



February 11, 2026

MESSENGER

Quote of the Week

"Repenting is for getting rid of the debris of sin."

Pastor Connie in this week's message

INFO

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Contact Information:

Due to the fires, our mail has been forwarded. Please send mail to PO Box 91055, Pasadena, CA 91109. You may still call the church phone at 626-797-8970;

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MOUSE, MENACE OR MENSCH

On his blogsite *The Tragic Optimist*, social commentator Andrew Boyd recently shared some insights about masculinity based on the example of Alex Pretti, who recently died while demonstrating in St. Paul MN.¹ Boyd speaks of the classic choice men seem to feel forced to make when they are confronted with violence: between being a MOUSE and being a MENACE. In an effort not to appear meek and mouselike, they feel forced to over-assert their "manliness" by coming across as a menacing threat. Boyd observes that Alex Pretti chose a third option and to act like a **MENSCH**.

"Mensch" is a Yiddish term that's well-known among Jewish folk, but it needs to be understood and embraced by non-Jews as well, because we have no equivalent term.² A mensch is a *true* human being, whose life is marked by authenticity and character. A person of weight and significance, whose ideas really matter because they've been deeply thought through. A mensch doesn't have to calculate how they should act in a particular situation because they're always coming from who they are, not from who they're pretending to be. A mensch is real and genuine, and their words and actions are consistent and dependable.

Older dudes will remember when the Village People came out with their hit *Macho Man* (1978). In depicting typical symbols of masculine strength --- a Police Officer, a Biker, a Cowboy, an Indian Chief, a Construction Worker, a uniformed G.I. --- they were really making fun of these "macho" strengths as caricatures of the essence of who men really are, under their costumes.

You're probably familiar with Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, in which he analyzes the relationship between two struggling depression-era (1937) men, George and Lennie, desperate to find a day's work. But you may not realize that the novel's title came from a poem written 250 years earlier by Scottish poet Robert Burns, entitled *To a Mouse*. The subtitle was "On turning her up in her nest with the plough, November, 1785."

February 11, 2026

(Continued from other side)

Most farmers would have ignored the scurrying little rodent, but this farmer/poet spoke to the “wee, sleeket, cowran tim’rous beastie,” and the result was a timeless expression of insight into a human being’s relationship with surrounding nature. The last stanza of Burns’ poem is this observation:

Still, thou art blest, compar’d wi’ me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e’e,
On prospects drear!
An’ forward tho’ I canna see,
I guess an’ fear!

What makes the Farmer/Poet radically different from the terrified mouse is not size, or strength, or even intelligence. It’s the fact that he sees not only the Present, but also the Past (“I backward cast my e’e on prospects drear”) and the Future (“forward, tho’ I canna see, I guess an’ fear”).

We might summarize these lessons on being a quality human in this way:

- You act like a MOUSE when you respond only in the scary Present.
- You act like a MENACE when wounds of the Past induce Present abuse of others.
- You act like a MENSCH when you see Past, Present and Future in proper context and respond in a human way.

I believe there is one other possible option:

- You can act like a *MAGNIFIED MENSCH* when you add to Past, Present and Future a vision of **Eternity** from a genuine faith relationship with God.

I don’t know exactly what that looks like, but I hope God will give me the grace to be a MAGNIFIED MENSCH if and when *my* Alex Pretti moment comes.

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ <https://substack.com/home/post/p-186629462>

² Though most of this article may seem male specific, a mensch comes in female models as well, as demonstrated by this review of two recent books: <https://jewishbooks.blogspot.com/2023/05/shes-mensch-two-collective-biographies.html>