

How do we relate in love with those we disciple?

What do I mean by a Real-Life Relationship?

A real-life relationship is sharing life with a person that you give the right to know everything about you and they give you the right to know everything about them.

From the life of Jesus, we know that Real Life Relationships are the rails that effective discipleship travels on.

Real life relationships should be the norm in the church of Jesus Christ. It was the norm for Jesus and His disciples. It was the norm in the early church where disciples met in homes, shared their needs with one another, shared communion as they ate meals together, and encouraged one another daily.

In the past at Western Hills and currently in most churches in our country, real life relationships have been the exception rather than the norm.

One of the consequences of our failure at real life relationships is that we keep getting shocked by the behavior of our members.

On Feb. 10th in the Houston Chronicle it was revealed that over the last 20 years over 700 people have been victims of sexual abuse by leaders and volunteers serving in Southern Baptist Churches.

The title of the article was...

[Abuse of Faith](#)

[20 years, 700 victims: Southern Baptist sexual abuse spreads as leaders resist reforms.](#)



This collection of mug shots includes a portion of the 220 men who, since 1998, worked or volunteered in Southern Baptist churches and were convicted of or pleaded guilty to sex crimes.

The charges in the article include allegations that Southern Baptist Churches and the Southern Baptist Denomination have not responded to these charges with compassion for the victims, held those responsible accountable, and instituted safety measures to protect their churches. One of the most serious charges is that those who are guilty have been allowed to return to places of leadership in churches.

The pain that has been caused is immeasurable. This news is being compared to the scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church.

Leaders of the Southern Baptist Denomination are scrambling for answers and viable solutions. What I have heard on twitter so far has been a compassionate response and a prophetic response. I have also heard some practical solutions like, background checks for everyone leading or volunteering in the church.

For me personally, when I hear about a man in a church sexually assaulting someone, I ask the question, “Did another man in the church know that this man was struggling with sexual sin?” “Did this man have a real-life relationship with another man in his church?”

We will always have sexual sin in the church. They had a problem with it in the New Testament in the church at Corinth. But at least the church knew what was going on. They were not shocked by the news of what the man was doing. The Apostle Paul was shocked that they knew what was happening and they were not doing anything about it.

At breakfast last week, one of the men in our group shared that he was experiencing some powerful temptations to be unfaithful to his wife. This type of transparency is normal with all the men I disciple. They are transparent with me and with other men about their struggles with sin, their moral failures, their emotions, their mental issues, and their relational problems. I am transparent with them.

What if all the men in the picture above would have had that kind of relationship with other men in the church? What if they would have entered the church knowing that this was the culture of church? Do you think that there would be fewer victims of sexual assault?

Why aren't real life relationships the norm in the church of Jesus Christ among men?

It is outside of our comfort zone. But why is that, especially among boys and men?

We have created a culture of manhood in our nation in which Real Life Relationships are not manly; a culture in which men who are struggling or failing believe that to be manly means you should be able to handle your own personal problems; a culture in which men should not talk about their feelings with other men!

This false culture of manhood exists in our nation and it exists in the church.

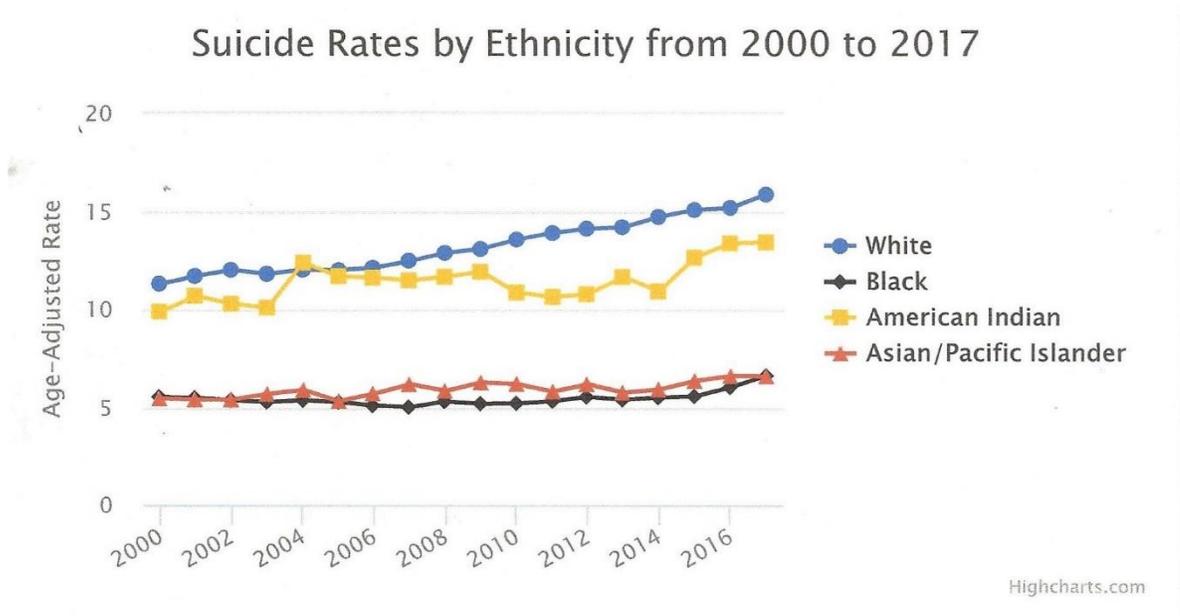
One of the lies that it is based on is that emotional connection is a female trait. Men reject it in boys, demanding that they "man up" and adopt a strict regimen of emotional independence and even isolation as proof they are real men. Behind the drumbeat message that real men are stoic and detached is the brutal fear of homophobia, ready to crush any boy who might show too much of the wrong kind of emotions. Sometimes this message is not direct. But boys grow up not experiencing it with their fathers and they do not see their fathers having real life relationships with other men.

As a result, the United States is filled with lonely men that don't have even one real life relationship. In one recent nationwide survey, 50% of the men surveyed acknowledged they were lonely.

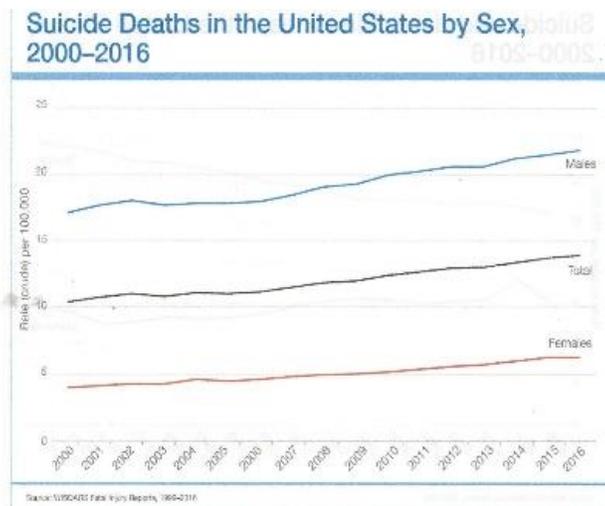
Most of these men also acknowledged that they were also suffering from persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

The result has been a significant increase in the suicide rate among men, especially white males.

There is one death by suicide in the US every 12 minutes. (CDC) Every day, approximately 123 Americans die by suicide. (CDC).



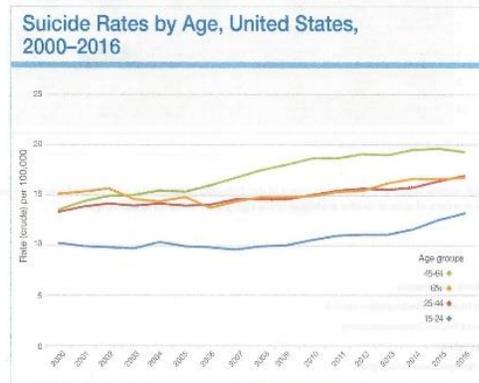
- Since the year 2000, the rate of suicide has increased most among White Caucasians.



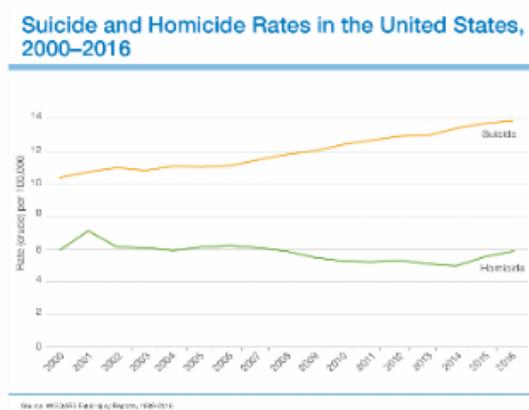
From 2000 to 2016, the suicide rate in the United States increased from 10.43 to 13.92 per 100,000. Among males the increase was from 17.11 to 21.83. Among females, the rate increased from 3.99 in 2000 to 6.24 in 2016.

- White males accounted for **77.97%** of all suicide deaths in the year 2017.
- In 2017, men died by suicide **more than 3- and one-half times** than women.

Suicide by Age

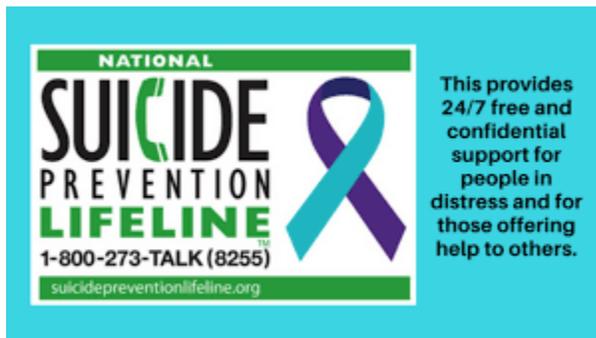


- Since the year 2000, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of suicides among 15-24 years old's, especially men.



- Since the year 2000, the rate of suicide has increased significantly more than the rate of homicide.
- The state of Oklahoma is one of the states with the greatest number of suicides per capita. Today, Oklahoma has the eighth-highest suicide rate in the country, with a person, on average, taking their own life every 11 hours, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

I am always seeing posts on Facebook these days that look like this.



We can't save every man in the church from sexual crimes or suicide. But shouldn't there be brothers in the church that are aware of our struggles?

What I can do is my part! I can change the culture in my life with the men I disciple. As a Pastor, I can lead men in the church that I pastor to change their culture. Will you change yours?

Jesus told his disciples the harvest is white and plentiful.

[John 4:34-35](#)

[34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.](#)

[35 Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest"? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!](#)

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Jesus said this to his disciples after his encounter with a Samaritan woman whose life was changed after she entered a real-life relationship with Jesus.

Nothing has changed. Men are suffering from sin and loneliness in the church and outside the church.

Jesus has the answer to reach them; Jesus showed us how to reach them with His disciples and with others. Form Real Life Relationships that lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and maturity in Christ.

Real Life Relationships are the rails that effective discipleship travels on.

Jesus was an expert at Real Life Relationships. He created us. He created us for relationship. When He became a man, He modeled for us how to form real life relationships with others by what He did with His disciples.

How do we go about forming real life relationships with people?

There is God's part, our part, and the other person's part. What is our part?

- [Jesus was intentional about being generous with His time with His disciples](#)
Jesus spent over three years with His disciples. They were with Him most of the days of those years. Jesus knew that He would not have a real-life relationship with His disciples unless He was generous with His time with them.

To have a real-life relationship with someone I must be generous with my time with them. I must intentionally plan to be with them each week and then be available to them at other times. In the early church Paul said we should encourage one another daily. This requires me to be generous with my time.

- [Jesus was intentional about knowing His disciples.](#)

Jesus was the Son of God. He knew all men and what was in their hearts. He saw Philip under a fig tree. He knew when His disciples were having conflicts. He knew when they were having doubts. He knew Judas was going to betray Him. He knew all His disciples were going to deny Him.

Knowing people is more difficult for us than it was for Jesus, but it is just as important. Knowing people must be a priority if we are going to have a real-life relationship with them.

It is not easy to really get to know someone. We must be very intentional about knowing them like Jesus was.

There was a skill that Jesus had that we need to develop to know people. He was a good listener.

1. [He sought to know and understand His disciples by listening to the Holy Spirit.](#)

Jesus would withdraw from everyone and everything to listen to the Holy Spirit.

It was after a time of prayer that He chose the 12 disciples.

[Luke 6:12-13](#)

12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God.

13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

NKJV

This was the beginning of a relationship with His disciples in which Jesus was always listening to the Holy Spirit in order to know and understand His disciples.

2. He sought to know and understand His disciples by listening to them.

Jesus had many discussions with His disciples while they were walking from one place to another. He retreated with His disciples to solitary places. He ate meals with them.

Have you ever analyzed these discussions?

Jesus **asked** questions. We have recorded in the gospels over 300 questions that Jesus asked. Not all of them were with His disciples. Some of them were rhetorical questions in which He did not expect an answer, or the answer was self-evident.

But with His disciples, many of His discussions began with a question that would reveal something very personal about His disciples.

- Who do men say that I am?
- Why are you terrified?
- Do you also want to leave me?
- What were you talking about?
- Why did you doubt?

You would think if you were the Son of God, you would not need to ask any questions. You would think you would need to be doing all the talking since Jesus already knew all men and since He knew His time on earth was short. (It is interesting to me that the longest lecture from Jesus we have in the New Testament can be read in about ten minutes. He was with the multitudes when He gave this lecture and, in that lecture, He asked them five questions.)

But instead of doing all the talking, Jesus was always starting a discussion with His disciples by asking questions or interjecting a question during the discussion. This enabled Him to hear and understand what was really going on with His disciples.

Jesus listened to **more** than just the words that were being said or the facts that were being shared. He intentionally listened to identify the **emotions** or **issues** that laid behind the words.

Because He listened to hear and understand His disciples, they felt *genuinely loved and cared* for. It showed them He had a desire to know them **fully** and determine what they needed from Him to *support* and *help* them move forward.

For me, maturing as a good listener in conversations like Jesus has almost been as challenging as being generous with my time.

I was taught certain manners about listening growing up that were helpful. I was taught to not interrupt people, especially the elderly. I was taught by coaches to listen with my eyes. I was taught to take good notes when someone is teaching me something.

But there is a lot more to be a good listener than not interrupting people, listening with my eyes, and taking good notes.

I thought I was a good listener. You can't learn much about relationships if you think you are good at it?

It was not until I was married that I became aware that I had some bad listening habits that came from being self-focused that were keeping me from knowing people.

1. I listened without Focus

This is the kind of listening where I am *present*, and I recognize there is noise coming from someone that is directed at me, but I don't even attempt to hear the content. This is the kind of listening parents sometimes employ with the toddler that rattles on non-stop.

I may insert an 'uh huh' in every now and then while someone is talking, but most of my attention is focused on whatever I am doing or something else on my mind.

Obviously, this type of 'listening' is not respectful of or helpful to the person doing the talking. They don't feel loved.

2. I listened for the ‘Gist’

This is often the type of listening I employ when I am in a *hurry* or I am busy doing something else. I listen just enough to get an idea of what the other person is saying, so I can determine how it impacts **me** and whether I need to **respond**. While I am doing this, I only give half of my attention to the person speaking, putting most of my focus on my own internal dialogue and how it pertains to me. The person speaking can usually tell that my attention is elsewhere, and they are often left not feeling heard. They don’t feel loved.

3. I listened to Respond

This has been one of the hardest habits for me to break. I am listening so I can fix the other person. I may insert a **rebuttal** or add my own *story/experience* to the conversation. I am usually just waiting for the person to pause for a moment so I can insert my argument, story, or opinion. My response often comes out quickly and enthusiastically, showing my disciple that I am *more focused* on my own agenda and being heard than I am **understanding** *their* perspective. I send others the message that what I have to say is more valuable than what they are saying, and I just want to get my point across. It is usually obvious to the other person that they are *not really being heard*. They don’t feel loved.

Any one of these three ways of listening may be OK in certain circumstances. But if we really want to know those we disciple, our way of listening needs to change.

I need to ask questions and really hear and understand those I disciple.

I am certainly not an expert on this. I am learning. But when people share with me the situations and circumstances that are going on in their life, I will resist the urge to respond and I will ask them simple questions like...

What makes this most difficult for you?

How are you feeling right now about what has happened?

What is your greatest concern?

I want to make them feel that I have heard them and understand them before I respond.

Let me say this if it makes you feel any better! Most professionally trained ministers are not any good at this; even those that have been in the ministry for years.

But if you follow Jesus, Jesus intends for you to learn from Him ways to relate to those you disciple the way Jesus did.

- He was intentional about being generous with His time with them
- He was intentional about knowing them

A real-life relationship is the rails that effective discipleship travels on!

Follow Jesus!

Because of the example of Jesus, I have become very intentional about being generous with my time and very intentional about knowing those I disciple.



If you follow Jesus and disciple others, I can promise you this, your life will make a difference and it will bring you great joy.

Will you receive Jesus?

Will you answer His call to make disciples through real life relationships?

Will you take these two steps today with those you disciple?

- I will be generous with my time
- I will know those I disciple