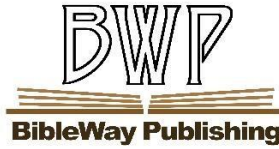


Real Men Are Godly Men

Looking For Real Relationships

Steve Flatt



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Looking For Real Relationships

There are all kinds of myths about men: "Real men don't eat quiche. Real men don't floss. Real men don't buy flight insurance. Real men don't call for a fair catch." All of those, by the way, are myths; they're not true. But, perhaps the most damaging and devastating myth that's been perpetrated by the John Wayne/Clint Eastwood-type Hollywood characters, is that men can do just fine without any real relationships, that men are born to be loners. The myth that we need most to discard is that real men don't need other people.

For years, our culture has fostered the notion that being a male meant being independent, being isolated, keeping particularly other men at arm's length. We've been told that rugged individualism is what built America. Do you realize that's a culturally fabricated myth? When you go back and look at the history of America, the real history of America, it wasn't built by rugged individualism; it was built by men working together, not men working apart.

So the wise man stated in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, "Two are better than one, because they have a greater return for their work: If one falls down, there's one to help him up. But pity the man who falls down and has no one to help him up!" The Bible says that it's a myth that man can live without meaningful relationships. And the perfect example that I can show you from the Bible is Jesus, himself.

Do you remember how he spent all night in prayer before coming down the mountain and choosing 12 special men who would be with him, who would walk with him, who would live with him, who would be his closest friends and carry on his work even after he died? Whenever he sent his disciples out, he sent them out at least two by two. You will never find Jesus sending one of his men out to do the work of God alone. Jesus teaches us that God meant for men to live in community, and yet most of the men I know, live their lives with what I call, "deficit relationships." Most of the people that men would call close friends in their lives; women would only call casual acquaintances.

McGinnis, in his best-selling book, *The Friendship Factor*, estimates that only ten percent of all American males have any genuine friends. Patrick Morley said in his book, *Man in the Mirror*, "I think most men could recruit six pallbearers, but hardly anyone has a friend that he can call at 2:00 a.m." If you look at our culture, that's true.

Now some men will retort, "Well, I may not have many close friends, but my wife is my best friend." Good, good, if you're a married man, your wife ought to be your best friend. My wife is my best friend, my most intimate companion. But I honestly think a lot of men use that as a cop-out. Scripture tells us that we don't only need to have somebody that we would die for, our wives, just like Christ died for the church; we need people in our lives that we would die with, that we would go down fighting with.

Alexander the Great conquered the world by using a simple, but revolutionary fighting technique, that came to be known as the Macedonian phalanx. It's very simple. When a man went out into battle in those days, he had the shield in the left hand, and the sword in the right hand. There's a problem with that. His right side was exposed, the right flank was open. So, Alexander said, "No man ever goes into battle alone." You go in with a man at your side, literally at your back. If you think about it, back-to-back, then this man's shield would cover that right flank. You would have a circle of swords and shields. People, that's how God wants it. He wants men who have faith in him, to cover each other's backsides. He wants men who would say what Jonathan said to David in I Samuel 20:4, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."

Do you have anybody you can say that to? Or, anybody who would say it to you? I think about David's 30 mighty men after Saul had died. They were in the wilderness, and the Philistines were hunting them. David was sitting there probably sighed and said, "Oh, what I would give for a drink of water from the well outside the gate of Bethlehem." (I Chronicles 11:17) Three of his 30 men overheard him. These guys weren't sentimental wimps. One of them was a fellow by the name of Jashobeam. The Bible says he had raised his spear and single-handedly in battle killed 300 men. That's a pretty tough guy. It said with him was a man by the name of Eleazar, who when the Israelites were retreating in the face of the Philistines stopped in the middle of a field and took the Philistines head-on and conquered them there that day. The Bible says those two and one other went all night, went through enemy lines, didn't sleep risked their lives, and brought back to David a cup of water from that well. When David saw it, he was so sentimental and choked up and couldn't drink it. He poured it on the ground as an offering to God.

Do you have a friend like that? See, I believe that men do want friends like that.

Barriers to men forming real relationships

1. Men tend to value others for utilitarian purposes. The previous lesson pointed out that men are left-brained meaning among other things, that while women tend to be more relationally oriented; men tend to be more task-oriented. Consequently, have you ever noticed how men tend to form relationships around activities, while women tend to form relationships around just each other?

Who are your friends? If I were to ask "Who are your friends?" most men would respond "All the guys that I golf with, the guys I fish with, the guys I hunt with, the guys I bowl with, the guys I work out with." See it's always built around something that we have to do together. Men are so task-oriented, it's like I killed two birds with one stone that way. I do something I want to do, and I go ahead and have a relationship. Plus it makes it easier not to admit that we need the company of other men.

If a woman hadn't seen a friend in a while, one of her female friends, she would call that friend up and say, "Hey, I'd love for us to have lunch." Her friend would say, "Oh, wow, great!" But if a man calls up a friend that he's not seen in a while, a male friend, and say, "Hey, let's get together for lunch." Then his friend would say, "Sure, what's up?" Isn't that right? Have you ever thought about that? See, men have to manufacture non-emotional reasons for getting together. That by the way is why women make friends, and guys tend to settle for buddies. We tend to use people for utilitarian purposes.

2. Men are taught not to show their emotions. We're taught not to get down to the emotional level. I can remember when I was a young boy when "Old Yeller" came on our old black and white television set at home, and I was laying in the floor watching...you remember "Old Yeller" don't you? That loyal dog who saved him from the hogs. Old Yeller was bitten and he got rabies. You know how the movie ended - they had to shoot Old Yeller. Well, I was down there and sniff...sniff...sniff, it was tearing me up. Then I realized I'm in here with my dad, my mom, and my sister. So I crawled out of the room, went into another room, got my composure, and came back in. We teach our boys, and we teach our young men that a real man doesn't show emotion. Let me tell you something, if that's true then what do we do with Jesus? A man who demonstrated compassion in public, a man who angered publicly, a man who cried publicly, not just once, but twice; and that's amazing. When I read about Jesus, I know I want a friend like that. So maybe you and I need to rethink what a man really looks like.

3. Men are so competitive. Women, I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but men will compete at anything. If you lock two boys in a room and don't give them anything in there, they'll find some way to make a game out of it where somebody wins and somebody loses. Men will compete in everything from who can drive the nicest car, who can catch the biggest fish, who can spit a watermelon seed the farthest. See men are wired along the, "I win, you lose," model. For a man, the ultimate catastrophe in life is to be viewed as a loser. So we're constantly jockeying for self-esteem based upon how we compare with other men. Ladies, we compare investment returns, job titles, we compare cars, men compare wives, and kids. I've been in the locker room when men compared scars. "Well, look here, I have a real bad one right here, look at this old surgery I had." Men will even compare themselves spiritually. "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest," so competitive. (Luke 9:46)

We're wired to be competitive and there are certain arenas in life we need to chisel out and let it go. Be competitive on the ball field. Be competitive on the golf course, but if you live your life with competition dominating it, the irony of it is you're going to be the real loser. Because it feeds ego and pride and it's of Satan. It's exactly why Paul said in Galatians 6:4, he said, "Let each man test his own actions, then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else." Competition is not the ultimate in life. It's something that needs to be overcome to establish real relationships.

4. Fear of betrayal. Most of us know how that feels and once we've been burned, we've been slower to trust again. Benjamin Franklin must have felt that sting when he wrote, "Three people can keep a secret as long as two of them are dead." Julius Caesar had his Brutus, didn't he? Jesus had his Judas. Uriah had his David, and David felt the sting of betrayal. I don't even know the setting, but somebody stabbed David in the back. "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe

were raising himself against me, I could hide from it. But it is you, a man like me, my companion, and my close friend." (Psalms 55:12) That hurts, that really hurts. So often our fear of betrayal outweighs our willingness to risk trusting another man with our inner thoughts, and so we isolate ourselves.

5. Men want to appear strong. We just want to put on this facade of invincibility. For example, Ladies have you ever been on vacation with your husband and gotten lost? He'll drive around in circles until supper time, or after before he stops. Why? He doesn't want to let them know he needs anything.

Another not-so-humorous example, in a troubled marriage a woman will be 10 times more likely to seek help than the man. He can't admit his weakness.

The price of friendship is personal vulnerability, letting somebody know you need help when you fall down. But you see men, instead of receiving the extended arm; men want to give the stiff arm, like I just don't need that. I'll get out of this by myself. But Jesus said "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." He closes by saying, "This is my command: Love each other." (John 15:12) I'll tell you something, a strong man is not a loner, a strong man is a lover. Real men pour their lives into somebody else's life.

Somebody once said that "A man's measured by his investments." That's right, but not your investments in stocks and bonds. A man is measured by his investments in other people.

What Kind of Man Are You?

1. Who are you sacrificing something for? Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Jesus said, you can't build friends on the, "I win, you lose" mindset. That destroys friendship. You sacrifice for them to move both of you ahead. Men based upon what Jesus said, are you really anybody's friend, or are you more everybody's buddy?

2. Who are you opening up to? Jesus said, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) He said, the reason you're my friends is because I'm open with you. Men, are you so competitive, so fearful of betrayal, that you won't be open to anybody? Jesus said if you want what he had in mind for you, we've got to stop hiding. Folks, we've been hiding since the Garden of Eden, and God didn't like it then, he doesn't like it now. We've got to create some arenas, and the church is the place where there's that arena, where a man can take off his mask, stop being competitive, admit his struggles, and reveal his hurt. It's a strong man who stands like Jesus and says, "This is who I am, this is where I'm going, and this is why I want you to walk with me."

3. Who are you walking with to do something bigger than yourself? Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit---." (John 15:16) In our individualistic mindset, we just take that one-on-one. He wasn't talking to a one-on-one. He was talking to them as a group of twelve. He said, "You all," "I've chosen you all," a community of men to go out and to bear fruit. Jesus wants us to bear fruit together. If you want to be a real friend, if you want a real friend, link arms with a brother to do something that will last through eternity.

God wants all of his people, called the church, to be strong in community relationships. We should love one another enough that we would die for one another. It's impossible to be intimate friends with everybody, but you sure need to be intimate friends with somebody(ies). Amazing Grace #1207 -- Steve Flatt - April 30, 1995.

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