

What Every Man Needs To Know



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Introduction

Remember dodge ball? Back in grade school. Its come back as a popular sport for adults with leagues forming in many larger cities. Its also a game many of us play our whole lives. Were you one of those kids that spent most of the game trying not to get hit, dodging the ball so often that you seldom actually threw your own ball? Or were you a bold risk taker who got in front of the team to take out a few opponents with a wicked hard throw?

While I hesitate to use dodgeball as a metaphor for life, it does work to explain how some men dodge the big questions of life and others take it by the balls. While we stand with confidence and speak with surety on the things we know, it is often the foundational questions of life that cause us to hide in the corner to avoid getting hit.

This short treatise is about five of those questions. Five questions that, in my opinion, a real man seeks the answers to. While he may not yet have found the answers, he doesn't avoid the search, the challenge, the questions or the conversation. A real man is actively engaged, ready to lead because he fully knows who he is because he has come to terms with his answers to these questions and no longer is dodging them in his life.

A real man is a mature man. Physical maturity comes with puberty, but true maturity is the wisdom of a man who has come to terms with these and other foundational questions.

There will be more to say and more to discuss.
Check back on the website – www.livingreal.net – to join the conversation.

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Things

Every Man

Needs to Know

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Everyman needs to know where he comes from

If we are to move forward in life, to gain new ground and conquer new territory it is crucial that we have a full understanding of where we come from, where our roots begin and from whence our ancestors hail. This brings up at least two thoughts in most of our minds. Number one is our heritage, our race, ethnicity and cultural beginnings. Were our ancestors from the Germanic tribes, the Scottish highlands or the African Plains? These questions might be easy for many of us where lineage and genealogy have been traced, recorded and researched. For others it is only a guess. An estimate based upon last name or quiet talk amongst long deceased relatives. For many men, history has been torn away from us and left us with no knowledge or beginning point from where to look. (While this is unfortunate there are organizations that can test a person's DNA through either blood or cheek swabs to determine ancestry. While results can not be 100% comprehensive I am told that responses state - for example: You are 85% European and 15% Native American.)

Our last names are also an indication of our history and knowing the story and origin of the name we have been given shouldn't be too hard to learn and another anchor point to knowing your forefathers.

The deeper question of Where Do I Come From is answered not through history or DNA, although both can substantiate your answer, but through a decision made first with your head and then with your heart. Consider the power you have in that. You can decide the answer to your place of origin. That in itself is a beginning point to understanding and reaching a conclusion.

By process of elimination we come closer to an answer. The fact that the decision will be yours to make says that we as humans are not robots preprogrammed to act and think and respond in specific ways. [We have the freedom to choose](#), to determine and to decide.

Aside from some science fiction version, our beginnings, the place from which we came, the string of events that extends from where we stand today, back up to our mothers wombs and her mother's and hers and the men who implanted the seeds that formed the DNA and the genetic coding that cause us to have physical similarities to our siblings and other relatives is all pretty much undeniable and something we can all agree upon.

So if we travel back further, and for the sake of visuals consider it a journey of hundreds and maybe thousands of wombs where sperm meets egg and successfully grows to produce offspring, you have to be impressed with the design of the system. While modern man has created a combustible engine and walked on the moon, the complex process of forming a walking, talking, thinking human being has been around a whole lot longer.

As I marvel at the architectural brilliance of a skyscraper, a view that is then interrupted by the wonder of aerodynamics when a steel tube flies across the sky carrying hundreds of people thousands of miles, and then getting all their luggage to the same location, (most of the time), I am in awe. And I should be. [What is most amazing is how we take for granted the wonder of modern society that surrounds us.](#) I wake up to the music that flows out of my alarm clock, switch on a fluorescent style light bulb, walk into a small room that is a combination of man made tiles, glass, chrome and plastics. I urinate into a specially designed appliance designed to eliminate my need to see or know what happens to it, turn a knob and fully expect to receive clean fresh aerated water. Then after dressing and eating, two activities that allow me a myriad of choices regarding style and taste, I drive my car on roads that are designed to safely take me thousands of miles across the country. And we do all of this each day taking it for granted and get upset when something fails to work the way we expect it to.

And who do we have to thank for all of these marvels of society? Maybe you if you are a designer or engineer. Yet all of these inventions originated first in the mind before they became reality.

[The question of who am I and why am I is no accident.](#) The incredible make up of what I call my body is far too intricate to have happened by mere chance. The mere fact that I have a brain that can even conceive of the thought and formulate the question of "Who am I?" speaks to the wonder of what we simply label "me". So in our journey back womb to womb, egg with sperm, sperm meeting egg I am completely in tune with this miraculous process happening over and over again.

But here is where I get confused, and find it fascinating - that anyone can see the same world which I see each day, enjoy the wonders that are natural and those created by the brilliance of humankind and take the leap of faith to imagine it was all the result of circumstance and chance. If you are in this camp - I commend you, for you have far more faith than I to believe and accept the huge mathematical and statistical coincidences and equations that are required to occur for this world to exist through chance and circumstance.

Where do I come from - my lineage goes back to a man and a woman created by God, who created them for His own joy. The good book says he created them in His image, [male and female He created them.](#) He set the world in motion. Did He do it with mud and clay, I don't know. But I do know he did it with love. There is just too little evidence to believe it happened any other way.

Oh - and this evolution stuff, that of course happened too. Dinosaurs, the whole bit, really. You see its not an either or. It is both and. Both evolution and creation happened. You need not have to choose one or the other, it is possible to believe both. Why - because it is the truth and it fits.

Everyman needs to know where he is at now

Right now, where are you? Physically you are probably sitting down reading this paper, maybe looking at your computer. But where are you, in a good state of health, a declining physical condition, getting old but doing it gracefully? What about emotionally? Feeling content with your general state of affairs, your relationships and the way things are going in the world? Your answers are important because they have a lot to do with where you are spiritually. And it would also be correct to say that where you are spiritually makes an impact on where you are physically and emotionally.

There are plenty ways of breaking it down. Some will say we are body and soul. Others will say mind and body or body, soul and spirit or a spiritual being in a human body. And we have certainly heard from folks that say we are made of chemicals and minerals that came together in a unique way that we call life.

Where are you at, right now? In which of the camps mentioned above are you going to park your tent? You see, it is important to decide what you believe about what makes you you. Every man needs to come to terms with what he believes and respond properly to that belief. At some point a man needs to be ready to stand up and lead. Some of us are failing at this while others are right in the middle of it, taking charge. How does where you are make you feel emotionally?

When a child looks to their father for guidance on issues of ethics and morality he should have a foundation to stand on. When our daughters and sons ask us why their friend Omar goes to a mosque and Adyra goes to temple and Bret goes to church, and your family doesn't go anywhere, we should have an answer. When a decision needs to be made about where to get married or in which faith do we raise the children – [a man needs to have an answer](#).

Sure we can skirt the issue. Many of us have been doing that for years. It has made many of us better golfers and arm chair athletes. But when it comes to answering the real questions of life saying "go ask your mother" is just not acceptable for a real man. Men are good decision makers, not all, but it is a solid trait for most guys. So why are we avoiding this one?

Taking a stand about what you believe spiritually is certainly different than about what we believe physically. Most of us would agree about physical – what's good to eat, what taste good but isn't good for us, what is strong, what is weak. On emotional issues we can talk about other people's emotional state for a while but seldom our own. But knowing what you believe about the spiritual side of life and letting others know can be a scary step. So step up and quit being a chicken.

Here's my story. I took some courses in college just out of interest. Religion through the philosophy department then another course of religion through the religious studies department. I was hooked, it was all so easily acceptable. Over the years I sat zazen meditation, attended a week end retreat at an ashram. I studied tai chi and owned the I-Ching which I kept alongside my Bhagava Gita and the Bible I stole out of a hotel room. At some point I remember making an internal commitment to my believe in these varied walks of faith. None in particular, but a mixture of them all.

A few years later while traveling through Europe we were invited to have a free dinner at a Hari Krishna temple in Amsterdam. We joined others, all of whom were carrying back packs and bedrolls like us and sat on the floor around the perimeter of a large square room. They came around to each of us with a variety of truly delicious vegetarian dishes. A young woman came to sit down and talk with us. She was dressed in the flowing scarves that make up those fancy Hindu dresses and wore a third eye, although I sensed she was not Indian.

She asked me a question that changed my life. "Do you know why we chant Hari Krishna, Krishna Krishna?" I said I didn't and she answered. "We believe that what is ever on your tongue when you die is where you will go to live. If Moses is on your tongue that is where you will go, if Jesus is on your tongue you will go to live with Jesus. We want to go to be with Krishna so we chant his name all the time, because we don't know when we are going to die."

I realized at that moment I believed in everything. Every belief was nice and kind and believable. I could just as easily pick one over another or none at all. I realized that if I died right then I would probably stutter. It wasn't a star studded moment, but it was certainly an epiphany that my mind could not forget.

Once a man decides what he believes there will be consequences, good and bad. There will be changes in your life if not right away then eventually. Don't think about that now, you will be able to handle them when they come and you will be open to them. For now, know that [making a decision is the difference between growing up into true manhood and spending your years afraid and unsure](#), dodging the real issues of life, never growing into the full maturity and wisdom of old age.

This is a solo decision. No one can make it for you and you can't make it for anyone else. But ask questions, look for answers, but don't get caught in the cycle of seeking. When you find the truth, and to those who seek seriously the truth will reveal itself, be ready to step off the path of searching and embrace the truth you have found. Questions – steve@livingreal.net

Everyman needs to know who his friends are

Whose got your back? Who is watching out for you, to make sure you're mess ups are less often and less messy? Who is the man that can tell you when you're being an idiot, you could use a shower and you are not as cool as you think you are? Who is the guy in your life to tell you to be real? And who gives you permission to do the same for them? To be open and transparent and real in your relationships and friendships.

Men are relationship creatures. We live and survive in communities in which we interact on a regular basis with other human beings. Some do it better than others, women do it better than men, we all require and crave that contact. Certainly we all know someone who is a lone ranger, able, so they say, to exist without the support and encouragement that comes through human interaction. But even the Lone Ranger had his friend Tonto and we all do better when we know who is on our side, whose got our back, whose playing wing man.

While time spent alone is important for a man to find out what he is made of and what he is capable of, it is time spent with other men that unites him and grounds him with his real self. What of his unique talents and skills does he share with the group, what does he add to the project, what does he contribute to the discussion. [It is only by spending time with other men that we learn what it means to be manly, masculine and real.](#)

A man on his own without others to hone and guide his thoughts and feelings can become a danger to himself and others. We need others to bounce our ideas and thoughts off of, to sharpen our skills and to soften our hearts. We need wiser men around us to see through our words to the real meaning of what we say, and to help us cut through the delusions of our own heart and minds. We are better with brothers around us. To wrestle with both physically and emotionally.

As we make our journey through life we will be in contact with many people and many friends. Few will be life long friends. To those that are with us through all or much of the journey we must be 100 percent real if our friendships are to stand the storms of life. As men, I don't believe we are prone to having lots of close friends. A small cadre or posse is often sufficient. But spending time with a larger group of men is powerful in recognizing that what we think and feel and struggle with is common among all men. You are a man among many men. While you are distinctly unique you share many battles and victories, and in this we should be able to find a little peace.

If you are a man who has a few good true friends I congratulate you. I congratulate you if those friendships are deeper than locker room and beer drinking chatter. If you don't have friends that know your deepest fears, biggest screw ups, most embarrassing moments and uncontrollable urges, men who understand your struggles with women, God and money, then you are missing out on one of life's greatest pleasures.

That is easily said, but for a man who doesn't share this type of friendship the question is always how? How do I reach out to other men for friendship, conversation, and companionship. The answer to that is simple but may not be easy. The answer is also unique to who is asking, as the methods are many. For some guys its as simple as asking another man to grab a cup of coffee together. For some it is asking for help with a project. For all it involves a little bit of a risk. Some men are better at taking risks, all men are capable of taking risks. The first and most important step is **if you want to have a friend then you must be a friend.** Will you take that risk? Will you be a man others want to befriend?

Everyman needs to know how to use his tools

If you cut us both open we aren't going to look much different from one another. On the outside I may be uglier than you, shorter than you and certainly have less hair than you. But when it gets right down to the biology of the matter we both have the same number of bones and muscles, nervous system, digestive system and all the other tissues and organs that make us homo sapiens. Does that mean we are the same? Thank goodness no.

I can not imagine a more boring place to live than where everyone is alike. Fortunately each of us is an exclusive masterpiece. We are wired differently. We are created to be unique. We are made to be a original. Inside we all look alike, but on the outside we are completely different. We have a great deal of control over how we look, how we stand and walk, how we dress and groom ourselves. But how you feel about yourself will always play the biggest role in how you appear to other people and your attractiveness to the world. Are you self assured, self confident about who you are and what you are capable of accomplishing? Are you physically sound because you eat right and stay active? Or is the opposite true – you aren't exactly sure of who you are in the world and your personality, looks, and actions tell everyone you don't.

[One of the keys to self confidence and being self assured is knowing who you are and what you are capable of doing.](#) This all begins with discovering what you are passionate about in life and secondly we need to hone our gifts.

I can't fine tune anything. I was never good at the fine touches of tuning up a car (think rotor, cap and spark plug gaps). The small settings of cutting the perfect angle on my table saw, tuning my bike, and reading sheet music befuddle me. Maybe you just have a knack for the small details. I can cook, can you? You have skills I don't, and I have skills you don't. Call them talents, I call them gifts.

Ever heard the phrase, born leader, natural talent, gift of gab? You were given certain gifts when you were created. It is now your responsibility to figure out what they are and how to use them. Kind of like Clark Kent learning to manage his strength or Peter Parker learning to control his web. But not all gifts make us super heroes. Some gifts are more supportive. Like the folks who design the sets and aren't on stage to get the applause. Or the kitchen staff with incredible culinary talent who find joy in the preparations and seeing others relish their creations. Or the back office research and marketing teams that make the presentation a success.

The psychological and biological reality is that when we discover our gifts and find a satisfying and good way to express them we will become incredibly and fully satisfied. There are some caveats to consider. The first is to drop the human tendency and emotion of envy and jealousy. Your gifts are your own. [You were designed for your gifts and your gifts were designed for you.](#) When you take your eyes off that truth and begin to consider the gifts that others have with anything other than joy for that person, comparison will emerge. Comparing ourselves and our gifts with another person is actually scorning the talents you have. It's like saying to your creator or parent, 'why did you make me like this, why can't I be like him?' As a child we were all like this at some point. As a child we needed these thoughts in order to see how we stacked up. As a mature man we now need to drop any thoughts of comparison and embrace the gifts that we have, the gifts that make us who we are, the gifts that tell us where we fit in.

This should be rather intuitive. Look around at the people you know. Who is truly thrilled in the work they are doing? Are they a 'natural' at it? Do many parts of their work just come easy for them? At the end of most work days are they energized or drained? How about the other folks who are exhausted at the end of each day and always looking forward to time off, the week ends or retirement? How do you feel about your work? What gives you energy and gets you jazzed?

For some of us it is not our work life that provides the opportunity to use our gifts. Instead it is where we find ourselves volunteering or helping out. Are you the first to look under the hood of a car when its not running right or jump in to plant spring flowers in the garden? Are you involved in community or church organizations? Does your home always seem to be filled with guests? Are you the first guy there when someone is moving?

Bottom line – [it should be your goal to discover your unique gifts and talents](#). [It is also your obligation and responsibility to discover your true passion in life](#). What is it that captures your interest and causes you to want to go deeper, to understand fully and be a part of? What cause or purpose are you drawn to spend time and energy on at this point of your life? At different seasons of life our passions may change as our priorities also change. A good dad who invests time into the life of his young children is feeding both his passion and his priority.

There are men who are good at making money, talented in business or sales, leading others and commanding a high salary. For others, the satisfying application of their gifts puts them into a more modest salary range. So be it. At the end of the day our satisfaction comes from feeling good about who we are and how we express ourselves in our gifts. Is it any wonder that people who work in the building trades (carpenters, masons, painters) are the happiest workers plying their trade.

Do the two match up? Are your gifts the right tools to help realize your life passions? That's a good sign you are on target. Recognizing this important relationship is important to your search for purpose. The reason is (and here comes an important truth) your life is not about you. What? Not about me, then who is it for? This is an ancient truth that has been shared with men for centuries. As protectors and defenders of their families, their communities, and their natural world, men have given of themselves for all of history. Often sacrificing their own lives in service to others. Hard concept to grasp in our cushy day and age.

The idea that [we find our life by giving up our life in service to others](#) is a truth we can only realize when we do just that, give service. When we use our gifts, talents and skills in a way that benefits others we experience an emotional satisfaction that can not be gotten in any other way. We also receive the 'A Ha' moment of "that's why I am so good at this".

Another ancient truth passed on from generation to generation is that you are not that important. The gifts you have been given are meant to be shared with others. The heart and mind you use in speaking and caring for others, the physical and emotional strength you lend to others, these are the things that define us. While we also take care of ourselves, and accept care from others, our ability to see others as more important than ourselves brings a richness and freedom to life that can not be matched nor easily explained. It is only then that we become truly alive to our purpose.

Take this responsibility seriously and discover your passion and your gifts.

Everyman needs to know where he is headed

There has been a rise in the number of suicides. Mostly in industrialized nations, mostly with young adults and teens. Surprised? You shouldn't be.

Where ya going? It's a question we often ask or are asked. People want to know. Your friends, your family. They want to know where you'll be, where they can find you, when you'll be back. Wanting to know where your wife and children are is just being a good partner and parent. Keeping everyone safe, making sure everyone is accounted for. Phones, cars, and even our pets can now be equipped with a GPS, a Global Positioning System. Without them even knowing it we can track our kids by the cell phone they will always have with them. Our pets can be found, our package traced to the exact location of the delivery truck.

Road maps, Google Maps, MapQuest, OnStar, Tom Tom, Garmin. It's hard to get lost these days. My wife doesn't understand it when I want to leave my cell phone at home on a Saturday night. Who is going to call me anyways that can't wait till tomorrow? I usually lose that argument and pack the cell phone in my pocket. No one ever calls.

But where ya going? I mean after. When the calls and letters and emails slow down. When the phone calls are from grandchildren rather than business deals. The letters filling the mailbox seem to all be about medicare and AARP. What is the next stopping point? A man needs to know.

Some will tell you we just go back to where we came from. The fish pond. The dust pit. The wooden box in the cement vault in the hole in the ground, where the green grass grows all around. Really? After a lifetime of relationships, hardships, excitement, joy filled moments, tears, business successes, and business failures we just vanish? All that's left is our memory and then only in the memories of those who are still around – for how long? A generation or two at the most? I have a DVD my dad had made which is a compilation of many old family movies taken before DVDs were even invented. He is right in suggesting I watch it alongside my adult children because they will have no idea who is on the film. Forgotten ancestors.

Is all the time we spend wandering this earth mean nothing. Sure we have lots of good times, plenty of hard times, relationships that bind us, relationships that break us. We work, play, make love, make war, build up and break down. Then we just die? Is it any wonder that with that vision for my future, if all I can see up ahead is dust and the inside of a casket, that ending my life sooner is really no big deal. [Is your life and your time here meaningless?](#) And what about your kids? If they are raised to believe that life is ultimately meaningless and death is the end, what do they have to hang onto? What importance can they see to hanging in there when stuff goes bad and the pain seems unbearable.

Here's another thought. [It all has a purpose.](#) Your life, your friend's life, your children's life. Let that thought roll around a little. Sure you can accept that your role as a parent or husband has a purpose. We need to provide comfort, shelter and love. And in your work there is certainly a purpose or role you fulfill. But what if all of life really had a purpose, that it was meaningful beyond just the 70 or 80 years we spend here and then die. Stay open minded, stay with me and this idea.

What if the 70 or 80 years was just a warm up to the next 700 or seven thousand years? What if the way you live your life right now was the determining factor on how the next thousand years would be for you and those you love? Would you do things differently? Would you act differently? Would you treat people differently? Would you treat yourself differently? Jazz pianist Eubie Blake, when he reached age 100 said "If I knew I was going to live this long, I'd have taken better care of myself."

[A man must know where he is headed](#). If we were talking about goal setting we'd all agree that you need to know clearly and specifically what is the target. In football its the goal line or the first down, in hockey its the net, in the marketplace its profits and promotions, in marriage and child raising its lots of important little things. So what is it in Life? What's the goal we are aiming for in Life? How can we be so clear, and so demanding to know what we are working toward in so many areas of life and be totally foggy about the biggest goal of all?

If you aren't absolutely certain about what is coming, but you are looking forward to it – that's called Hope. I hope it will start to warm up. I hope the Packers make the play offs. I hope I get that pay raise. I hope there is more to life than getting old and dieing. Some things are certain, winter will come to an end sometime, the Packers always make the playoffs. Other things we can work towards without certainty like a pay raise or a relationship. Some things we take on faith because our hearts know better than our minds, that [we were meant for something more](#) than a few years struggling through life. Real faith and hope are emotions based on more than fleeting desires. They are the result of careful consideration, study, inner meditation and a believe in something greater than yourself.

When we look beyond the small world we have created for ourselves to the larger world we can see with our eyes to the world we can only imagine in our hearts we begin to humbly accept that there is more than we can ever know or comprehend. That life is so much more than a coincidence or a mistake. Humility is the key to this acceptance.

But if all we are aiming for is the grave, decomposition and a headstone, then really – what's the point? What if there is more? What hope of a future can you truthfully give the next generation and yourself so that the idea of putting a gun to your head would seem utterly absurd? [Life is bigger and brighter and more exciting when we have the hope of a future](#). A real hope based upon truth.

We are all going to die. Some of us are dead already. Some have not yet begun to live.

Your call.

In Conclusion

The purpose of this writing was to spark some thoughts and stir some emotions. But thoughts alone can become meaningless and at times an excuse for not taking action. I pose the idea that Every Man Needs To Know as a challenge, and I want you to take it personally. Do you know the answers to each of the questions posed here. Are these answers a strong conviction in your heart, in your mind, in your daily actions?

If you feel the need to discuss any of this, I invite your call or email and we can talk.