

Do You Know Any Icebergs?

Jim (not his real name) was fairly active in many of the men's activities—a “behind the scenes” guy who liked to make things happen but stayed out of the spotlight.

Jim walked into church every Sunday with his family. His wife was involved in the children's ministry, and his kids were engaged in the youth group. Jim had a great sense of humor and a reputation for being there for guys when they needed someone. A lot of guys knew Jim.

Well, actually, they didn't know him. They were acquainted with him. What they didn't know about him was that his longtime marriage was really a struggle. He had been feeling more and more distant from his wife. The occasional drink had turned into several beers every night.

When Jim's marriage imploded—in a spectacular fashion that included the police—most of the men in the church were caught off guard. Jim was a stand-up guy. How could this happen?

Jim was like a lot of men in the church today. Though the appearances were good, he was like an iceberg. Only a few men ever got to see what was going on beneath the surface. Luckily for Jim, a few guys did know about his struggles—though not the extent of them—and they were there to walk through the aftermath of his poor decision-making.

Regardless of their spiritual maturity, all men go through difficulties at various times in their lives. At any given point, many men in your church may be going through a tremendous challenge. Many times, we ask men, “How many of you are going through a significant struggle in one or more of these areas: finances, marriage, child rearing, aging parents, employment or health?” At least half raise their hands every time.

Men are hurting.

In his book, *Seven Seasons of the Man in the Mirror*, Pat Morley talks about “Seasons of Suffering” that every man goes through. He cites three reasons he has seen for men to suffer:

- for doing wrong
- for doing right
- for what seems to be no reason at all

You can probably think of men you know who fit into each of those categories.

Unfortunately, many men tend to respond to suffering the same way—whether it’s their suffering or someone else’s—they flee relationship, isolate themselves. Sometimes in an effort to appear strong, sometimes because they just don’t know what to do.

But the Bible is clear about what our response is supposed to be. Jesus told His followers, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). In Galatians 6:2, Paul encourages the Christians in the churches he is writing to, “Bear one another’s burdens.” He says that when you are doing this, you “fulfill the law of Christ.” Many men struggle with two things: Knowing how to ask for help, and knowing how to offer it.

Every man needs to have at least a couple of other men who know them well enough to recognize when something’s not right. In the opening story, Jim had a few friends that were there for him when things got out of hand. They couldn’t prevent the crisis that happened, but they loved him enough to walk through the aftermath. Without them Jim might have ended up hurting himself or someone else.

So just exactly how do you help a hurting man? Eugene Peterson states in his paraphrase of Galatians 6:2, “Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed.”

Here are five practical ways to reach out to a hurting man:

R Is for Relationships

At Man in the Mirror, we focus on a “life-on-life” approach to men’s discipleship. The first step in helping a hurting man is to have close relationships. Create an environment in the church where men are more than just buddies who talk about sports and weather.

Hurting men can be messy. It takes a godly man to step into that mess. Remember Job’s friends? Sure, they eventually gave him some bad advice, but first they “met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.” They loved him so much that they wept for him. “Meanwhile, no one was speaking to him at all because they saw that his pain was severe” (see Job 2:11-13).

E Is for Encouragement

The writer of Hebrews said, “And let us consider how to spur one another to love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). Encourage literally means to instill courage in another person.

When a man is going through a difficult time, he needs brothers to come around and give him courage. Remind a man of God’s promises. Reassure him that God has not abandoned him, and that he is not going through this difficulty alone. As a Christian brother, you are the tangible representation of the presence of God.

A Is for Attitude

When walking with a hurting man, sometimes it is our role to hold a man accountable for his attitude. Some men are prone to give in to the despair and assume that things will never get better. This is in spite of the fact that the Lord has brought them through difficulties before. Remind a man of what God has done and encourage him to trust God for His greater purposes.

Jesus assured His disciples, "In this world you will have tribulation." But he brackets that statement with an assurance of His presence and power, "so that in Me you may have peace" (John 16:33). Keep pointing a hurting man to the gospel of power and peace, and urge him to focus on God and not just his problems.

C Is for Community

Scriptural engagement and biblical community are two crucial aspects of the Christian life. Hurting men may have never experienced biblical community, and may be primed and ready for such an authentic, transparent environment that provides a safe haven for their hurting soul.

As mentioned above, don't allow a man to isolate himself. Instead, continually invite him to join into community with other men and couples in the church. Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

H Is for Hope

A hurting man may lose his health, his job and his family. But the most devastating loss of all is the loss of hope. Discouragement leads to despair, and despair to despondency. Men who are left alone to fester in their misery can give in to hopelessness. In severe situations, sometimes suicide becomes appealing.

Paul reminds us in Romans 15:13 that we believe in a "God of hope" who can "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

We must remember that the battle we fight is a spiritual one. Satan is a thief, Jesus said. He seeks to steal, kill and destroy. He is a wolf who snatches and scatters the sheep (John 10:11-12). When you step into the life of a hurting man,

you are doing battle with him against evil.

Don't retreat from the battle. The life of a hurting man can be lonely, difficult, depressing, frustrating and chaotic. As Christians, we are called to step into that mess and shine the light of the gospel. Engage with hurting men. Draw them into relationship and community. Pray with them and for them. Challenge them to trust God. Help them find hope through their faith in the power of God. Remind them that God will meet them even as a "broken mirror."

*For the original article, visit . **Patrick Morley** is the founder of Man in the Mirror Ministries.*