

## Men In Leadership: Brave Acts, Vulnerable Hearts

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A story in *Blue Like Jazz* by Donald Miller tells of Navy Seals who came to rescue hostages “in some dark part of the world.” They stormed into the room where terrified hostages in a fetal position were curled against the wall and shouted, “we are from the United States, and we are here to rescue you!” The Seals expected everyone to follow them and bolt for the door, finally able to flee their horrendous torture. But not one of them moved. The Seals repeated their identity, holding the door open, frantically urging the prisoners to escape. But they stayed huddled on the floor, hiding their eyes in fear. Finally, one Seal put down his weapon, took off his helmet, and slowly walked over to a young hostage. This Seal knelt down next to the prisoner, and then tightly curled his body into the same fetal position as the prisoner. Only then, did this prisoner begin to stand, as the Seal matched his every tentative move. Others bravely mirrored this first captive’s courage, until finally all the fellow prisoners followed the Seals out the door into freedom.

What was it about this particular Navy Seal’s behavior that modeled leadership? This man took a great risk. Physically, mentally and emotionally, he became vulnerable in “assuming the same posture” as the hostage. At best, his fellow Seals would disagree with him. At worst, it compromised the original plan of rescue, risking death for everyone. But his choice built trust in one of the captives, and the end result was freedom for all.

There are four key leadership traits represented in this story: 1) Courage 2) Vulnerability 3) Identification and 4) Empathy. American society does not encourage the growth of these traits in boys and men. Long established societal mandates tend to encourage men to take authority, but to hide any perceived or real weakness, be “right” at any cost, and greatly limit any show of vulnerability or emotion. However, as I work with men and their families, men are challenging these cultural norms. They are leaders in their careers, their churches and communities, yet are able to sit on the floor, “assuming the same posture” as their preschool son, making a storybook with him to lessen trauma around an upcoming hospitalization. Men are identifying and empathizing with their teenage sons around the complexities of sexuality, while at the same time encouraging them to be examples among their peers for morality and respect toward women. Husbands are staying faithful to their wives both emotionally and physically, while their coworkers are bending the boundaries of male/female relationships.

When Jesus walked this earth, He too lived out these traits of vulnerability, courage, identification and empathy. He overturned the moneychangers’ tables in the temple, wept with Mary and Martha over their brother Lazarus’ death, raised Lazarus from the dead, identified with children and implored others that only by becoming like children will the kingdom of heaven be attained (Matthew 18:3). But Jesus leading with vulnerability

and empathy can also be great encouragement to men. In unimaginable pain and hanging naked on the cross, He implored His disciple John to care for His grieving mother: "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:27). On the cross, Jesus "assumed the same posture" as all of us: He took on our sin and died, so we, like the prisoners following the Navy Seals, could walk into freedom.

Pressure to achieve and successfully perform at any cost, along with declining social morals, are threatening to diminish a man's desperately needed influence in today's world. But men can also take great courage in the fact that they are not alone in their quest to challenge these norms. Role models in leadership could be the dad next door with the preschooler, the military veteran, and always, Jesus Christ.

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