

# Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

## Men, Isolation and the Power of Community

I used to have a 1,300 cc Yamaha Venture Royale touring bike and I loved going for rides with friends. We'd put on our black jeans, boots and leathers, and then tear down the road as if we really had somewhere to go. Sometimes there would be 8 of us, and one time there were 200 of us. We'd usually ride for four or five hours, and then head home.

When I got home from a ride, my wife would always ask, "Did you have a good time?" I'd give a typical lengthy male response and say, "Yup." Then she'd ask, "So what did you talk about?" I knew she was giggling me, because when women get together they do nothing but talk ~ "How's little Suzie, gosh she has wonderful curly hair." "Did you see that new recipe on *'Cooking With Connie?'*" "Yes, I saw the show, but her dress really wasn't very becoming was it, bless-her-heart." "Ohhh, and I wonder if that cute producer is married yet, you know, the one with the piercing blue eyes."

But when us bikers got together it was to ride, not talk. Besides, you can't hold a conversation when cruising at 75 surrounded by a male symphony of straight pipes.

Let's look at that snapshot for a minute – 20 guys hanging out together for 4 hours, and the only time we talked was when gassing up or stopped for lunch. Even then the sentences were typically male ~ short and to the point. Here are five guys talking while pumping gas ~ filling a bike's tank is about a 90 second process, so here's 1.5 minutes' worth of in-depth male conversation. "Nice day." "Yup." "That chromed chopper with the S&S 145 pro stock's a screamer." "Sweet ~ straight pipes are hard to ride behind." "Heh heh." "Zero to 60 in 3.75." "Holy crap!" "Yo, new leathers?" "Nope ~ had 'em a month now." "Hey, how 'bout them Packers!" "Rogers is on fire, baby!" "Yep ~ got a pistol for an arm." "I thought you rode a Sportster." "Had one ~ traded it on this Ultra ~ you know, a 'station wagon.'" "Heh heh." "Goin' huntin' this year?" "Yup, got a new Savage 300 with a scope." "Could nail a flea's butt at 50 yards with that." "Got a 10-pointer last year." "Awesome." "Mount it?" "Nope ~ wife." "Yeah." "Great talking with y'all." "Ditto." "Ciao." "Later."

In those sacred moments around the gas pump we were all brothers, joined at the heart. Ten seconds later the wind was screaming in our ears and we were back in our solo worlds.

While there are exceptions, most males in America tend to be pretty emotionally isolated from other men. We may go bikin' with the guys, play sports with the guys ~ have a beer with a the

guys after a game ~ but very few guys have close male friends with whom we intentionally get together to share our lives, honestly discuss deep and personal issues, and provide emotional support for one another. More often than not, friendships among men are primarily based on shared activities rather than on deeper attachment.

This isolation has consequences. For example, two studies found social isolation among males was a contributing factor to cardio vascular disease.<sup>1,2</sup> Another researcher found what most men already know, that it's easier for men to share their emotions with women,<sup>3</sup> so if men make deeper attachments at all, they tend to make them with females.

Addressing the female complaint that men are so often immature, Wikipedia reports research finding a link between fewer friendships, and psychological regression. Clinically, regression is usually tied to some level of emotional pain. Men tend to repress emotional pain, which often leads them to express it in unconscious ways through the two culturally “allowable” male emotions of aggression and anger. More often than not when men unload their repressed emotions it is in the direction of those closest to them, such as wives and children.

Men's inability to process their own emotional stuff is so widely recognized that in psychological literature there's a special name given to this inability – it's called, “alexithymia,”<sup>4</sup> and one Harvard psychologist argues that almost all males in America today suffer from “alexithymia.”<sup>5</sup>

It wasn't always that way. In antiquity, Aristotle actually classified “philia” (which is the Greek word for brotherly love) among the virtues. And the Roman philosopher, Cicero, believed that “in order to have a true friendship with someone, one must have complete honesty, truth, and trust.”

Complete honesty and trust.... I'm a pastor and psychologist, so men often open up to me in my office. Recently, one told me, “All that touchy-feely crap about men being open with men ~ that's not my style.” The reason this man was in my office was that his wife had said that he either needed to get help with his anger, or she was leaving him and taking the kids. He wasn't physically abusive toward them ~ he was just always angry. He'd grown up with an emotionally distant father who functioned more like a dictator than a dad. He'd learned about some of his dad's indiscretions, and that knowledge drove him to hate the man.

Go to the literature and see if you can find any research supporting the hypothesis that no more than 10% of young men are emotionally and relationally close to their dads, in a relationship built upon trust and respect in which the young man is honestly open with his dad and wishes to be like him as an adult. It would be safer to say five percent ~ or perhaps two percent.

Most young men are not close with their dads. Most dads don't know how to do the “in-close-and-personal” thing with their boys. There's absolutely no modeling of this in movies or on TV. Churches don't provide training in this task. When religious men read about the loving

relationship between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3), for most it's just a story but not linked to personal experience.

Yet male relational isolation is dangerous, to everyone. Solo men don't mature well. Solo men often make big mistakes both in marriage and business. Solo males are enormously vulnerable to the addiction and deterioration inherent in pornography. Solo guys may work hard, play hard, drink hard, and work out like Trojans, but they can't do the connection thing very well. And although there are always women who think they can tame and train these guys, their attempts fail most of the time because what's broken on the inside of men can't be fixed by what's broken on the inside of women.

Much of what men struggle with is the use or ab-use of power, whether at the long or short end of the stick. And without meaningful connection to others, the whole morals/values thing is a dice toss. And in the final analysis, it's meaningful relationships that make life itself meaningful. Otherwise, it's all about "me," and that gets pretty shallow pretty quickly ~ yet it's where millions of guys live, mainly because they're isolated from in-close, in-depth relationships with other guys.

And bikers aren't the only ones who need man-to-man connection. Tax accountants play power games just as much as bikers on Big Bear choppers do. Salesmen wrestle with morals and values, as do CEOs, professors, electricians and dog-trainers. Walmart checkout clerks, choir directors, corporate board members and chefs are all equally susceptible to questions regarding life's meaning and purpose.

So here's something to think about if you're a man. The Family Legacy Institute presents "The Legacy Project." This project intends to connect men with other men, at deep levels, for years, for many purposes, including providing opportunities for men to:

- Learn trust with other men
- Develop one another's character
- Strengthen one another's ability to commit
- Strengthen one another's marriages
- Deepen one another's relationship with God
- Support one another's sexual fidelity to their wives
- Learn to serve others, even at cost to self
- Build life-directing and life-enhancing goals
- Turn weaknesses and failures into strengths

The Legacy Project is a men's movement aimed at accomplishing two meta-objectives:

- 1) Discover the truth of Christ statement when he said "I have come so that people may have life, and have it to the full," and

## 2) Help men create and leave behind a Godly legacy.

We believe these two objectives are powerfully enhanced through men being strongly connected to men ~ in relationships that include complete honesty, truth and trust. We are building this movement, and we invite you to join us.

Our promise to you is threefold:

1. Through involvement with **small groups** we will provide the opportunity for you to open your life to the support, encouragement, attachment and mentoring of other men;
2. Through our “**goal-setting**” process we will help you set and achieve meaningful goals for your career, your family, and your walk with God;
3. Through learning and practicing **servant-leadership**, we will help each man strengthen his moral character and build meaningful relationships.

The Legacy Project isn't for wimps. It's for men who are ready to commit, grow, stretch, heal and mature. There is an untapped reservoir of power in a community of men who are unalterably committed to one another and to God. We want you to experience that power.

## Resources

1. Combined effects of job strain and social isolation on cardiovascular disease morbidity and mortality in a random sample of the Swedish male working population.  
(<http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/1990-06304-001>)
2. Social relationships linked to better health and protection against heart disease in many studies. [http://www.cardiologyonline.com/journal\\_articles/Mens\\_social.htm](http://www.cardiologyonline.com/journal_articles/Mens_social.htm)
3. Common reasons men felt emotionally closer to women included greater ability to disclose to women, greater comfort discussing emotional issues with women, feeling more understood by women, and sexual intimacy shared with women. <http://mensstudies.metapress.com/content/u37n52240p1vn7m3/>
4. Alexithymia is a concept created by Sifneos in 1972 to describe a disturbance in affective and cognitive functions characterised by an inability to find words to describe feelings or emotions. The term "alexithymia" is derived from the Greek and means "no words for feelings". The salient clinical features of alexithymia include difficulties recognizing and verbalizing feelings, endless description of physical symptoms instead of emotions, concrete speech and thought closely tied to external events, paucity of fantasy life.

Precisely, alexithymia is an inability to associate one's visual image, thoughts and fantasies with a specific emotional state. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/dec01/mummies.aspx>

5. Harvard psychologist William S. Pollack, PhD, suggests that most men display what amounts to a full-blown case of alexithymia, the result of a gender-specific rearing and socialization process. Ibid.