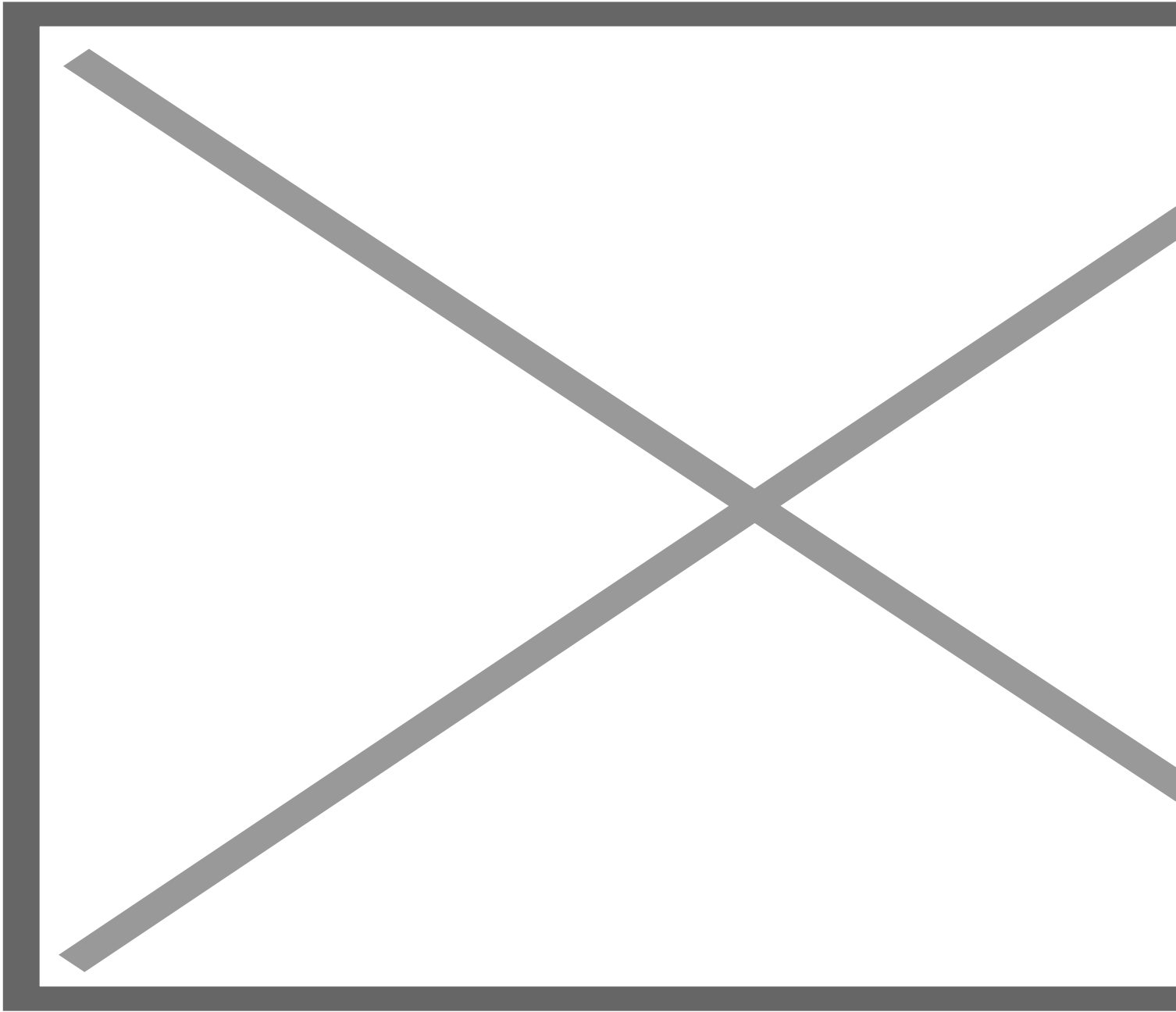


Unrealized potential

It is time for men to embrace our capacity to care for people without applause.

by [Brian Bantum](#) in the [February 2026](#) issue

Published on February 2, 2026



Century illustration (Source images: Getty)

One day my wife and I were having what you might call a vigorous conversation about our plans, or lack thereof, for a rare weekend without work or hosting. It followed a familiar, not-so-healthy cycle of her expressing frustration, me getting defensive, and us then sorting it all out over the course of a less-than-happy day.

In the midst of the silence and back-and-forth, I tried to defend myself by saying I wished she would just tell me what she wanted. What she wanted, she said, was for our weekends together to be as carefully attended to as my bike trip weekends. Ouch. I thought I was making space, that I was willing to make sacrifices for her. But what I thought of as sacrifice was actually an unwillingness to learn more deeply about her and her needs.

Recently this conversation has come back to mind. I sit in horror watching masked men dragging parents from their children in front of day care centers or chasing random Brown people down streets, watching people running simply because they want to escape the netherworld of a federal detention facility. What is wrong with the men who give these orders, with the men who follow them?

No, we are not all masked men or pugilistic wannabe dictators. But our culture readily excuses the worst impulses of its male population, a population that is overrepresented in so many of our society's ills. As much as I hate to admit it, there is a connection between the ignorance I felt comfortable with in my relationship and the manosphere we are captive to at this cultural and political moment.

Some church programming tries to address the "man crisis" with invigorated notions of masculinity: purpose, leadership, strength. And yet these qualities always seem to point to the subordination of someone else. Maybe this explains the apparent success of the jobs program for disaffected men that we call Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The complicity of Christianity in this impulse is clear. Recall God's words to Adam and Eve after they've eaten the fruit and are naked and ashamed in the garden, after they've each tried to blame someone else. Adam will toil working the land; Eve will have pain in childbirth. And Adam will be over Eve (Gen. 3:11–17). Simple, right?

But this world of rigid roles and chain of command is a myth—a myth men have been fighting for millennia to maintain. In what world is it only men who work the land? In what world is a woman gritting her teeth or crying out in childbirth while men sit unbothered? (Maybe this is why so many men developed a ritual of distance.) In what world of interconnectedness is there not a dance of offering and listening until what is decided is always the fruit of a community?

When I come back to God's words to Adam and Eve, as a man I see a long response to Adam's refusal of Eve, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. I think God says to us, *You will toil with the ground from which you came, and you are going to need help. You will hear your flesh of flesh and bone of bone cry out as new life enters the world, and you will know nothing. You can do nothing. You will need to learn to be with them in utter incapacity, to learn how to do mundane things that will get no applause because you weren't the center of this miracle. And what you will learn in those moments is the beginning of a life of learning about your partner, of cleaning up after your children, of learning the different cries of an infant and the different needs of your partner.*

For all of Adam's attempt at self-sufficiency, God stitches Adam again into flesh of flesh and bone of bone. But the history of men has been a long, long legacy of refusing that grace. Perhaps there is an argument to be made that men and women are wired a bit differently. Maybe we look at the way boys and girls play and interact with one another and make some broad assumptions of how sex and gender shape our experience of the world.

If we are honest, though, we men are capable of being attentive and attuned to a whole range of people and experiences. We can plan. We can sense what would make someone feel seen. We can do hard, thankless tasks for the sake of a larger goal. But are we willing to do these things—without sex as the endgame, or the allure of power and control, or the heroic trappings of guns and body armor and bravery in the face of death, or being recognized as the smartest person in the room?

Do we have the courage, the strength to change diapers? To care for someone else's children? To plan a party? To stay home and raise children because our partner's dreams and gifts are more apparent? To learn and attend to the inner life of a four-year-old the way we analyze the difference in feel between a 48- and a 52-tooth chainring or a parlay bet or any of the other countless details we men can master? I don't know that this is a magic pill, but I don't know how we go forward without it. I think all of our lives depend on it.