I couldn’t look like Poster Guy, but still.

For the record, while this book isn't about making yourself attractive for women, the reaction to Poster Guy is certainly worth noting, because it may be that women instinctually want to bring out the best in us.

There's a little experiment I've conducted several times while speaking to groups of men and women or teenage girls and boys. Usually, it's while I'm talking about a subject like serving others or humility. I'll show slides of real men helping people and use actual photos from news stories: a soldier carrying an old woman out of a village, two guys helping a family into a boat during a flood, a middle-aged guy pulling a baby out of an overturned car in a canal. Some of the men are a little overweight, some balding, some covered in filth. Nobody has ripped abs. But it doesn't matter.

I'll ask a seeming non sequitur. "Oh, by the way, a question for the ladies: Do you find these men attractive?"

The response, without fail, has been immediate, vocal, and emphatic. "YEEEEEEEESSSSS!!!"

I do this because I want the males in the audience to feel the reaction. I want them to remember it, like I remembered the ubiquitous Poster Guy with Baby photo. None of these guys look like what other guys would typically think a woman freaks out about, and yet, the women freak out. Why?

Because these men are doing their thing as protectors. That's it.

Check out any survey of women being asked about the most attractive professions that men have. It's always the same: Firefighters win. Why? Because of their gigantic salary? Because of pants with awesome reflectors?

It's not pants with reflectors. I've tried this.

No, it's because they rescue people. They take responsibility for the vulnerable.

Police officers usually finish in the top five professions. So do paramedics.

I make this point to the guys in the audience: Now, you can use this information to decide, “Hey, I’m going to be a firefighting police officer so women will like me.” That’s one possible takeaway, sure.

But the bigger picture is that women sense who we are supposed to be. And they are attracted to us when they see us living that out. They’re looking for men who make them feel secure. This is why women often consider confidence, a fit body, wealth, or a deep voice “sexy.” Wise women, of course, know these are mere surface indicators and can be misleading to the extreme . . . but they’re certainly hoping.

Please know this: A man who is a confident provider and protector can be less than wealthy. He can have a high-pitched voice. He can be less than fit . . . and still be very attractive to women.

Fun fact: Apparently, sometimes you don’t even have to do anything to be admired for being an attractive man of action. A few nights ago, a group of loud teenage guys was out on the street in front of our house. It was after 11:00. They didn’t bother me, so I sprang into inaction and stayed in bed.

But my wife, Carolyn, was very unsettled. She couldn’t sleep and watched them through the window. She went downstairs. I didn’t understand what the big deal was. But I finally got out of bed.

I got dressed, went downstairs, and headed out the door to confront the guys. But as I walked outside, they all left. I didn’t even do anything, and Carolyn’s reaction?

I’m super hot. That’s what. I didn’t even do anything, and suddenly my attractiveness took a quantum jump.

Wait, I *did* do something. I showed a mere willingness to act. A *willingness* to get out of bed. A *willingness* to intervene on my

**Women sense
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And they are
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wife's behalf. My wife is not a fearful person, and she didn't marry me for my awesome nunchuck skills. But women love it when we prove we're *willing* to do what needs to be done. It turns out it's not about muscle at all but about character.

In fact, if you don't prove to be a protector, if you turn out to be a man who is passive or weak of character, a woman who was once attracted to your ripped muscles will ultimately begin to resent those same ripped muscles. You will simply not have her respect, no matter how much you work out.

Women sense when we are fulfilling our purpose and when we're not. As we'll discuss, women don't respect passive men who lack ambition or drive. But it's more than that. They also grow to resent them. They know men are made for something more.

If you're married, you'll realize that your wife sees something in you—or at least saw something in you. It's the man you could be, and she's still hoping you become that. Even if she's never articulated it, she knows you're at your best when you are a source of security for those in your sphere of influence. It's alarming and annoying for her to see that role slip away. It's also profoundly disappointing.

What women want from us resonates entirely with the original work given the original man in the Bible's account of the garden of Eden.

What women want from men, I believe, is a signpost pointing us to something we've all wanted: purpose. What they want from us resonates entirely with the original work given the original man in the Bible's account of the garden of Eden.

I'm hoping that by the time you've finished this book, you have a deep sense of that purpose. As I wrote in the introduction, I'm not the archetypal manly guy. Since I'm not huge, I see poorly, and I fall asleep easily, I'd be a terrible security guard. But I've found ways of serving as a protector and "keeper of the garden" with the gifts I have.

I believe you can too. With whatever you're given, you can live out this purpose, and if you do, the vulnerable people around you—and maybe those far away—will thrive and flourish because of it.

As we'll talk about a bit later, Adam was made to protect but became passive. God went looking for him. "Where are you?" he asked.

Adam left his post, and the world has been suffering ever since. It is yearning for men who show up. All kinds of men, in all walks of life, who know who they are and why they are here . . . and don't leave. Men who don't go AWOL from real life.

The world needs men to show up. You ready for this?

Masculinity Is about Taking Responsibility

“Is this the best a man can get?”

That’s a voice-over in an ad Gillette debuted in 2019. The ad showed men behaving badly, preying on women and acting as bullies.

The ad continues, saying things are changing:

There will be no going back. Because we . . . believe in the best in men. . . . To act the right way. Some already are. . . . But some is not enough. Because the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow.¹

The images illustrating the “act the right way” theme are of men intervening to break up fights or stopping other men from making women feel threatened. There is also a great image of a dad holding his little daughter in front of a mirror, telling her that she’s strong.

The ad was a little cartoony, but I liked it. And it’s apparent that the ad makers and the number of other people who also appreciated it understand that this really is what men are like when we’re at our best.

As mentioned, this purpose goes back in history quite a few years. Like . . . all the way to Adam.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (Gen. 2:15 NKJV)

The Hebrew word translated “keep” here is *shamar*. It means “to guard,” “to protect,” and “to watch over.”²

Guard. Protect. Watch over.

Think about what the garden of Eden was: A place that God and humans inhabited together. A place at peace. A place that was wildly beautiful and where things were made to thrive and to grow.

But it wasn’t a finished product. There was wonderful, life-giving work to do. It needed to be shaped and enhanced. God created man and woman in his image, and that means they were made to be creative and actually *do* things that matter.

So God gave Adam the job of looking after the garden and the things within. He was to guard it, tend it, and help it flourish. He was responsible for it.

I believe looking after our own “gardens” remains our masculine purpose, and we all implicitly know it. Our culture is in chaos regarding what masculinity really is, so it’s dangerous to suggest there’s a distinct, wonderful thing called *masculinity*. But the Gillette commercials certainly come close.

Masculinity is about taking responsibility. We naturally respect men who take responsibility for themselves. We have even more respect for those who go beyond themselves to their families. And we have immense respect for men who take responsibility for those well outside their own homes.

We are “masculine” not to the extent that we body-build or achieve sexual conquests or fix stuff, but to the extent that we are faithful to the job of being humble, consistent, dedicated keepers of the garden. Just as Adam’s failure was devastating, our failures to fill this role have been devastating.

When we do fulfill our purpose, we become a refreshing source of life wherever we are. The vulnerable will be allowed to grow and bloom. People will sense that they're safe around us. Our neighborhoods, workplaces, and homes will be safer simply because we're there. (Of course, not *everyone* will feel safe. If we are who we are made to be, those who want to attack the garden or who would threaten those within will not feel secure at all. Our mere presence will bother them.)

Keepers of the garden need not be physical brutes. What we do need is the willingness to bring whatever resources we have to fill this role in whatever contexts we find ourselves: our homes, our schools, our apartment buildings, our offices . . . anywhere we are.

The original garden was a place where God was fully in charge as King and his justice and peace were present, to everyone's benefit. We were supposed to rule with him and to expand his rule, but we misused our freedom. He has promised he will one day restore it all, and the biblical glimpses we get of the kingdom in its fullness are breathtaking. Glimpses like the lame leaping like deer, every tear being wiped from our eyes, and the deaf getting to hear for the first time.

We get to be part of expanding that kingdom here and now in the places we find ourselves. Not as a power move, but quite the opposite: through humility. You are made to do this, whether you're a student, an accountant, a motorcycle mechanic, or a drive-through worker at Burger King.

Maybe you're a nerd like me, or maybe you play left tackle for the Seahawks. Doesn't matter.

Maybe you're outwardly healthy; maybe you're battling an obvious disability. Doesn't matter.

Wealthy or poor? Makes no difference.

We're all called to be keepers and protectors in our spheres of influence, whatever and wherever they are.

The way Jesus explains the kingdom of God (and he talks about it more than anything else in the Gospels), it works very differently from the rest of the world. The weak are made strong. The last are first. The humble are exalted. The proud are brought low. The widow, the alien, and the orphan are valued highly. The unfairly treated are defended. The seemingly insignificant go to the head of the class. The lost are found. And the broken are healed.

Imagine men like you and me taking whatever strength we are given to defend and expand that kingdom rather than our own temporary, throwaway, little ones that will never last.

Imagine if we approached life like this: “Adam didn’t do the job. But with whatever I have, I’m going to do it. I have a mission, and I accept it.”

In the Bible, God says he raises the poor from the dust. He doesn’t forget them. He defends the afflicted. He saves the children of the needy. He defends the weak. He favors the humble. (See 1 Sam. 2:8; Pss. 9:18; 72:4; 82:3; Prov. 3:34.)

If I’m going to be more like him, guess what I’m going to do? I’m going to raise the poor from the dust. I won’t forget them. I will defend the afflicted. I will save the children of the needy. I will defend the weak. I will favor the humble.

Jesus told us to seek his kingdom first. When we take our cues from him, it’s not just good news for us. It’s good news for everyone around us.

You are made to do this, whether you’re a student, an accountant, a motorcycle mechanic, or a drive-through worker at Burger King.

We Need You Out Here, Man

So what exactly does Adam do when the garden is threatened? We don't know for certain, but it sure looks like he does the following:

1. Absolutely nothing.

Maybe you know the story. After God gives Adam his assignment to protect and tend the garden, he tells Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

God then creates Eve, a “suitable helper” for Adam. The word for “helper,” *ezer*, shouldn't be read as “assistant” or “underling.” God himself is described as *ezer* in Psalms. He is our helper because he has the ability to aid us in our need. He rescues us because we need rescuing. An *ezer* is distinctly “other” from us and is a lifesaver. An *ezer* is not our mere sidekick.

Women were to be corulers with men from the very start. In Genesis 1, God creates mankind in his own image, “male and female,” and then he blesses them and tells them to be fruitful, increase in number, and rule over the earth. Again, that's not just for the male. Male and female are made to rule, together.

Later, Eve has a conversation in the garden with an enemy of God. The enemy claims she's missing out by accepting the limits God had given to Adam.

She falls for the lie. She eats the fruit. And all the while, Adam doesn't do anything.

Now, where do you think Adam was when all this was happening? When I heard this story as a kid, I'd always pictured Adam far away, doing some hard work or something while Eve was dealing with the snaky enemy. But notice where Adam actually is:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (Gen. 3:6–7, italics mine)

The text makes it seem like Adam was there the whole time. So he let her converse with an enemy of God, and he didn't intervene to protect her or the garden.

Adam, remarkably, did nothing, and I say "remarkably" because we're still remarking on it thousands of years later. That's how impactful our refusals to act can be.

Adam was so passive he didn't even grab any fruit for himself. It says Eve passed it to him. Maybe he was lying down?

This is a fundamental betrayal of who he is supposed to be. He's supposed to guard the garden and all the beautiful things in it. He's supposed to rule and reign with God. Instead, he just stands there. Or maybe he's lying in a hammock while the world

Adam was so passive he didn't even grab any fruit for himself. It says Eve passed it to him. Maybe he was lying down?

takes a blow we still haven't recovered from. It's something we're still ashamed of. In fact, it introduced shame itself into the world.

Next, get this:

The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (vv. 8–10)

So the woman eats the fruit first, and she has been blamed for that for millennia. But notice God doesn't call *her* out. No. He wants to know where the man is. The security guard.

Where are you, Adam?

Now, to be sure, they're both in trouble. The fact that God comes looking for Adam doesn't mean he's more significant than Eve. But where's the keeper of the garden? Where's the one God specifically charged with being the protector?

Where's the one he made to take responsibility?

Given our current human condition, it may be that God is still asking.

This brings us to a possibly dangerous question to bat around with friends.

Let's say "Jake" is a relatively physically healthy nineteen-year-old. He lives at his parents' house and stays inside almost all day, every day. He spends his time playing video games and watching porn. His parents provide meals and snacks. He's content. He'd say he's happy with his life.

Is this okay? I mean, is there anything really "wrong" with this?

He's happy, right? He's not bothering anyone else. He's harming no one else.

Is there actually a problem?

For some, the answer will be obvious: No. There really isn't a problem at all, because as long as he's not hurting anyone else and he's happy, what does it matter? We should all be free to construct our own realities, and that's what it means to be human.

But this reasoning doesn't quite work. It presumes that freedom to do whatever we want is what we should value most. How do we know that?

And it also ignores this: Jake *is* actually harming himself and others, by not being who he was created to be. The world needs Jake. There are real humans outside his window who will suffer because he isn't who we need him to be. There are real humans outside *your* window who will suffer because you aren't who we need you to be.

There are perhaps thousands of people whose lives will be worse—possibly for decades—because Jake is a no-show.

He also may currently be “happy,” but who decreed that mere happiness is the end goal? After all, it can and will be fleeting. Maybe we should pursue something bigger and richer and longer lasting than that.

Now, Jake may not look like the idealized hero, but he could decide to be one. Like all of us, he's been given a measure of strength and intelligence and creativity. He's been given resources to fill a certain role. We'll talk more about those things, but these are worth thinking about now:

While Jake immerses himself in fake accomplishments, there are real things that need to be done.

While he entertains himself with images of women, there are real women yearning for actual grown-up men.

**There are real
humans outside
your window
who will suffer
because you
aren't who we
need you to be.**

While his games and entertainment may center on fake story-lines of fighting injustice, there are real people who need protection.

Everything Jake has is given to him for a reason, including his freedom. It really is up to him whether he chooses life through the real or death through the fake.

He's like all of us. This is where we are right now. This Jake, like the original Adam, was created to be a keeper of the garden, a protector and defender. He was created to make order from chaos. He was created to help the things and people around him thrive and grow in beauty and strength.

But he's AWOL. He's taking the passive route.

It's simply not enough for someone to say about their life, "I didn't bother anybody." (Interestingly, where older religious traditions—attributed to Buddha and Confucius, for example—held the Golden Rule to be, essentially, "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you," Jesus goes well beyond that: "In everything, *do* to others what you would have them do to you" [Matt. 7:12, italics mine].)

Do. Actively meet needs. Actively show up. Actively engage.

Man was created to take responsibility. So if a guy's life is all about entertainment options, using women for sexual pleasure, smoking some weed, and modifying his car, he's not yet a man. He's stuck in boydom. God loves him dearly, yes, and I'm rooting for him. But he's not the man the world needs him to be. Not yet. Wow, do we need him to grow up.

Some boys start becoming men early. If you're a dad or mom reading this and you have, say, an eight-year-old boy, you can ignite his imagination by helping him understand his role as a defender and keeper of the garden. He won't resist this. Boys tend to love challenges and knowing their roles, especially when they happen to fit a deep yearning.

If your son picks on his little sister (like mine did), you can remind him why this is a very bad thing. He's betraying the role he was given. He's to be her protector, not a threat to her. My son understood this very clearly, and he took it to heart. I'm proud of the man he has become. (Dad-brag alert: At this writing, he's currently an intelligence officer in the military, planning to become a surgeon at CURE Hospitals to serve children with disabilities in developing nations.)

Young kids can understand this role. Certainly nineteen-year-olds can understand it.

Jake, we need you out here.