

Lewis, Tolkien Personified the Male Friendship Phenomenon

I recently began a new teaching series at my church entitled, “The Worlds of Lewis and Tolkien: Christian Imagery in Narnia and Middle Earth.” As a big fan of both these authors (particularly Tolkien), it has been a pleasure exploring anew how Christ is represented in their fictional works.

One thing that has struck me in my background reading is the unique friendship shared by C.S. Lewis and . Tolkien, particularly as it manifested in the regular meetings of the “Inklings.” Indeed, it was this friendship that not only led to Lewis’ conversion, but also was the context in which they developed many of their ideas that later appear in their fictional works. It was their friendship that made them who they were.

There is something powerful and special about male friendships when they are centered on Christ and His kingdom. Such friendships draw us out of our preoccupation with the world’s version of manhood—which is typically centered on career or recreation—and remind us of what God really made us to be: Men—men whom God has called to advance the cause of Christ into a hostile world.

To have such friendships would be less like hanging out with “the guys” watching football or shooting hoops and more like being one of the 12 disciples as they shared their lives together. While there is nothing wrong with the former kind of friendship, it will not change your life. But the latter kind of friendship will.

Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, describes this kind of male friendship: “Those are the golden sessions, when our slippers

are on, our feet spread out towards the blaze, and our drinks at our elbows; when the whole world, and something beyond the world, opens itself to our minds as we talk; and no one has any claim or responsibility for another, but all are freeman or equals as if we had first met an hour ago, while at the same time an Affection mellowed by the years enfolds us. Life—natural life—has no better gift to give.”

Humphrey Carpenter, in his biography of Tolkien, describes the Inklings: “On Thursday nights, they would meet in Lewis’s big Magdalen sitting room, congregating some time after nine o’clock. Tea would be made and pipes lit, and then Lewis would boom out: ‘Well, has nobody got anything to read to us?’ Someone would produce a manuscript and begin to read it aloud—it might be a poem, or a story, or a chapter.

“Then would come criticism: sometimes praise, sometimes censure ... soon the proceedings would spill over into talk of all kinds, sometimes heated debate, and would terminate at a late hour.”

The modern church needs to take a cue from Lewis and Tolkien on the nature of male friendships. We have a dearth of good male leaders. And perhaps one reason is because we have a dearth of good male friendships.

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