

MEN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

THE WEIGHT WE NEVER MEASURE

Recognising the invisible burden of responsibility

REFLECTION 2 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



The Weight We Never Measure

Recognising the invisible burden of responsibility

"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." — Viktor E. Frankl

There are some burdens that can be seen. A heavy suitcase, a demanding workload or the physical tiredness that follows a long day all leave visible signs. They can be recognised, measured and, perhaps most importantly, acknowledged by other people.

Then there are the burdens that remain almost entirely invisible.

The responsibility of knowing that others depend upon you. The quiet awareness that your decisions affect the wellbeing of a partner, children, ageing parents, colleagues or friends. The pressure of keeping a household functioning, paying the bills, making difficult choices and continuing to move forwards, even when you feel uncertain yourself.

These responsibilities are not unique to men, nor are they experienced in the same way by every man. Many women, non-binary people and carers will recognise similar pressures. Yet throughout history, ideas about masculinity have often been closely linked with providing, protecting and persevering. For some, these expectations become a source of meaning and purpose. For others, they gradually become a weight that is rarely spoken about because it seems so closely tied to their identity.

Responsibility is, in many ways, an expression of love. We work because we care. We worry because relationships matter. We stay awake at night thinking about the future because we hope to protect the people who are important to us. There is dignity in this. Yet even the most meaningful responsibilities can become difficult when there is no opportunity to acknowledge their emotional cost.

Perhaps this is one of the quieter challenges of adulthood. There comes a point when responsibility is no longer something we occasionally carry; it becomes woven into everyday life. Decisions are made almost automatically. Problems are solved before anyone else notices them. Plans are adjusted. Financial concerns are quietly calculated. Appointments are remembered. Repairs are arranged. Difficult conversations are anticipated long before they happen. Much of this takes place unnoticed, not because it lacks importance, but because it has become ordinary.

The difficulty with ordinary burdens is that they are rarely recognised as burdens at all.

It is often easier to notice the dramatic moments in life than the slow accumulation of responsibility over many years. Emotional exhaustion does not always arrive because of a single crisis. Sometimes it grows gradually, almost imperceptibly, through countless days of placing everyone else's needs alongside, or occasionally before, our own.

Viktor Frankl wrote that those who have a sense of purpose can endure extraordinary hardship. His words remind us that meaning matters deeply. Yet meaning does not remove the need for support. Loving others does not make someone immune to fatigue. Caring deeply does not prevent loneliness. A meaningful life and an emotionally demanding life are often the very same thing.

There is wisdom in recognising that carrying responsibility and acknowledging its weight are not contradictory. One does not diminish the other. In fact, the ability to recognise when life feels heavy may be one of the ways we continue carrying it with compassion rather than resentment.

Communities have long understood the importance of shared purpose. Across the United Kingdom, Men's Sheds bring people together through practical projects, conversation and companionship. Although they

are not therapy services, they provide something many people quietly miss: a place to belong without needing to explain themselves. For some, working alongside others, sharing skills and becoming part of a community offers an opportunity to reconnect with aspects of life that responsibility alone cannot provide.

Perhaps the question is not whether responsibility is heavy. Most people already know that it can be.

Perhaps the more important question is whether we ever allow ourselves to notice its weight before it becomes too much to carry.

Further Reflection

Responsibility can give life meaning, but meaning does not remove the need for rest, connection or support.

Perhaps emotional wellbeing begins not by putting life's responsibilities down, but by recognising that they were never meant to be carried entirely alone.

If You'd Like to Continue the Conversation

Men's Sheds are community spaces where people come together to share practical skills, work on projects and build friendships. While each Shed is different, they share a common belief that connection, purpose and community contribute positively to wellbeing. Many people discover that simply spending time alongside others, without pressure or expectation, can help reduce loneliness and create a renewed sense of belonging.