

Choose Whom You Will Serve

Jeff Dunn

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Son of Nun: Servant of the LORD

► JOSHUA 1:1

*“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.
This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.”*

~ Brennan Manning

Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging

What does it mean to be a man? Beyond the simple anatomical definition, what makes a real man? You’ve, no doubt, heard people discuss the “man’s man” or the “real man,” but what is that? Is it generational? Is the John Wayne-archetype of my father and grandfather the definition of a real man? Or is it Humphrey Bogart? Is the true man more like Rhett Butler in his cavalier words, but golden heart? Perhaps it changes over generations, and the John Wayne man gives way to the James Bond man of the 60s. The Steve McQueen/Clint Eastwood loner of the 70s gives way to the Stallone/Schwarzenegger man of the 80s, which leads to the Jason Bourne of the 90s. What do you say about a man today? Is it the superhero which seems to be so prevalent? If so, which one? Is it the Superman high above Metropolis looking down on his population? Is it the Batman loner who chooses to operate outside of the conventional norms? Or is it more the Michael Cera/Scott Pilgrim sensitive loser who is sweet, but has no societal attraction?

Much is made of the mixed messages young girls receive as they strive to achieve womanhood. You can find a lot of work analyzing the effects of media on the self image of girls as they mature. But what of boys who are set upon with a ton of mixed messages themselves? They are presented, from childhood, with a variety of role models which are vastly different in their presentation of manhood. As children, boys

are given the role models of GI Joe or Spiderman. They are presented with heroes such as Iron Man, Punisher, or Wolverine who are heroic in their actions, if not in their individual morality. Those give way to the “lovable loser,” who is generally the unsung hero of most teen movies. He’s nerdy kid who doesn’t fit in, but has some wonderful redeeming value, which is finally discovered and makes him desirable to the world around him. Boys watch kid-centric entertainment on TV where the child is always smarter than most of the adults surrounding them. They are presented with misogynistic, bigoted role models in musicians and actors who base their own success and self worth on how many Bentleys they drive. As men mature, they look to sports for their role models. They find the Tiger Woods, Brett Favres and Ben Roethlisbergers of the world. They are men who excel in their field, but demonstrate a total lack of respect, especially for women, in their personal lives. We are captivated by the lives of leaders like Vince Lombardi whose famous quote, “Winning is the only thing” rings much hollower when you realize he rarely had time for his own children. We look to leaders of industry who demonstrate that winning is more important than how you play the game and that money is the greatest measure of manhood. But do any of these models define what it means to be a man?

Add the modifier, “Christian,” and the entire dilemma becomes even more confusing. I’ve heard sermons that alternately praised and criticized various biblical figures as true male role models. Abraham is said to be a model of a man. Moses is held as a leader who should be emulated. David is praised as being a man’s man. However, the Bible demonstrates in each case that these men were flawed and sinful. Each of them, though blessed by God, had serious issues with faith and obedience. Obviously Jesus is our ultimate model. We are all striving to be more like Jesus in all that we do. We all want to walk in His footsteps and seek to be more like Him in everything. Yet we still struggle with the transition.

Cultures all over the world have always had some form of ritual or rite of passage to help boys become men. Everything from the Jewish

“Bar Mitzvah” to the Native American “vision quest” have been held up as examples of turning point events, which help boys make the jump into manhood. Unfortunately, we have precious few roadmaps to show us what that transition should look like. How do we go from being boys, living in the shadow of our parents, to men who can parent, teach, and lead others? What does that transition look like? We don’t get to see much of Jesus’ young adulthood. We don’t get a great picture of David’s journey from young shepherd boy to king. In looking for a biblical paradigm of transition from youth to leadership, from being a child to being a man, there are only a few marked paths to follow.

One of those is in the Book of Joshua. When Joshua begins, he is already grown. However, he is still referred to under the name of his father, “Joshua son of Nun.” He is Moses’ right hand man. He is a runner, a squire, a page; a younger man who is waiting for his opportunity to come into his own despite his numerical age. God gives Joshua son of Nun leadership over all Israel. Because his authority comes from the Lord, it is pretty unquestionable. But how does he gain the wisdom, the knowledge, and the understanding to be a leader? That happened the same way he got his authority. He got his training from God.

I grew up as George’s boy. There were also those in our country neighborhood who referred to my brother and me as “them Dunn boys.”

When I was young, others knew me because of my dad or my grandfather. Sometimes others knew me because of my mom; my brother and I were most often identified because of our dad. That’s the way it is for most of us. We are identified by our relationships.

There was a time after I married, however, when I was referred to as Mr. Harrison. My wife is a wonderful woman, who she insisted on hyphenating to keep her last name. It really didn’t matter to me, as long as she was marrying me she could call herself whatever she wanted. However, as we conducted business or dealt with people who were familiar with only her, they would invariably call me “Mr. Harrison.” If I’m honest, it annoyed me to no end. I was not Mr. Harrison. My

father-in-law, who found this incredibly funny by the way, was Mr. Harrison. I eventually learned to live with it and understood that these people only addressed me that way because of my relationship with my wife. Again, we are identified by our relationships.

Now I seem to be identified in a different way. I'm known as "Allie's dad." I can hear little voices in the neighborhood or in a store somewhere yell, "Hey, Allie's dad!" Sometimes these kids are addressing me, not because they are looking for my daughter, but because they need something else, yet that is the only way they know me. "Hey, Allie's dad, can you help me get that ball down?" Now, truthfully, I don't mind being known as Allie's dad. I actually like it. I answer to it and follow through on whatever I'm being asked. Yes, we are definitely known by our relationships.

As a man, we are constantly called by our relationships. We are known as the sons of our fathers, the husbands of our wives, and the fathers of our children. We even do it to ourselves. We identify ourselves by what we do, where we spend our time, the jobs we have, and the hobbies we pursue. We even identify ourselves by our allegiances; for example, I'm a Steelers fan, I'm emo or goth, I'm a Republican. The truth is we are all looking for identity. We are all looking for the place we fit. We are all trying to find something that makes us who we are, and we long to have others around us who embrace that same identity. Joshua teaches us a lot about that.

In one of his earliest appearances, Joshua is a representative chosen as the voice of the tribe of Ephraim as they go into the Promised Land. Anyone who grew up in Sunday School has heard this story, eight members of the team return with tales of giants and a land that "devours its inhabitants!" Except for Joshua and Caleb. These two men went against the grain. Most scholars believe that Joshua and Caleb were in their 40s during this time, so like all of us, they would have defined themselves by their relationships. "Hey, my name is Joshua, and I'm in intelligence." or maybe "My name is Joshua, and I'm a representative." How did these two guys not get sucked into the vortex

of trying to fit in with all the others? We've been discussing how men are traditionally defined by their relationships, yet Joshua and Caleb resisted the urge to get swept away in the fatalistic thinking of their peers. Maybe they had a relationship that was stronger.

One of the early mentions we have of Joshua is in Numbers 13 where he is listed among the representative spies going out into the land of Canaan. His name is listed as *Hoshea*, which means "salvation." Moses calls him *Jehoshea*, which means "God saves." This is almost an afterthought as it is mentioned in the passage, but it bears a bit of scrutiny here.

What do you call yourself? Does that moniker reflect a specific relationship in your life? Does your name for yourself reflect your relationship with God? That's what Moses does for Joshua here. He changes his name.

Changing names is a common theme throughout the Bible. God changes Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel. Such a change usually accompanied a change in life. The person whose name is changed is changed as an individual. Their outlook, identity, and relationships are totally changed. In the New Testament, Jesus changes names, too. He changes Simon to Peter and Saul to Paul. All of those name changes that significantly impact the identity of those involved. So what about you? What is your name? It's easy for you and me to go through all the names we call ourselves. Sometimes what we call ourselves reflects our identity, but many times, those names pull us in an entirely new direction. In my head I may call myself something derogatory like "Fatso" or "Tubby," because those names haunted me throughout my formative years. I was always the chunky kid, the fat kid in the back of the pack trying to keep up. I compensated by being loud. Later in life, I would call myself "inadequate." When I stepped into ministry I felt overwhelmed. I knew that there was so much that God would have me do and so much that was expected of me by my congregation. I never felt like I was good enough. Even today, I find my "self talk" is negative. I feel like a "failure" a lot. I know that God has blessed

me with many talents, which I don't use as well or as thoroughly as I should, so sometimes I feel like I'm a failure because my ministry is not everything that my ego thinks it should be. Again, this is selfish and arrogant and not something from the Lord. Even in my personal life, I sometimes feel like I'm not a good enough husband or father and that I'm failing my family. I still realize that this is something that is not from God and this negative "self talk" is only an attempt to tear me down. Many of us, as men, may not converse and share a lot of these innermost thoughts, but we still hear those negative voices. Maybe it's time to listen to a new voice. I would submit to you that God has an entirely different view of you than you have of yourself. God sees you in a different way. And His view is the one that really matters.

God likes to rename you. He likes to take you and make your identity grounded in Him. Because we are known by our relationships, the only way to rise above those earthly relationships and all the things that would tie us down in the world is to have a stronger relationship defining our identity. Instead of being George's boy or Allie's dad, my identity would be in being a servant of God. No longer am I defined by who my parents were or who my wife is, or what I do or enjoy but instead I am defined by my relationship with God. That's what happened to Joshua. The Book of Joshua begins with his having a new name, but still being defined by his family relationship and as the servant of Moses. He is not Hoshea, son of Nun, anymore. Instead he is Jehoshea, son of Nun. It's a subtle difference, but it's important when you realize it defines his relationship in a completely different way. By the end of the Book of Joshua, he is known simply as Joshua, the servant of the Lord. Think about that for a moment. Imagine moving from being known by your family or company name to being known simply as the servant of the Lord. What better epitaph could there be? That's what's in store for you and me as well.

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a

new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it”
(Revelation 2:17, NIV).

God wants to give you a new name. How awesome is that?! In ancient times, the Romans would present a white stone to an acquitted person after a trial. White stones with engraved names were also given to winners of the early Olympics. Yes, God wants to change your name, but is it really that much of a change? Maybe, like the people listed in the Bible, it is simply more reflective of your true identity and the plan God has in store for you. Not long ago, a gentleman spoke to our congregation about this very thing. He talked at length about “listening to the voice of God” and trying to discern what name God called us. At first, I was skeptical and blew it off. However, in my private time, I began to legitimately pray that God would teach me who I am. I began praying earnestly and asking God to tell me how He sees me. I was sure that nothing would ever come of it, but I was mistaken. There was no blinding light or burning bush. I simply woke up one night and felt one word resounding in my spirit: TEACHER. Now I’m not telling you that God speaks to me and gives me divine knowledge. I’m not telling you that I have any magical relationship with God. I’m just saying that maybe, just maybe, there is a name that God holds for each of us. There is an identity He wants us to find. Perhaps if we want to be powerful leaders or mighty men of God like Joshua, we would do well to begin to seek that identity. We must search for what God has in store for us and how He sees us. Maybe we need to seek God and hope to find ourselves in His eyes and in finding ourselves we can find our true identity. Maybe these new names have been our true names all along.

Discussion Questions

1. How we are defined by our relationships and our interests. What are some of the names that you use to identify yourself?
2. On a blank piece of paper, write down four or five of the “negative”

names with which you have identified at some point in your life. Share these with a partner, and talk about what effect those names have had on you (personally, professionally, or spiritually).

3. As a group, take these pages and destroy them. As you do so, sing the hymn "I Surrender All" (lyrics on the next page). End in prayer, asking God to take your worldly identity and give you one from Him.

(HOMEWORK)

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This week, pray for God to show you your identity in Him. In your daily prayers, ask Him to reveal to you how He sees you. Next week, you'll share any revelations as a group.