

The Inner Tug-of-War Many Men Experience

There is an inner tug-of-war in every man, a tension that drives so much of our outer life. Here it is: *We long to be known, and at the same time we're terrified of it.*

So many of our patterns of relating and our failures to love can be traced to this tug-of-war. Which side wins? It's usually our terror.

Hence the lifelong attempts to cover ourselves, only redoubling the power of that terror in our lives. We lock up our longing to be known in a dark closet, treating it as we would an abused child, hoping it will go away. But the longing remains and calls out to us, sometimes insistently, sometimes unexpectedly, and so the tug-of-war keeps yanking at us.

Enter Jesus. Take the story of how he dealt with Levi, the tax collector (Mark 2:14-17). Here was a man despised as a traitor by his fellow Jews. Tax collectors not only worked for a pagan government, but they also made their living by overcharging the required tax, as much as they could get away with.

As a result, they were excommunicated from the synagogue, and their families were held in disgrace. They were so mistrusted that their testimony in court was not considered reliable. Yet Jesus chooses this despised man to be His disciple. But the story gets even better.

Levi throws a party and invites the only friends he has, other tax collectors and low-life. What do they do? They eat together. Eating in that culture required a certain physical intimacy, as they reclined together on couches. It also implied an emotional one, as hearts were shared over the food. The text in Mark even suggests that Jesus was the real host of the party.

Imagine the impact on Levi and his friends. They had been despised and shamed much of their lives, and now a famous rabbi and teacher wanted to be close to them. Jesus just saw them so differently than they saw themselves. He longed to know them and be with them, and it began the dismantling of shame. We don't know what happened to Levi's friends after the party, but we do know what happened to Levi. He was so revolutionized by Jesus that he eventually penned the Gospel of Matthew.

This same revolution can happen inside each of us. How does shame get healed in our lives? How do we allow ourselves to be known? It comes as we allow Jesus to re-image how we feel about ourselves as men. The binding power of shame is that it ends up defining us, but the truth is that only the Father knows who we really are. He says that we are His beloved sons (Gal. 4:6), and His only Son is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Heb. 2:11).

I've watched this happen in the lives of other men, but especially in my own life. To deal with the nagging disconnection I grew up with, I buried the longing to be known and turned to substitutes. One of my main ones was an addictive cycle of running and eating.

Unlike the Mark story, I had no experience of feeling connected to others as I ate. It was simply a drug I used to feel some sense of aliveness. Running did the same thing, and the two together worked in a cycle to keep my longing buried and my heart frozen. But with the Father's help and some minor hip arthritis (forcing me to quit running), I am slowly learning to see myself through His eyes.

When we learn to do this as men, we will find shame yielding to glory, and we'll experience the wonder of being known—and being enjoyed—all at the same time. It's the beginning of the end of the tug-of-war.

Finally.

Bill Delvaux is a graduate of Duke University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has served as a pastor and a high school Bible teacher. Presently, he leads Landmark Journey Ministries as a speaker, small group coach, and author of *Divided: When the Head and Heart Don't Agree* and *Landmarks: Turning Points on Your Journey Toward God*. Bill and his wife have two grown daughters and reside in Franklin, Tennessee. Follow Bill on Twitter @BillDelvaux.