



**By Gordon Dalbey**

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## **The Real Men's Movement**

*Performance-based religion has crippled men, but the heavenly Father is calling us into healing relationship with Himself.*

Is there a deep and genuine yearning in men which no list of standards, principles or promises can meet, no matter how moral, righteous or even biblical? Is there a God-given longing in men that can't be fulfilled by performing correctly?

Indeed, Is there a balm to cure the restlessness of men, a permanent place where we feel peace with God, and where we have the heartfelt passion to manifest the love of Christ to the world?

I believe so.

Jesus did not come to this earth just to exhort us to higher standards of behavior. Moses had already done that! And indeed, Scripture declares that "God gave the Law through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17, TEV).

In fact, precisely where the Bible shifts its focus from the work of Moses to that of Jesus, we see how God plans to meld His grace and truth in the coming New Covenant. In the very last words of the Old Testament, God proclaims, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6, NIV).

This scriptural doorway to the coming Savior implies that the broken relationships in this world between fathers and children reflect the very brokenness between humanity and God. In other words, restoring relationship with the Father is the very focus of God's saving power in this world. Jesus came to reconcile humanity to the Father (John 14:8-13). And nowhere in this world is the need for that reconciliation more deeply felt than in a man's unfulfilled need for his dad.

Biblically, this father-wound is the difference between what Dad has given you and what Father God wants to give you. Every man, therefore, bears its sting, because no human dad is perfect.

## **Father Hunger**

Several years ago, shortly before my son was born, I spoke to 350 fathers at a Christian men's conference. Confessing my fears as a soon-to-be dad, I asked the men, "When your first child was born, how many of your own fathers reached out to you with support, encouragement or helpful advice?"

Only five hands went up.

At another retreat of 150 men, I asked, "When you were growing up, did your father ever talk to you helpfully about your sexuality?"

Two hands.

In my 10 years of speaking to men across the country—and England and Australia--these proportions haven't changed much.

The father-wound is a wound of absence. Therefore, it's harder to recognize than other wounds--and ultimately, more destructive.

You can kill a living thing, such as a plant, in two ways. You can actively destroy it: Cut it down, smash it, beat it up. But there's another way: Just leave it alone. Don't water it. Don't give it any sunlight.

Abandonment kills.

As life requires input, vital manhood requires father-presence--something only Jesus can provide (John 14:6).

To their credit, leaders of the secular men's movement have addressed this epidemic father-wound in men. However, because they don't know Jesus, they can't access the true and ultimate power to heal the wound.

"I'm still waiting for my father to talk to me about sex and success, money and marriage, religion and raising kids," confessed editor Joe Kita in *Men's Health* magazine following his father's death. "The shame of it is, I don't know a man my age who doesn't feel like he's navigating his life without a map."

Christians, on the other hand, *can* access power to heal the father-wound. We have a dependable "map," because those who know Jesus know the Father of all men (John 14:9-10). Tragically, however, most of us have chosen instead to hide from the wound, often because we don't trust Jesus to bear the deep shame it stirs.

## **Fueling Dysfunction**

The father confirms and calls forth masculinity in the son. Without this essential input from Dad, the boy can't later see himself as a man. Quickly, fearfully, the gap between his inadequacy and the man he longs to become fills with crippling shame. His spirit cries out for a father to save him.

Without other men to introduce him to almighty God, the "Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name" (Eph. 3:14NIV), his cry echoes in the darkness.

Enter Satan, the "Father of Lies" (John 8:44), who promises to cover this deadly shame in men today by urging us into a variety of

compulsive/addictive behaviors, from drugs and pornography to workaholism and religious legalism. In hiding our wound, we men today are displacing the awful pain of father-abandonment on the world around us--from abortions and sexually transmitted diseases to crime and domestic violence.

I respectfully leave it to women to say what the father-wound and its destructive curse mean to a daughter. Among men, I know it's a crippling reality which--for starters--leaves a man fearful of women, distrusting of other men, short-sighted in his view of God and, therefore, cut off from his destiny.

No pain in this world strikes more deeply into a boy's heart than being abandoned physically and/or emotionally by Dad. Consequently, no pain more directly stirs in a man his need for the saving power of Father God. That's why God's end-time vision in Malachi is so relevant to our age. And that's why the enemy of God is hell-bent to make us deny not only the father-wound itself, but the Fatherhood of God.

When we Christian men shrink from facing the father-wound Jesus came to heal, we abdicate to the world our sacred calling to proclaim the true Father of all. Hence, the secular men's movement. And hence, the Malachi prophecy: that until unfathered men receive the blessing of sonship from the Savior (Rom. 8:15-16), they will bear a curse to the land.

### **Trapped by Religion**

The word "integrity" comes from a root meaning *whole*, as in the mathematical term "integer," which refers to a *whole* number. A man who hides and splits off from his wounded self is not a man of integrity. He's only half a man. He may know the truth of God's Word, but not the grace of the Father's heart.

The man who misses the importance of God's grace in his spiritual development won't feel safe enough to recognize his true need--nor therefore, the true needs of other men. Instead of entering into God's unconditional acceptance through Christ, he sets up lofty rules of qualification for himself and others by demanding impossible behavioral standards. He hides his wounds behind a religious mask--righteously exhorting other men to strive after the "10 principles of godly manhood," to keep the "five standards of biblical masculinity," or to demonstrate the "six marks of a spiritual champion."

Such exhortations often serve to hide the exhorter's shame--and therefore, divert a man from facing his own and taking it to Jesus. That's why the "experts in the law" irritated Jesus the most: "You load people down with burdens that you can hardly carry," He told the Pharisees, "and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46).

The Old Covenant commands obedience and motivates men by shaming them with punishment (1 John 4:18). The New Covenant invites trust and motivates men by promising sonship (Gal. 4:6,7).

The man who withdraws from his father-wound and the Savior it beckons, becomes a slave to the shame of not measuring up. Abandoned by Dad, he looks for his identity in work—and often, in women, as in Mom. Desperate for manhood, and angry for not getting from his dad what he needs to secure it, he becomes vulnerable to a host of worldly--and even religious--counterfeits, which promise to silence the voice of shame and render him a "real man" at last.

New Covenant manhood, on the other hand, requires facing the hard fact that you can't do what God commands, and crying out to Him for saving power. As Paul confessed, "[E]ven though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it... Who will save me from this body that is taking me to death?" (Rom. 7:18, 24TEV).

When we don't trust Jesus to bear our shame, we try to cover it with performance. Religiously, we offer sacrifices of time and energy, hoping to compensate for lack of relationship with both our earthly dads and our heavenly Father (see Matt. 9:13; Ps. 51:17). But we fall short.

Men today don't need more performance-based religion; we need a new relationship with our heavenly Father. Yet most Christian teaching for men today simply tells us what we should do--and the terrible consequences of not doing it.

It's basic, Old Covenant religion. On the one hand, it's an appropriate and altogether necessary reminder of God's holy standard to an unprincipled, pagan society. But, like Moses without Jesus, it's eternally deficient. The ultimate purpose of the Law, after all, is to bring us to death and show us just how much we need a Savior (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 3:19-20).

### **Getting Real**

Christianity is not, as "conservatives" presuppose, a moral code. Nor is it, as "liberals" insist, an ideology. Christianity is a relationship with the living Father God. It's God's answer to the deepest longing in a man's heart.

It's time to press on beyond the Law to the fullness of what Jesus died to give men--namely, sonship. Herein lies the ultimate "men's movement," fueled by this central, New Covenant truth: Jesus did not come to tell us what to do but, rather, to do once and for all what we could not (see Ezek. 36:26-27; Eph. 3:20-21; Phil. 2:13).

We're not saved by *our* promises, but by *God's* promises.

Jesus' saving work in men is prompted, therefore, not by the shame which makes us strive to do right, but by the grace which allows us to be real. It's sustained not by trying to measure up but only by confessing that we can't. It proceeds not from a determination to do the right thing, but from a longing to know the true Father.

This ultimate "men's movement" is today stirring in the hearts of men everywhere. But it has yet to break forth from the churches, largely because we men haven't dared to discover that self-discipline is a fruit of

the Spirit--not a natural product of our own efforts, but a supernatural product of the Father's grace (Gal. 5:22-23).

A real man is a man who's *real*. And only real men can lead us into this New Covenant manhood--men who have dared to cry out their own inadequacy and surrendered it to Jesus for Him alone to bear.

In our spiritual journeys, we must progress from the anxious, striving mentality of a slave to the trusting, surrendered heart of a son. This is the authentic rite of passage into Christian manhood (Gal. 4:1-7). Paul said it well: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received a Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

May we be so real.

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