

What True Brotherhood in Christ Requires

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 today. 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 ... 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?" (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*)*

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 in Proverbs 27:17, *"Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."* True brotherhood. Face to face. Man to man. Iron on iron.

How do you know if you are swimming in the deep of true brotherhood or just splashing around in the shallows? Here are two indicators to identify where you are now and two requirements to get you where you need to be:

Indicators

1. 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 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 wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed."*

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 its end is the way of death."* Isolated from other men, we won't know what hit us.

2. True brotherhood connects on a soul level. Jonathan and

David had that kind of connection. Both were warriors. Both had stepped up at critical times when the Israelites were bullied and intimidated by the Philistines. When the Israelites needed something to ignite their courage, Jonathan and his armor bearer walked right into the enemy's garrison and killed about 20 men in hand-to-hand combat. Later, David would stand up against Goliath and 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 bound to the soul of David, so that Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*" Do you have a healthy God-designed soul level connection with another man like that?

Requirements

1. True brotherhood requires honesty, trust and 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 but never connect on a soul level of honesty, trust and vulnerability. 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" (David W. Smith, The Friendless American Male).

2. 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. And no one will just hand you the time. Stop waiting on someone else to find you friends. Accept responsibility. Carve out the time, and put it on the calendar. 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 worshipped God.

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

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