



CHRISTIAN MALE FRIENDSHIPS

“My brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier...” In a moment of intimate reflection, Paul praises his dear friend Epaphroditus. Paul goes on to explain, *“... I should have sorrow upon sorrow,”* if I lost him. (*Phil. 2:25-28*)

Deep male friendships are uncommon today. The covenant relationship of Jonathan and David seems odd and best to be avoided in this relationship-challenged society. Our culture has no lens or metric for wholesome, intimate male relationships. As a consequence, many Christian men have lost sight of male friendships such as those exemplified by Elijah and Elisha, Daniel and his companions, and Christ and His disciples. This loss of sight has brought about a lack of biblical male intimacy and consequently has left us in a state of loss to all the advantages those relationships could bring.

Proverbs states *“...there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”* (*Prov. 18:24*) The purpose of this article is to restore this vision for Christian male relationships. This restored vision will focus on both the beauty and the use of male friendship. As a model for illustration, consider Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Daniel and his companions were uprooted and stolen away from their home in Jerusalem during the first deportation of the Jews to Babylon amidst the empire sweep of Nebuchadnezzar. They soon found themselves in a foreign land, under foreign leadership and within a foreign culture. Unlike sexual love, which finds its fulfillment in the other person, friendship love is beautifully grounded in a shared “third party” identity. Daniel and his friends were bound no doubt by their common heritage, shared ideals and common faith in God. This beauty gave rise to the wonderful advantage of strength in a pagan land. They were brothers indeed.

When men have a shared third party identity, they can work together toward a shared goal. Daniel and his friends did this in the first chapter of Daniel. When commanded to eat of the King’s table, which defiled their shared Jewish identity, they moved together toward a solution. Appealing to leadership they asked, *“Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.”* (*Dan. 1:12*) Companionship helped these men be assertive and take initiative and not be taken, as others were, in the swift current of complacency. They were companions in labors indeed.

In the second chapter of Daniel, Arioch, the king’s captain, came to Daniel’s door to claim his life. Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream could not be recalled nor interpreted by the wise men of the kingdom. Daniel wisely appealed to the counsel of God and leaned on the communion of prayers offered by his friends. *“That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven... that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”* (*Dan. 2:18*) Daniel and his comrades found peaceful fellowship in shared communion with whom they shared identity – God. In so doing, friendship facilitated prayer in the face of despair. Within the fellowship of friendship, they bowed to their knees when all others stood.

Furthermore, friends are able to stand when all others bow to their knees. In the third chapter of *Daniel*, his friends stood while all the princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counselors, sheriffs and rulers of Babylon knelt. At “*the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music ye [are to] fall down and worship the golden image*” was the decree. These three men arguably stood taller and longer in the face of death because they stood together. They were fellow soldiers indeed.

Our strong, “I can do it myself” mentality coupled with our over-sexualized culture has created a low view of male relationships. We either think they are not necessary, or we are afraid of what they mean. Thus, we have sacrificed the beauty of our paths linking up with others who are traveling to the same place (like Christ with His friends on the road to Emmaus). We forego exemplifying the gospel by not seeing that our joint identity is our shared Savior; hence, we are brothers. Relationships help us strive toward common goals and grant us the ability to do together what we could not do alone. We have comradery, companionship and friendship. This beauty gives rise to wonderful use. Laboring together, we stave off complacency by a community of assertiveness and diligence. In prayer we resign our strength corporately and appeal to His. We, like soldiers, engage with the enemy in battle, stronger as we band together.

If you are a Christian male, consider your male relationships. Ask the following questions of yourself:

- Do I have brothers in the Lord that help me fight against apathy and complacency?
- Do I have companions in labor with whom I work together towards a shared Gospel-centered goal?
- Do I have fellow soldiers with whom I stand together against oppositions to faith?

Paul was not a “lone ranger.” He lived the Christian life well and carried out ministry well because he did relationships well. Such health is not surprising when we see the beauty and use of relationships embodied in the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from whom and for whom all things were created. Our health is tied to the health of our relationships. Thus, as men in the Lord, let us take initiative together. Let us kneel when others stand and stand when all others kneel; acknowledging one another as brothers, companions in labors, and fellow soldiers of the truth.

ACCFS has several resources to encourage men in their biblical roles and responsibilities. Recommended resources and presentations can be found on our website at www.accounseling.org/men. If you would like more information, please contact ACCFS at (309)263-5536 or info@accounseling.org.