

Note: This is the first chapter of *Naked Warriors: Making Disciples By Destroying Isolation* by Brian Childres, with substantive revisions and editing by Ken Walker. Released fall of 2021 by KDP Publishing.

Chapter 1

The Power of Unity

I am blessed, having lived all my life in a rural community filled with men who love Jesus. Like many areas, particularly pockets in the South and Midwest, East Texas has a reputation as a peaceful Christian haven, especially compared with other, more conflict-ridden areas of our troubled nation. With more than three hundred churches and some of the largest ministries in the world headquartered here, many of us think of our region as a bit of a “Jesus paradise.”

Indeed, where I live in Tyler, we have some of the most gifted preachers and teachers in America. There is no shortage of biblical truth taught here. Any man can walk into most any church on a given Sunday and hear rock-solid Bible teaching. And therein lies our struggle. While our churches have succeeded in producing well-equipped soldiers and we have made a lot of progress, we are still seeking to build a unified army. There is a huge difference between the two. If my hunch is right, your community faces a similar obstacle.

Decades after the Promise Keepers movement packed stadiums with tens of thousands of charged-up, on-fire men and this excitement spread to the grassroots level, we have numerous strong, good-hearted Christian men in our churches. However, few have been united intimately with other godly men. As a whole, the men in most churches have not been commissioned as a unified platoon outside the four walls of their church. So, we have capable soldiers, yet a small army. It is difficult—if not impossible—to win a war without an army. And on any day, I would rather go into battle with a cohesive squadron of ten soldiers rather than a thousand individually trained ones.

The United States Army is tremendously effective in building a cohesive unit that can annihilate any enemy. I know; as of this writing my twenty-something son is a soldier who has served on active duty with his National Guard unit at the Texas border. He will be the first to tell you that the Army’s success depends on melding men into an interdependent brotherhood. In the armed forces, there are no individual heroes.

While this book is aimed at men, it is not a “men’s book.” There are plenty of those; I enjoy reading books on Christian manhood. However, I am aiming beyond a strictly male group, hoping to effect change within our churches and move people out of the rugged, self-reliant, he-

man hero mindset. It is one that too often reflects public discourse in America and has spilled over into our churches.

This reality can be seen by the reactions to a question I posed once to a group of men: “Do you think it is possible to be a godly man?” When all responded in the affirmative, I looked them square in the eye and told them: “It is impossible to be a *godly man*.” One older gentleman got rather offended, intensely disagreeing with what he saw as a harsh statement.

In response, I pointed out the key word to my question: *man*.

“There is no such thing as a godly *man*,” I explained. “There are only godly *men*.”

Think about that for a second. Do you see the profound difference between the two? We are only healthy and powerful when we are *together* as men. God created the body of Christ to live in community. He wants us to live in the plural, as submitted, transparent, vulnerable people. Many of us have been duped into thinking that spiritual growth and discipleship is a personal journey when nothing could be further from the truth.

This is because the American phenomena of individualism has infected the church. I watch too many Christians invest enormous amounts of time and energy into spiritual activity that is focused on individual, private spiritual growth. The tech explosion, as personified by YouTube sermons, Zoom meetings, and Christ-centered phone apps, has only added to the struggle. We are never more isolated than when we are staring into our smartphone screen or laptop. We may be fully engaged in “Christian activity” while remaining utterly alone. The truth is: my favorite preaching podcast will never be able to look me in the eyes, listen as I confess my sin, and accept me unconditionally.

Wrong Target

Recently, a pastor told me that his goal is that every man in his church have a daily quiet time of thirty minutes of prayer and Bible reading. He was convinced that if every man got up each morning and devoured the Word of God and prayed, it would transform his church. While I disagreed, I didn’t say anything. Unfortunately, I didn’t have the courage to inform him that he was aiming at the wrong target. A half-hour prayer time at 5:30 a.m. every day will do nothing to cancel the destructive power of isolation for a man.

Am I refusing to acknowledge the power of consistency in our prayer closet? Not at all. I am simply declaring the insanity of attempting to be spiritually healthy when there is no one in your church who knows the real you. That’s because the bottom line is: You CAN’T follow Jesus by yourself! It is impossible to be spiritually healthy if you are not part of an intimate team of godly men. Following Christ by yourself is an impotent religious game, which leads to pain and destruction.

I know. I wasted years in ministry attempting to disciple individual men who had no spiritual brothers in their lives. These good guys kept coming back week after week to meet with me and receive every ounce of ministry I had to offer. Yet, my efforts accomplished few positive results. Why? They were trying to live the Christian life in a vacuum. Without a brotherhood for support, they were doomed to a pattern of failure because no one can go it alone.

So, this book will not tell you how to be a good husband, father, or leader. Many of you reading these words likely know the “how-to” of your roles as a Christian man. As a matter of fact, if you have been a believer for at least a year and attended a Bible-teaching church for most of that time, you have more than enough truth to successfully live the Christian life.

In the pages that follow, I will relate the story of the men's movement in East Texas. Because of men I associate with beyond our area, I know similar grassroots movements are springing up in places like Utah, Arizona, and Oklahoma. As I relate what miracles we have seen over the past decade, I want to relate how you and your church can join this revolution, no matter where you live.

I say this after watching hundreds of men get initiated into this band of brothers. The result is typically the same: a man's life is transformed and his family impacted. This in turn impacts the life of another man, and then another, and another. The primary benefactors in all of this are pastors and the local church.

This men's movement is about more than discipling a group of men. It is creating a healthy, sustainable revival in the local church. Most pastors I know have a burning desire to see more strong marriages, healthy children, spiritually robust teens, humble leaders, and strong male participation in congregational life. And what gives birth to all of the above is a men's relational discipleship movement within local churches.

Now, there is nothing wrong with having a strong marriage ministry, children's program, or youth ministry. It's just that these programs will not produce healthy marriages, children, or teens. This only comes from having a church with a strong foundation of men, intimately connected one to another.

Mutual Rescue

Among other things, I write this book out of personal gratitude for what the East Texas men's revival has done in my life. Back in 2012, I was struggling during an excruciating season of marriage. The day of my eighteenth anniversary fell on a Tuesday, with the gloomy skies and rain pelting Tyler symbolizing an eight-months-long separation with my wife. Despite our division, I wanted to buy an anniversary card for the woman whom I had loved for so many years.

Stumbling into Walmart as I dodged rain drops, I bought a card, and sprinted back to the car. Then, I made a split-second decision to not give it to her and crammed the card into the glove compartment. The tragedy of not being able to celebrate my marriage on this special day hit me like a sledgehammer, overwhelming me with grief. Soon, I pulled into a convenience store to grab a six-pack of beer and guzzled four of them before I pulled into my driveway.

Turning off the ignition, with the pain of longing and loneliness weighing on me, I burst into tears. As the rain continued to fall, I felt covered by a blanket of despair. Needing to escape, I decided to drive two hours to another city where I could hide in a strip club and get drunk. That was the only plan I could devise to dull the ache inside. As I prepared to set out on my journey, I shot a quick text to Mike, one of my spiritual brothers, reading:

“18th Anniversary today. Painful. Pray for me. Much temptation.”

Within two minutes he shot back a reply: “I am tempted tonight as well. But I'll stand strong for you brother and pray for you. Know that you are covered.”

Something happened in my heart that night as I read my friend's words. But it was more than just his message; it was the love and commitment he expressed, leaving me feeling as if Mike was physically standing by my side. It represented a powerful force—light entering into a vast darkness. Even though I was by myself, I was not alone.

Miraculously, instead of driving to the strip club, I went inside and went to sleep. After a peaceful, restful evening, I awoke the next morning and soon received a call from Mike. He

confided in me, telling me how he had been in a fierce battle with temptation while on a business trip when he received my text. It moved him to declare that he would take a stand for me and fiercely intercede for my pain and temptation instead of giving in to his own sinful struggle. Because God showed up for both of us, on that rainy Tuesday night, two men rescued one another.

Power of Brotherhood

This is the power of brotherhood. As a result of this movement, I have watched this same miraculous provision and transformation happen hundreds of times in the lives of men like you and me. And I never grow tired of watching it happen. If you are a leader in your church—whether that is as a pastor, deacon, elder, or small group leader—the challenge and truths in this book can change the destiny of your church. I urge you to begin building a band of brothers in your church this week. Don't wait. Start immediately.

My pastor, Pat Alvey, has watched this men's renewal sweep through our church. Not too long ago he remarked, "I have been waiting to see this kind of transformation happen in the lives of men for the past thirty years in ministry." My pastor is no different than you or me. We all long to see a genuine renewal in the body of Christ. If it is a true move of God, then the men of the church will be leading the way.

Wait no longer, my friend. The renewal is full steam ahead! In fact, it has never really slowed down since Jesus began the revolution with His small brotherhood. More churches are jumping into this movement each week. Pastors are realizing that men are not going to commit to a church because the sermons are biblical, the worship is professional, and the coffee is fresh. A cutting-edge website will not disciple the men in your church; the souls of men are crying out loudly for something more. Ordinary men need to embrace the Jesus found in other ordinary men.

As for you and the men in your church, all you have to do is join the revolution. There is no need to linger for God to move, or pray for a fresh vision for the church, or travel somewhere to attend a conference. You don't have to advertise a new men's ministry initiative or order a DVD series. Just grab a couple of men and jump in.

Take a little time so I can relate the story of the East Texas brotherhood, which is the same story being lived by other men in other places as a grassroots men's movement accelerates. But be forewarned. After you read this book, you will be armed with more than enough truth to start a revolution in your heart and in your local church. Once you are equipped, you will face a pivotal decision. I hope you will answer in the affirmative. In the meantime, enjoy the journey.