

Meaningful Male Friendship in a Disconnected Age

The epidemic of moral failure among men in the church today is directly tied to our lack of healthy relationships.

Despite the proliferation of iPhones, Blackberries, e-mail and social networking Web sites—not to mention Starbucks locations—many Christian men, if they are honest, will tell you they are lonely. They may Twitter several times a day to co-workers; they may have occasional golf buddies; they may even grab coffee with colleagues from time to time. But so many men who attend church regularly are friendless.

This was made real to me last weekend when I spoke to a group of men at a large charismatic church in Rochester, N.Y. I was talking about three different types of relationships we need: (1) “Pauls,” who serve as spiritual fathers; (2) “Barnabases,” peer-level encouragers who support and challenge us; and (3) “Timothys,” younger men we inspire and mentor.

Pentecostalism, Version 20.09

At my second daughter's college graduation this weekend I saw the future of our movement.

Some people twitch or roll their eyes when you say the word *Pentecostal*. The term conjures up outdated images of either (1) slick-haired, Bible-thumping preachers who spew saliva on the unfortunate souls seated in the first three pews, or (2) scowling women with their hair in buns who know how to scare you with glossolalia.

Say goodbye to the worn-out stereotypes. Last weekend I saw the future of the Pentecostal movement when my wife and I attended a graduation ceremony at Emmanuel College, the liberal arts school in northeast Georgia that was founded 90 years ago by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. What we witnessed on Saturday was a refreshing reminder that God has raised up a new generation of young people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We Need to Love the Church

You probably groaned, as I did, after hearing that Todd Bentley, leader of the Lakeland Revival, had divorced his wife, Shonnah, and married his former ministry intern, Jessa Hasbrook. The news surfaced after nine months of silence and speculation, during which time the board of Bentley's Fresh Fire Ministries in Canada publicly scolded him for adultery.

Rick Joyner, the popular author who is overseeing Bentley's restoration, released a statement in March saying that (1) Bentley married his new wife and moved to Joyner's base in Fort Mill, S.C.; (2) Todd and Jessa agree that their relationship was "wrong and premature"; (3) Bentley will remain out of public ministry while he seeks healing; and (4) Joyner will oversee the healing process with input from pastors Jack Deere and Bill Johnson.

It was also announced that Bentley will relaunch his ministry, called Fresh Fire USA, in Fort Mill, and that Joyner is collecting donations from supporters to build it. (Leaders of the Canadian ministry Bentley started have severed ties with the evangelist.)

In a few places in his statement Joyner expressed tough love,

especially when he said: "We know that trust has to be earned and that Todd will have to earn the trust of the body of Christ for future ministry, which will not be easy, nor should it be." But there were glaring omissions in the statements released during March and April that indicate a weakness in our freestyle approach to restoring fallen leaders.

First of all, it is outrageous that Shonnah Bentley, Todd's first wife, is rarely mentioned in the current discussion. Her name wasn't in Joyner's statement—while Todd was mentioned 18 times. Why are wives often ignored when male church leaders mess up? How will Shonnah manage to care for the three children she and Todd share? Their healing must be addressed too.

Second, we have a bad habit of elevating gifting above character. The prevailing attitude says, "So what if a preacher ruins one marriage and makes a hasty decision to marry a younger woman—the important thing is that we get him back in the pulpit!" That is a perversion of biblical integrity.

What is most deplorable about this latest installment in the Bentley scandal is the lack of true remorse. In his own statement, Bentley apologized for his actions and said he "takes full responsibility" for his part in the ending of the marriage. But how can he be taking "full" responsibility if he willingly chose to have a girlfriend on the side—and then married her immediately after his divorce was final?

Many Christians today have rejected biblical discipline and adopted a sweet, spineless love that cannot correct. Our grace is greasy. No matter what an offending brother does, we coddle him and nurse his wounds while we ignore the people he wounded. No matter how heinous his sin, we offer comforting platitudes because, after all, who are we to judge?

When the apostle Paul learned that a member of the Corinthian

church was in an immoral relationship with his father's wife, he did not rush to comfort the man. He told the Corinthians: "You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst" (1 Cor. 5:2, NASB). Sometimes genuine healing requires a ruthless, exacting love.

Many today would call Paul's position harsh and legalistic. But that is because we have lost a true sense of the fear of the Lord—and we don't realize that our laxness about God's standards is a perversion of His mercy. When the sin is severe, the public rebuke must be severe.

I've never claimed to be perfect, and I know the Lord extends His mercy to us all. But when it comes to biblical standards of leadership we need solid confrontation, not squishy compromise. We must restore not only the brother who sinned but also the church that has lost its bearings in the process.

If we truly care about Todd Bentley we will not clamor for his quick return to the platform. We must demand that those involved in Bentley's restoration not only affirm him but also love the church by avoiding a repeat of this scandal.

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God Has Pushed a Great Big

Reset Button

Put on your seat belt. What we are experiencing is so much more than an economic recession.

Unless you are Rip Van Winkle and have been asleep for years, I'm sure you feel the daily convulsions that are rocking our world. Change is hitting America right between the eyes. Everything that can be shaken is being shaken—from banks and insurance companies to car manufacturers and media empires.

Trusted brands, including Chrysler and United Airlines, may go out of business within months. Newspapers are laying off employees in droves as readers go digital; bookstores like Borders can't compete with Amazon.com. Pontiac is officially dead, and the city of Detroit—once the proud global headquarters of the auto industry—is rusting and jobless.

Sharing Jesus With the 'Slumdogs' of Mumbai

Before Slumdog Millionaire made the world's largest garbage dump famous, Biju Thampy was feeding the children who live there.

The Deonar garbage dump in Mumbai, India, is certainly not a glamorous location for a movie. The first thing that hit me was the smell—an awful combination of urine, rotting food and toxic fumes. But what made me nauseous was watching dozens of skinny Indian children forage through the mountainous heaps of trash looking for their next meal.

Welcome to Mumbai, a city of 24 million made famous last year by Danny Boyle's Oscar-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*. The lead character in the movie, a boy named Jamal, grows up near the vast garbage dump (reportedly the world's largest), watches his mother die and then is coerced by a mafia boss into begging for rupees with other love-starved orphans.

Pulling India's Children from the Fiery Furnace

Last December some children in the north Indian state of Orissa watched Hindu militants burn their fathers to death. Today these kids have found a refuge.

This past Monday at the Home of Hope Center in Coimbatore, India, more than 150 boys in matching uniforms stood in neat rows on the tile floor of their prayer chapel and began singing praise songs in Telugu, Hindi and Tamil. The smallest ones fidgeted as they clapped in unison. The older teens raised their hands in the air as they worshiped Jesus.

I sat on the stage and watched their smiling faces with amazement, knowing that some of these children had watched their own parents burn to death a few months ago.

Rick Warren and the Hot Potato of the Decade

Many Christians misjudged the California pastor after his recent interview with CNN's Larry King.

My switchboard almost short-circuited last week after California pastor Rick Warren appeared on *Larry King Live* to discuss the hot potato issue of the decade—same-sex marriage. Some concerned Christians called or e-mailed immediately to tell me that Warren had, just in time for Easter, denied his faith in true Judas style. They even lifted a quote from Warren's April 6 interview with King to prove that the pastor of the largest church in our country no longer believes in evangelical morality.

People who had not even seen the broadcast were hyperventilating. "How can Rick Warren do this to us?" they asked me. I decided to stay calm, breathe deeply and actually watch the broadcast instead of believing some slanted conservative blogs. (Note to readers: In this amazing age of TiVo and YouTube, you can actually check the facts easily before jumping to conclusions.)

Evangelism, Super Apostles and Mixed-Up Priorities

After visits from three evangelists in four days, I figured it out. We've neglected the heart of our mission.

Something amazing happened to me last week during a ministry trip to Texas and Oklahoma. God sent three unexpected visitors over the course of four days to confirm something He is doing in the church today.

Last Thursday when I was speaking at Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas, my friend Sujo John called to say he wanted to drop by the campus and attend the conference with me. Sujo is a full-time evangelist who is originally from India. He surrendered to the ministry on Sept. 11, 2001, when he was buried under the rubble of the World Trade Center.

This Easter, Show Them the Real Jesus

When millions of curious seekers crowd into America's churches on Easter Sunday, what will they find?

Millions of "Easter Christians" and other curious spiritual seekers will crowd into America's churches on the next two Sundays. Some will visit simply to "put in their time"—either in an attempt to ease their consciences or to please relatives. A few will see it as an excuse to buy and show off new outfits. And many will come out of genuine spiritual hunger.

A recent survey conducted by Lifeway Research revealed that 56 percent of Americans would attend a church service if invited by a friend. And while polls show that many older denominations are losing members, non-denominational churches

are growing in many regions of this country at a brisk pace (along with non-Christian religions). Despite all the grim economic news we've heard this year, some trends indicate that we could actually be on the cusp of a spiritual awakening.

Are You Ready for a Holy Ghost Building Inspection?

We must use the right building materials if we want our ministries to stand in the day of His visitation.

Every state in this country has strict building codes. You can't just buy a piece of land and throw up a structure any way you choose. Local governments have standards for foundations, floors, drywall, roofs, exhaust systems, water heaters, wiring, lighting and sanitary drainage. In my neighborhood you can't even erect a shed in your backyard without a permit, and an inspector will always drop by unannounced to make sure you followed the rules.

These codes are important in Florida where I live. You don't want to discover during a hurricane that your contractor used shoddy plywood or defective concrete when he built your house or condo. Bad construction just might send your roof into a neighbor's yard!