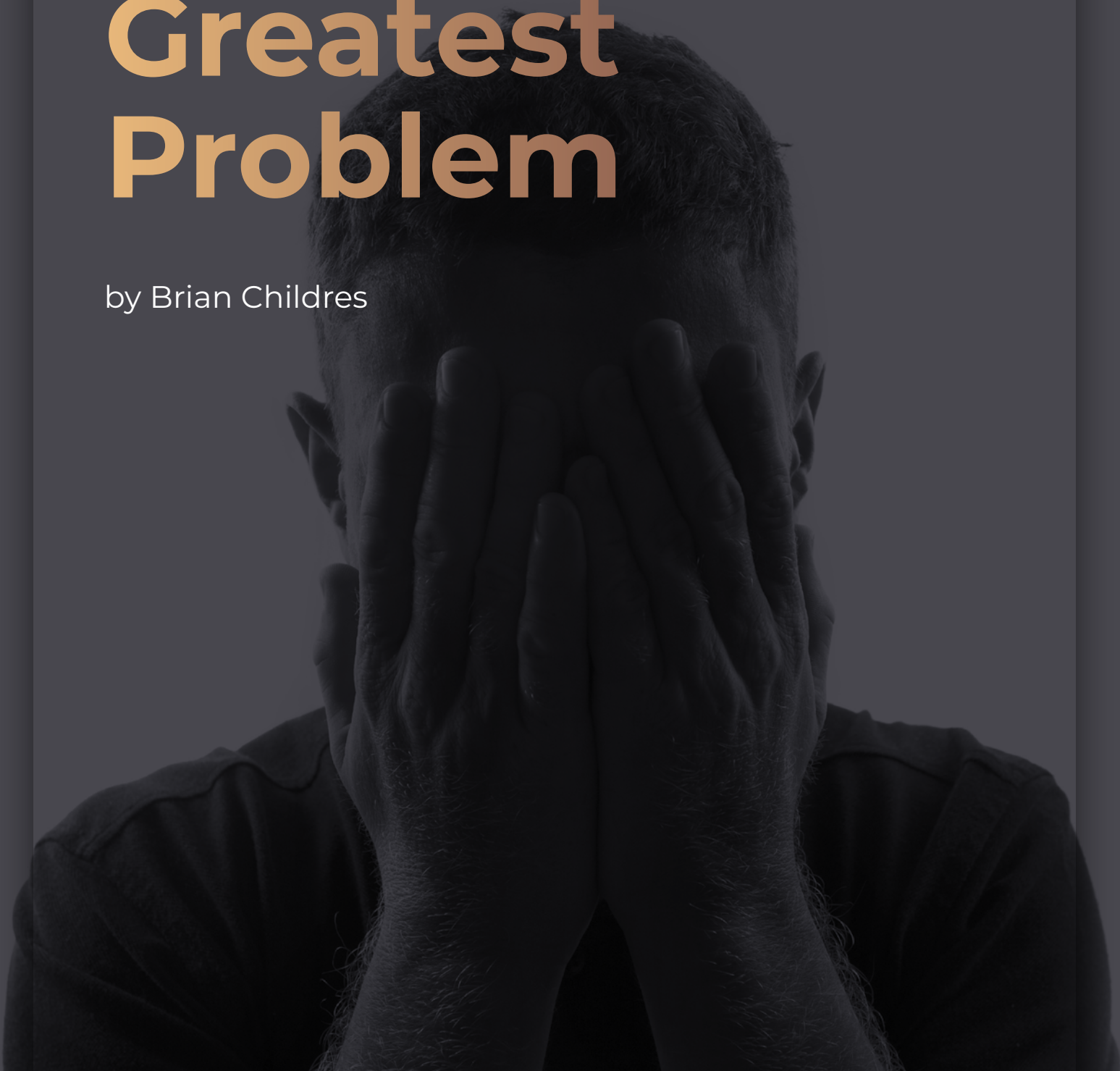




WeTrainMen

Man's Greatest Problem

by Brian Childres



Man's Greatest Problem

The year was 1986. It was a sunny day as my buddies Jim and Chris and I sailed down the highway, all three of us cackled with laughter, optimism, and the freshness of putting last week's high school graduation in the rearview mirror. Hoping to reduce the time needed to make the customary two-hour drive home from our favorite water park, my foot pressed a bit harder on the gas pedal. Suddenly, a mischievous grin crossed Chris's face as he said, "Hey, guys. You have the guts to make a slight detour and pay a visit to the Ponderosa Ranch?"

Jim and I looked at each other with a chuckle and answered in the affirmative. After years of what most folks would call urban legends—tales shared by brave souls who supposedly had taken glimpses of the delights behind this fabled gated community—curiosity had finally gotten the best of us. We were just minutes away from having this burning itch scratched.

Soon we pulled up to a mammoth, tightly shuttered gate. The mere sight of the ominous-looking, wrought-iron obstacle looming over us nearly melted our resolve. The Ponderosa was no ordinary "ranch." It was East Texas's one and only nudist colony. Rolling down the driver's side window, I nervously pushed the intercom button. A cheerful, masculine voice asked how he could help us. Lying, I replied that we were looking to book a place for



our upcoming summer vacation. The creaking of the monstrous gate signified that he had bought our story. We were in!

We filled the quarter-mile drive to the main office with adrenaline mixed with flights of fancy and fear that we would be discovered. Our hearts pounded madly as I slowly guided the wheels into a parking spot. We exchanged furtive glances at each other as we walked slowly toward the office's large wooden doors. No turning back now.

While we tried to step confidently into the building, our eyes opened wide at what we saw: a seventy-year-old man wearing nothing but tube socks and sandals. We tried to hide our horror behind masks of nonchalance as we greeted this jovial fellow, who shared enthusiastically about the volleyball tournament and asked, "Do you enjoy horseback riding?"

At that moment, all we could think about was hustling out the same black gate that we had entered. Our testosterone rush had quickly fizzled, and it was time to exit the premises. After we thanked the naked man for his time, he told us to be sure to come out the following month for the crowning of Miss Ponderosa. After speeding away, we laughed all the way home. Fantasy had collided with reality! Needless to say, that was my first and last visit to the Ponderosa Ranch.



The First Nudist Colony

The second chapter of Genesis tells us about the first nudist resort ever built. As a matter of fact, mankind got off to a perfect start living in Eden Ranch, a community full of naked people. Well, two naked people: Adam and Eve. Have you ever considered that God created a nudist colony to be the crowning achievement of His creation?

Scripture utters a profound commentary describing the first man and woman: “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25). Adam and his bride, at least for a short time, were able to experience total freedom. They harbored no shame or embarrassment. No prideful displays or people-pleasing. No striving or condemnation. Nothing but a blissful, innocent, perfect relationship with God and each other. Can you imagine a life like that? It’s what every person desires: genuine freedom.

The first man had absolutely nothing to hide. Not even his hairy butt or dangling penis! His physical nakedness was simply an expression of his inner state. His freedom was so complete that he had no awareness of himself. None. His life was consumed with enjoying God, his wife, and all of creation.

Sadly, the fun didn’t last long. A single act of sin and the nudist ranch abruptly closed its gates. It’s likely you know the story. Before the day ended, Adam learned to sew a



loincloth as awareness of sin prevailed and shame set in for the long haul. Genesis 3:10 shows the debilitating cycle that will play over and over for generations to come. God comes looking for Adam, who is crouching in the woods. When he finally gathers enough courage to respond to the question, “Where are you?” Adam admits, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.”

Sin gave birth to a horrific creation— a dance we can call “The Three-Step.” This pattern remains the great struggle for every Christian man: 1) see our nakedness, 2) become afraid, 3) hide. Every man alive struggles with pain, temptations, and doubt. Since this is an innate part of our God-given humanity, we as men cannot hide from this messy truth. When confronted with reality, we have a choice concerning how we view ourselves: we can choose to see ourselves as naked and unashamed, or not.

Often, we choose to NOT see ourselves as God sees us. Father God declares that as His child you are a worthy, righteous, powerful, loving, and talented man. Do you believe this? There are times in my life when I look at myself and believe something different. I believe the devil’s lie about who I am. As a result, I become ashamed. According to Genesis 3:10, this first step (shame) causes the second step: a reflex response called fear. We become afraid. Have you ever considered how much of your life you live in fear? Much of my life has been robbed of peace because of it. Simply put, it is impossible for fear and peace to coexist.





But the joy-killer of fear doesn't hold a candle to the destructive final step of this dastardly three-step dance. The end result is what kills the masculine soul: "So I hid." Little boys play hide-and-seek, but when Adam hid from God, he embraced spiritual death. He no longer experienced the abundant life of intimacy with Father God. He was plucked out of the safe and fulfilling place of community— both with God and his lifelong mate, Eve.

Isolated Nightmare

When Adam hid from God because of shame about his sin, the first man stumbled into what would become every man's nightmare: ISOLATION. That's right. Man's primary problem is isolation, a trait that resulted from original sin. While this may come as a surprise to some of you reading these words, isolation is the overarching, daunting, disaster-sparking problem of males in the twenty-first century. Man's primary obstacles are NOT things like:

- ◆ Lust and pornography
- ◆ Lack of Bible knowledge
- ◆ Spiritual warfare
- ◆ Selfishness
- ◆ Childhood wounds
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Addiction
- ◆ Prayerlessness



All the problems on this list are issues flowing from one, singular issue: hiding.

Isolation is our biggest issue as men. When men from different churches came together and became serious about discipling men in East Texas, we discovered an amazing truth: if a man chooses to come out of hiding and enter into intimate relationships with Christian brothers, he is transformed. He becomes spiritually healthy, deeply connected to Father God, and finds freedom over habitual sins. In essence, he comes alive.

This truth was shocking to me. I had been an ordained minister for almost twenty years, but had no idea that simply destroying isolation in men's lives would be totally life-changing.

Take men like Michael, who came into our brotherhood several years ago after struggling with pornography daily for twenty- five years. He was married to a godly woman and had a beautiful daughter. On three different occasions, Michael reached out to spiritual leaders in an effort to get help, but each time was faced a letdown.

In desperation, he attended one of our men's bootcamps. The look on his face wordlessly proclaimed his story—nearly consumed by despair, he was on the verge of giving up. On the first night of bootcamp, Michael had the opportunity to bring his pornographic darkness into



the marvelous light. He crucified his pride and confessed everything about his ugly porn habit. Two compassionate men sat with him and lovingly received every ounce of his confession. These two brothers offered no judgements, no answers, and no battle plans. They just showered this humble man with the explosive love of Jesus.

Michael came out of hiding that night. When he did, God set him free. His primary problem was not the sin of lust and porn—it was isolation. The pain of hiding in solitary confinement of his daily struggles had kept him trapped in sexual bondage. The fact he found freedom illustrates how God created man solely for relationship. It's the bottom line of our existence. Whether we realize it or not, we crave intimacy with God and others in every moment of our lives. We cannot escape this yearning for community.

Adam died spiritually when he chose to disobey God and then hide from Him. This resulted in replacing relationship with isolation. At this point, Adam lost everything that meant anything. He went bankrupt in the worst possible way.



Fully Restored

You know the rest of the story. God was keenly aware of man's plight and solved the dilemma in the most perfect way possible by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us. In doing so, Jesus took every ounce of sin and every shred of shame that you and I would ever experience. Jesus endured this torture for one reason: so that men (and women) could once again live fully naked and unashamed.

He fully restored the nudist colony! Well, not really—at least not like the Ponderosa Ranch. Christ died so that every one of us could live a naked and unashamed lifestyle. Jesus Christ is doing only one thing right now: restoring relational intimacy with God and others. Miraculously. Everywhere. Every human being on the planet craves this intimacy. This was the purpose of the cross: to destroy isolation once and for all for anyone who receives the free gift of eternal life in Christ.

It is a profound privilege to know each other deeply and to be deeply known by others. There is no other way to stay spiritually alive without transparent, honest, intimate relationships. The Bible calls this “church.” My friend, Michael, calls it true freedom.

Yet, in American church culture (whether in the South, the Midwest, or the Northeast), Christian men face a profound dilemma. Many good-hearted, godly men have gone back



into hiding. They have not given up on Jesus; some serve as deacons, elders, and mighty servants of God. I wouldn't question their spiritual commitment. Many of them read the Bible daily and rarely miss a church service. Yet, because they have been duped just like Adam, they have reaped the same results of fear and hiding. I believe the majority of church-going men live a painful, defeated life of isolation. However, the greater tragedy derives from the fact that nobody knows they are sad and defeated because the first thing we do in hiding is pull on a mask. Just as Adam grabbed the nearest fig leaf to cover himself for fear of exposure, so do many Christian men. If we are honest, we are all tempted daily to display our favorite mask and hide our true hearts from others—I know that I am.

Wearing a Mask



Not too long ago I had a long talk with a brother named Tim. He asked how my heart was doing. I was quick to tell him about a breakthrough with my daughter, but withheld the truth about a painful struggle with my finances. Embarrassed to reveal the truth, I put on a mask. I knew better, but I did it anyway. When I hid, I missed an opportunity to be naked and unashamed. I rejected the gift of God loving me through the ministry of a trusted friend, and Tim missed out on the opportunity to be used by God to minister to me. So, we both lost, all because I chose to hide.



As one of the leaders of the East Texas men's movement, I can quickly put on the "Men's Pastor" mask. There I can hide and pretend that all is well with my soul. I can share passionately about what God is doing in the lives of men all around me. I can pretend that my heart is overwhelmed with joy because I have the privilege of watching men be transformed. But on many occasions, I have no joy. The pain only intensifies when I put on a mask and then I topple back into the despair of isolation. The monster of shame has me in his clutches.

As always, this shame produces fear. I am afraid that I will not be accepted if I am honest about my doubts and struggles.


So, I often go through my day meeting with people with my mask intact. I can remain there for several hours, or even days at a time, suffering silently as I pretend that all is well with my soul. I can deceive myself so easily. I can point to the positive circumstances of my life, the blessings of God, and maybe even the fruit of my ministry. I can tell myself, "Life is good, and my heart is healthy." But it is not. I am isolated. I am wearing a mask.

And then it happens. I find myself sitting face-to-face with a good, godly brother, and what my soul is screaming for is now right in front of me. I want freedom. I crave intimacy. I am tired of this ridiculous mask! I look into the

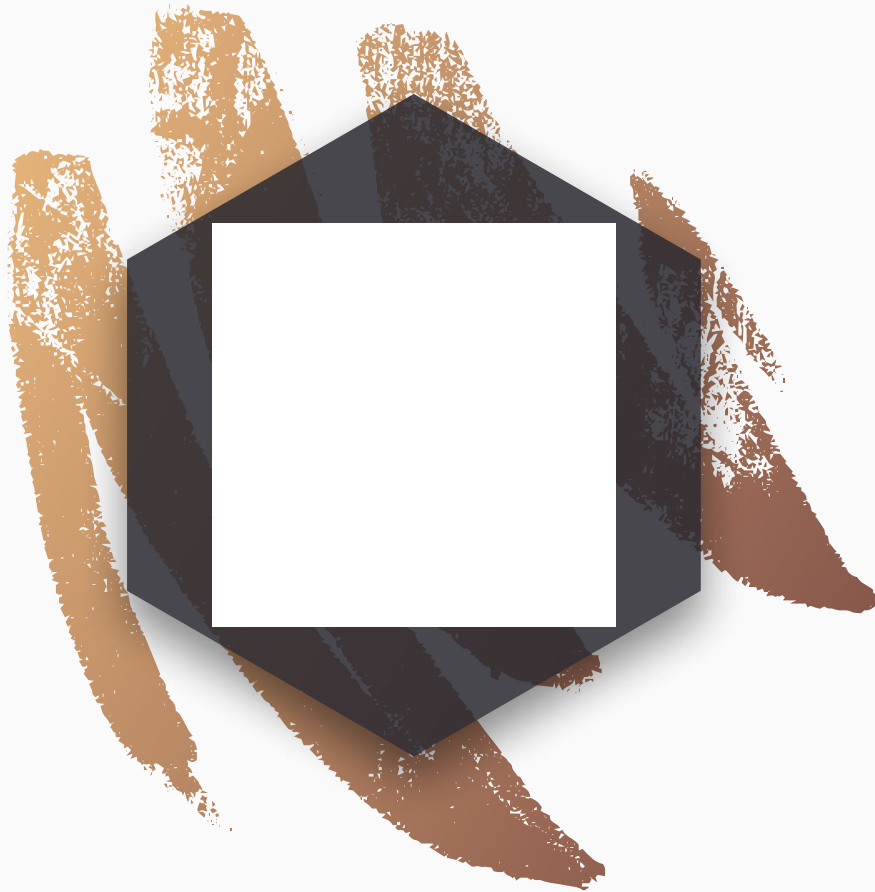


eyes of the man in front of me as my heart silently cries, "Please help me crawl out of the cave of isolation."

I take a deep breath and open my mouth. I quickly find my masculine, God-given voice and honestly confess. I declare my pain, my sin, my struggles. I humbly share the one thing that I don't want anybody to know. When I do, I step out of the death-grip of isolation and into the marvelous light of Christ that is found when I am intimately known by others. Once again, I am free.

You can be  too. I will show you how. Welcome to the brother-hood.





Men's Bootcamp Overview

We have discovered that men long to be connected with other men, and once this connection takes place, spiritual growth accelerates. Husbands begin to love and serve their wives. Dads begin to spend more time with their children. The local church takes part in the benefits as well: more mature and committed leaders.



Every man also has a God-given desire to be a part of something big. Our men have watched in amazement as God continues to multiply the fruit of their labor. Local church men's ministries are empowered by hosting a bootcamp or starting a SPAR group. Men are hungry for discipleship opportunities that make them come alive. Let us serve you!

Join us in the pursuit of authentic masculinity

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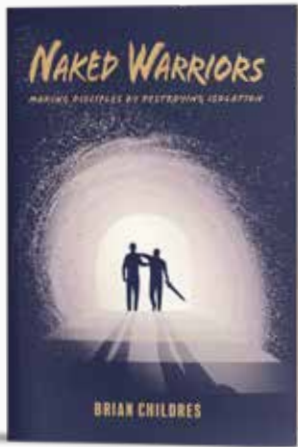


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Man's Greatest Problem is chapter 2 of the book "Naked Warriors," written by Brian Childres. Naked Warriors is a Biblical how-to book for any man or church that desires to connect men and make disciples like Jesus did.



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