

Swimming in the Deep End Takes Courage

From the mid-1930s to the late 1940s, C.S. Lewis met with a group of literary friends every Tuesday and Thursday in an Oxford pub to enjoy good beer and good conversation. They discussed literature, writing, and life.

Their pub, the Eagle and Child, is still there. It was in this environment, within this circle of friends, that heavyweight works like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* were forged.

C.S. Lewis and his friends made a habit of swimming in the deep. You can feel the depth of their encounters in his description of their friendship:

"In a perfect friendship, this appreciative love is, I think, often so great and so firmly based that each member of the circle feels, in his secret heart, humbled before all the rest. Sometimes he wonders what he is doing there among his betters. He is lucky beyond desert to be in such company. Especially when the whole group is together, each bringing out all that is best, wisest or funniest in all the others. Those are the golden sessions; when four or five of us after a hard day's walking have come to our inn; when our slippers are on, our feet spread toward the blaze and our drinks are 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 on or any responsibility for another, but all are freemen and 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. Who could have deserved it?"

One Man Sharpens Another

You can almost hear the crackling of the fire; you can feel the warmth of that room and taste the depth of their friendship. They made each other better when they were together. That's what the wisdom of the Scriptures says. Proverbs 27:17 says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another"* (NIV).

True brotherhood. Face-to-face and man-to-man. Iron on iron. But, how do you know if you are swimming in the deep end of authentic manhood and true brotherhood or just splashing around in the kiddie pool? Here are two indicators to identify where you are now and two requirements to get to where you need to be:

True brotherhood sharpens you. In other words, your friendships are making you a better man, like iron sharpening iron. Men need other men to challenge them and bring out the best in them. Men need environments that are safe, where permission is given and understood—a circle of trust where advice and accountability are welcome. As men, we still need to choose our friends wisely. Proverbs 13:20 says, *"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm"* (NIV).

It goes without saying that there are significant differences in male relationships and female relationships. Sociologists have observed that, for the most part, men's friendships revolve around activities while women's revolve around sharing. I don't need a sociologist to tell me that. Guys are action figures! We get stuff done! We don't need to "share." The less "sharing" we do, the better, right? But, that's not true. Men were created for deep relationships with other men.

We cannot be the men we are designed to be if we are disconnected from other men. Left to ourselves, we start writing our own rules. Left alone, we can talk ourselves into anything. Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"* (NIV).

Isolated from other men, we won't know what hit us.

True brotherhood connects on a soul level. Jonathan and David had that kind of connection. Both of them were warriors. Both of them stepped up at critical times when the Israelites were bullied and intimidated by the Philistines.

The Israelites needed something to ignite their courage, so Jonathan and his armor bearer walked right into the enemy's garrison and killed about twenty men in hand-to-hand combat. Later, David would stand up against Goliath and then become one of Israel's greatest warriors. Jonathan and David had a connection so strong and deep that 1 Samuel 18:1 describes it like this: "*... the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself*" (NASB). Do you have a healthy God-designed connection with another man like that?

True brotherhood requires honesty and trust. And, honesty and trust requires vulnerability. Most men settle for having a golfing buddy or a fishing buddy. They don't feel the need to be vulnerable. Guys can talk about cars, football, real estate and business and never connect on a soul level. Some guys think they have to conjure up some practical reason for picking up the phone and calling another man. That's part of the myth that says, "I don't have any emotional needs that I can't handle by myself."

Author David Smith writes: "The message is clear. The independent man doesn't feel he needs the company of other men. Therefore, men must manufacture non-emotional reasons for being together. A business deal must be discussed or a game must be played. Rarely do men plan a meeting together simply because they have a need to enjoy each other's company. Even when men are frequently together, their social interaction begins and remains at a superficial level. The same male employees can have lunch together for years and still limit their conversations to sports, politics, dirty jokes and comments about the sexual attractiveness of selected female

workers in their office or plant.”

True brotherhood requires time and practice—lots of practice!

There is no such thing as microwave manhood. You can't just flip a switch or push a button. No one will just hand you the time. Stop waiting for your church to find you friends like ! Accept responsibility! Make it a priority. Carve out the time and practice, practice, practice.

If you're married, practice sharing your emotions with your wife first. It will make your marriage better and prime the pump for soul connections with other men. Learn from others who already do it well. Read the Psalms of David and see how honest and vulnerable he was in the way he worshiped God.

Take off your floaties and leave the shallows. Discover true brotherhood in the deep end of authentic manhood. You can't man up without it.

Adapted from *Fight Club – Some Things Are Worth Fighting For* | Round 8: *Brotherhood*, Created and Presented by Tierce Green.

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