



By Gordon Dalbey

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Christian Bachelor Party? Men Supporting Each Other in Life-Changing Events

The invitation came on a simple white card, but was unlike any I'd ever seen:

CHRISTIAN BACHELOR PARTY (Tasteful Gifts Only, Please)

Before coming to the Lord, I'd been to enough "non-Christian" bachelor parties to see raunchy, tasteless gifts. But in all my years as a Believer, including pastoring for over ten years, I'd never seen Christian men celebrate a brother's upcoming marriage. As a new member of this church, I was intrigued to find out what the men had planned. I arrived a little late, only to find men wandering aimlessly around what turned out to be some very tasteless Christian punch. Chatting around the refreshment table, I noticed the upcoming groom and Guest of Honor off to the side by himself, seated uncertain and more than a bit pale on the edge of the couch.

I paused, punch-in-hand, as an often-repeated image leapt to mind from my days as a pastor: a young man in stiff-collared tuxedo sweating in my office before his wedding, his closest allies gathered about him for this immense commitment at hand. Trying his best to cover his fear and avoid the shame that lurks about in male company, the groom turns his back to the rest of us and gazes out the window. His suited groomsmen chat nervously, wanting to help their beleaguered comrade, but themselves at a loss amid the overpowering mystery in marriage that beckons all men.

As the fateful organ bells chime, inevitably the Best Man takes a deep breath and steps toward his friend. Resolutely, he stumbles ahead with a strained smile, slaps the trembling groom on the back and chirps, "Are you scared?"

Suffice it to say, such shame-out-loud is no comfort to a man at that moment. But as a seasoned pastor—and married man myself—I had learned to be ready. "I hope you *are* scared," I would boom out. "If you're not, there's something wrong with you. Getting married is a big step, and none of us men has all the answers here. But it's something we all want, so let's all take a minute to ask the Father to bless our brother here for the great adventure ahead of him."

A sip of ginger ale laced with Hawaiian punch sputtered me back to the present. Looking again at our uneasy Guest of Honor, I began to pray—and immediately a wild idea popped into my mind. I hesitated, then walked over to the host and pulled him aside.

"This is great to get us all together and honor Joe," I offered tentatively. "What gave you the idea?"

"Well, hey, you know his fiancé Jane is with the women of the church this afternoon, having her bridal shower. I figured it would be good if the men did something for Joe."

He paused. "I mean, not a 'shower' or anything like that, exactly, but....maybe...you know, something more for men...."

As his voice trailed off into the unknown, I knew it was time to speak.

"It's really a great idea," I encouraged. "In fact, it's such a pioneering thing that it seems like none of us really knows how to do it. I'm not really sure myself, but what if we were to gather around our brother here and those of us who are married might talk to him a bit."

Unsure, I opened my hands and lifted my shoulders, "You know, maybe talk about things you wish someone had told you beforehand—maybe some things you've learned, some good surprises, even some mistakes you've made that you'd like our brother to avoid."

The host knit his brow for a moment, looked at the Styrofoam cup in his hand. "Well," he confessed, "you're sure right that we don't really know what to do." With a sigh, he turned to the room of men. "It's worth a try."

Putting his fingers to his lips, he gave a loud whistle. "Heads up, guys!" he shouted. Like chaff before the wind, the chatter died. "It's great to be here together to honor our brother Joe before the wedding on Saturday. Right now, I want us to gather around him here." A shuffle, and the dozen-odd men there clustered around the couch.

"Now," the host announced, "I want the married men here to talk to Joe—maybe tell him the best thing about marriage for you, some important things you've learned or wish someone had told you when you were where he is right now. Then we'll all lay hands on Joe together and bless him."

Yes, Lord! I thought. *This is the way to do it!* Excitedly, I waited...and waited, as a deadly silence fell upon the room.

I panicked. *Oh, Father, come on!* I cried out in my heart. *Don't let the men abandon our brother! Kick some married guy here in the butt and make him step out!*

Moments passed, endless and empty, and then a voice—hesitant, but deliberate—broke into the darkness like a sword of light.

"Well," offered one man, "I'd have to say that I was a little unsure when I got married. But now that Sue and I are going on two years together, I can say that getting married was the best thing I ever did."

Alright! I thought, excitedly waiting for the man to continue. But to my dismay, he sat smiling in relief, self-satisfied and eminently finished. At once, I knew that I'd have to push him for the heart of his offering. "That's really great Bill," I broke in. "But I wonder if you could help Joe out a bit here and be a little more specific. Just what, exactly, is so good about being married?"

Bill paused. “I guess,” he said finally, “it’s like a lot of the time a woman can accept you and still love you even after you mess up. I mean, a lot better somehow than you can accept and forgive yourself. It’s just great to feel free to talk about things together and know it’s alright, no matter what comes up.”

Bold and true, Bill had broken the dam. Even before he had finished, Joe was no longer perched tensely on the edge of the couch, but relaxed and sitting back, listening with appreciation. In fact, Bill had demonstrated that proclaiming before other men the blessings of the Father was strengthening and uplifting for the one sharing as well as for Joe. Soon all the men were anticipating their turn to speak, and when all had told their stories, we closed the Bachelor Party with a rousing prayer, celebrating the Father’s blessing upon us all.

Later, after the wedding, Joe told me how much he appreciated what the brothers had given him. In fact, it was a gift to his wife, the gift of a man centered in the God-given community of men, secure in his masculine identity, confident and excited about his future with her.

And I wondered: Why do the men of God not give this simple but powerful gift to each other? Why are we content to let the women have their bridal showers, receiving the blessing and grace of other women who have walked the path ahead of them, while we remain alone and afraid?

Later still, it struck me: When a woman becomes pregnant, her friends come around her with a “baby shower” to encourage and bless her with their feminine fellowship and stories of mothering. Why can’t churches do something similar for men on the threshold of fatherhood?

When my wife told me she was pregnant, I was thrilled—but terrified. Was I ready for this overwhelming responsibility? How would I ever make enough money to pay the doctor bills and regular life expenses for a child? I felt so disconnected from my own father, so had little boyhood experience to draw upon to guide me as a dad myself.

My wife confided to me some fears of her own, but then came the invitation to her “baby shower” from the women of the church, and she was relieved.

I was jealous.

No man ever contacted me to say, “Gordon, this business of being a father is awesome stuff, and we want to come alongside you as men to give you some encouragement and support.” This was not, I knew, because no man in my church had ever been a father.

While the mom-to-be celebrated, the dad-to-be trembled.

Men, it’s time to get real. Getting married, like becoming a father, is a momentous, life-changing experience which defines your life thereafter. As such, it’s as frightening as it is promising. We need each other alongside if we’re ever to be the husbands and fathers God intends us to be.

Heads up, Christian brothers: the wedding bells are ringing, and the babies are crying.

Are we ready?

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