

# The Praus Movement

Urban Crofters Men's Ministry



**The Praus Movement  
Urban Crofters Men's Ministry Launch Preach  
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By Christopher Kerr**

## Section 1 – Introduction: Men in Crisis

So, I can confirm that the rumours are true – Urban Crofters is, today, launching a men’s ministry.

Now, some of you may rightly point out – why? The church ratio is currently **70%** women and **30%** men, and I would respond: Exactly.

You see, this fits with the UK wide church average which is, according to Tearfund, **65%** women and **35%** men.

In another study of 4,000 UK men aged 27-45, **50%** said they would be comfortable going into a lingerie shop but only **33%** would find themselves happy to be in a church.

Folks, men are leaving the church in their masses, and that points to far deeper issue.

You see, since the day God created Adam, there has been a ferocious spiritual battle waged against men’s hearts, and can I be honest with you for a second by doing a stereotypical men’s ministry sports analogy: It’s the 80<sup>th</sup> minute of a 90-minute match, and we are losing badly.

That’s not to say all of us – I look around the room now and see some great men but in the global sense, both in the wider church and in the world, men’s hearts are in trouble. They are on a long drift from God.

Consider these statistics, all carefully taken from reliable sources, to paint the picture:

- **1 in 5** men in the UK die before they reach **60 years old**.
- **75%** of all UK suicides are committed by men.
- **87%** of UK rough sleepers are men.
- Men are **3 times** more likely than women to become dependent on alcohol and **3 times** as likely to take drugs frequently.
- Men make up **95%** of people in UK prisons.
- Rates of violent and sexual crimes against women and other men are increasing year on year.
- In the last **Government National Wellbeing survey**, men reported emphatically lower levels of life satisfaction than ever before.
- Depression, anxiety and other mental health issues amongst men are skyrocketing.
- Over 40 million men in the USA are now frequent visitors to pornography sites, with the porn industry now worth more than all three of America’s biggest TV stations combined.
- There are more homes without fathers, and more kids abandoned completely by their fathers, than at any point in recorded history.
- And Divorce rates are also increasing, with the latest figure quoted between 42-50% of marriages ending in divorce.

Something is dreadfully wrong.

**Now, please hear me:** To say that men are suffering, is not to say that women aren’t. The data tells us that life is extremely tough for women too. And that makes sense to me because how many of you know that God’s design for men and women makes us far more dependent on each other than the world wants us to believe?

I’d love to dig into Genesis Chapter 1&2 to demonstrate that interdependence in more detail, because it is so important, but time is short so let summarise it like this. Adam (man) and Eve (woman) were created in God’s image. God called Eve, Adam’s ‘suitable helper’. The word suitable, means ‘opposite but corresponding’ i.e. “hey Adam, I am creating someone divinely different to you but you desperately need”. God calls this design, “very good”. So, we can conclude, beyond any doubt that men need women, and women need men.

So, when one gender suffers, the other does too.



**So, what is going on? What is happening in and to men's hearts to create such a sad picture?**

The first thing to say, is that the heart is so, so important. The heart is a very intimate thing. It is the very epicentre of who we are. Yes, it includes our emotions, but it is so much more than that. It defines us, it directs us, and it encompasses our passions, motivations and the things that give us a reason to get out of bed in the morning. The heart, in biblical terms, is not a part of who we are, but rather the very centre of our being.

It's why in **Proverbs 4 verse 23** we are told to 'guard our hearts, for everything we do flows from it'.

It makes sense therefore that the enemy would target men's hearts if he wanted to bring us down. And he is doing just that in **two** distinct but very interconnected ways:

**First, the enemy is inflicting wounds on the heart of men.**

God is, of course, right to say that we need to guard our hearts.

But, sometimes when a flaming arrow is fired at us, there is nothing we can do to stop it. It's too fast, too strong and too powerful, so it bypasses our defences, and it wounds us. Remember, of course, that when I talk about a wound in this context, I mean an emotional one rather than a physical one.

So, how is that wound inflicted? Well, to answer this we need to know what is going on in the centre of every boy and every man's heart. John Eldredge, the author of *Wild at Heart*, and a Christian Men's Councillor, articulates it this way. He says: "The deepest question, lurking in men's hearts, is 'Have I got what it takes to be a man'? Now until that male believes the answer to their question is 'yes', he will forever be trying to prove he is a man, or he will shrink from anything that might reveal he is not one".

That's an incredibly vulnerable, raw question and the answer that is given – whether in word or in deed – will make him, or it will break him.

Here's the thing though. A man needs another man, usually in authority, to answer that question for him. In an ideal world, the answer would be given and then reinforced by the first and most important man in their life: their dad.

Unfortunately, though, for too many men, who's hearts are in crisis, they never did get the answer that they needed from their fathers. And that's the other reason they couldn't guard their hearts. The wound was inflicted, deliberately or, more commonly, inadvertently, by the one man in their lives who was supposed to protect them.

That's what happened to me. My birth dad chose to leave me and my mum when I was two, and he never came back. Then my mum remarried, and that man was emotionally abusive towards me – calling me names, often things that belittled any sense of masculinity that I had. So, as far as my heart was concerned, I didn't have what it takes to be a man. And I carried that into every place, every interaction, every relationship and every moment of the day.

The wound can also come from:

- A physically present but emotionally distant father who never answers the question.
- A performance-driven father who gives their son the message that they can never meet their high-standards.
- A father who dies early on in the boy's life, and who can never answer the question for them.
- Other painful moments with fathers.

And it can also come from uncles, teachers, bosses, brothers, peers, and even wives and girlfriends. John Eldredge, states that every man he has ever met, has a wound like this, albeit to varying degrees.

But once the wound is inflicted, a man risks never being able to recover. And mostly, he will seek to affirm that he is a man in all the wrong places, to his harm and others. Which leads me to the second way the enemy attacks the heart of men.

**Namely that once the wound is inflicted, the enemy works overtime to make sure that it never heals.**

Because here's the thing: No matter how big your wound is, no matter how badly you were treated, no matter how many terrible things you have done as a man, and no matter how little you think of yourself, God can heal your wound and He can redeem you.

He wants to.

He invites all men into relationship with Him – God as your father, you as his son. And He works with you to build an unbreakable father-son bond. And once you have that, you will ask him: 'Father, do I have what it takes to be a man?' and He will say: 'Yes, you are my son in whom I am well pleased'. Once your heart is healed up enough, God will then challenge you and coach you to be the great man that He created you to be – a wonderful person, husband, father and leader.

It's no wonder then, that the enemy is working overtime to stop this from happening to men globally. He has his tactics. He will try to stop you from hearing God's invitation. He will do his best to keep you from it. He will press on your wound, until it hurts. He will distract you, throw temptations at you, lie to you and try to convince you that the person or persons who inflicted the wound was right all along – you are a poor excuse for a man.

Resist him.

He also has another, more subtle tactic, for making sure that you never heal from the wound. He provides unbiblical models for masculinity. You know what I mean - the toxic masculinity groups, the groups that reject masculine characteristics all together, and even violent groups like gangs. I say this with compassion and mercy, these groups are full of wounded men being led by wounded men. It's the very definition of the blind-leading-the blind.

Can I be honest amongst friends? I was once badly wounded to. As I have explained, my birth dad rejecting me, and my ex-stepdad telling me I was anything but a man, left me with a devastating wound. And things got worse. Aged 17, I finally felt like I was gaining my stepfather's respect. I loved him as a dad, so I needed him to tell me or show me that I had what it took.

But then mum, called. My stepfather had been rushed into hospital with a severe headache and He died two weeks later. And just like that, he was gone and so was any chance of me getting the answer I needed. My Grandad stepped in during the immediate aftermath, and one night, a few weeks after my stepfather's death, he sat me down and told me that, as the oldest sibling, it was my job to be the man of the house now. That very night, my Grandad suffered heart failure and died.

So, at 17-years-old, I felt immense pressure to be a man, but I didn't think I had what it takes to be one, and worse still, I now had nobody to teach me how to do it.

Such is the significance of that question, that I instinctively, and without realising, looked to other men for guidance on what it took to become a man. Mostly, I looked in the wrong places. TV programmes and movies, friends, and men that culture viewed as strong – the highly successful, wealthy, high-status type.

So, I resolved that my ticket to becoming a man was to become a top-lawyer. I worked unhealthily hard at college, then university, then in my first job at a massive law firm. And then one day, my then boss told me he has put me up for not one but two promotions, and that I could take the weekend to pick which one I wanted. That was it – I had made it to the promised land.

But that over that weekend, my boss changed his mind. He told me that I wasn't fit to lead others. That I was too nice for this profession. That to succeed in this game, I would need to be ruthless. But you aren't, he said, so maybe you should think about getting a job in the care sector.

Just like that, my identity crumbled like a pack of cards. I hit rock bottom. And it did what needed to happen all along, it brought me down to my knees.



### Section 3 – Healed hearts (a heart like Jesus)



My boss was right. I was not ruthless. To me, ruthlessness was just a clever marketing term, to justify people being cruel. The enemy is clever like that.

But I had a choice to make: Become ruthless and succeed or stick to my values and face never becoming a man (because the fancy job title was still, in my heart, my ticket to manhood).

So, I prayed about it. Jesus, what should I do?

And he gave me the answer, just one I didn't particularly like. He told me to read the beatitudes, and in particular, **Matthew Chapter 5 verse 5** which says: '***Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.***'

In other words, If you are gentle, the earth will belong to you. If you are meek, the world is yours. If, by your very nature, you are tender-hearted then you will lead the world, it will not lead you. Oh, what power the gentle-man has, Jesus says.

Now, I'm not going to lie – I had two objections to this:

#### **First – in this world, meekness is weakness**

In fact, by its very dictionary definition the word 'meek' means 'to be easily imposed upon and submissive'.

Meek men don't stand up for themselves or others. They run from confrontation, even when it is needed to end injustice. They are timid, cowering in the face of challenges. Cruelly, the meek are compared to 'door-mats'. Rather than being powerful, they tend to give their power away.

Surely, Jesus cannot be saying such men will inherit the earth?

#### **Second - the powerful men on this earth are the very opposite of meek.**

Real men - or so the world says - are aggressive, go-getters. They are the loudest in a crowded room. They trample over the weak, kick-down doors and are ruthless in order to be successful. Along the way, they have been anything but gentle. Yet, society and my boss, seemingly, celebrates these traits, making kings of the men who demonstrate them. We promote them, we give them power and influence, and we let them shape our world.

Far cry from meek men inheriting the earth, it's the domineering who are leading it.

Now, I was confused. What Jesus was saying, was to me incorrect. It did not compute with my or most people's experiences. But I knew that He wasn't lying or mistaken. He not only tells the truth, He is the truth!

So, I did some digging. And what I found has honestly, changed my life. It helped me on the way to accepting that I did have what it takes to be a man. It helped me to re-think how Christians can be successful in even the most ruthless work environments.

You see, our western culture hasn't understood the true meaning and origin of the word used by Jesus in Matthew 5:5. We used 'meek' but that's only because our English language does not have an adequate word to translate it. The early Greek translation for the type of gentleness Jesus was describing was 'praus', which has a very unique meaning.

'Praus', was most commonly used by the warriors of Ancient Greece to describe the process of taming wild horses and transforming them into 'war horses'.

In their wild state, these horses were physically impressive, but their strength and power was used recklessly. They were slaves to their emotion, making them aimless, aggressive, and ultimately destructive.

So, to turn them into war horses, the Greek warriors put them through a rigorous conditioning process. But it was rare thing for any horse to learn how to control their strength and emotion. The elite minority of horses who became a war horse, were described as – you guessed it - 'praus'.

The praus horse was just as strong, powerful, fast, fearless and impressive as it was in its former wild state. But now it had all of this immense strength under control. All of its power was bottled up and used for a greater purpose.

That's what Jesus meant when he said, "blessed are the meek". He wasn't telling people to lie down and take abuse. He wasn't telling people to be 'door-mats'. He wasn't demanding people remain silent in the face of injustice. He was just telling us that the world would belong to the remarkable few that managed to control their emotions, their gifts, their power and use it in a way that brought the Kingdom to any situation.

That's praus. 'Immense strength contained and controlled for the betterment of others'.

And here's where it gets really cool, ok. How many of you know that, after we are saved by and receive new life in Jesus, God wills us to become more like Him?

And part of that process is learning about the character of Jesus, about who He is, about His heart. And his heart is a great place to start, because remember earlier, I said that in biblical terms, the heart is not just a part of who we are, but rather the very centre of our being.

Now, in the four gospel accounts - 89 chapters of biblical text - there is only one place where Jesus tells us about his own heart.

He could have chosen any word to describe it - "joyful and kind", "exhorted and strong", "powerful and loving" - but instead he said this:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light" - Matthew 11:28-30

When Jesus shares who he is at the very centre of his being - who he is at his deepest levels - he uses the words gentle and humble.

The Greek word used to translate this gentleness is, you guessed it, praus. Praus is a unique term. Only one other person in the entire bible was labelled 'praus', and that was Moses. And the word Praus is only used three more times in the entire New Testament (including Matthew 5:5).

So, Gentlemen, meekness – praus - is not weakness. It's immensely powerful.

Aristotle, the Greek Philosopher, articulated praus in this way. Can I have three volunteers very quickly:

Over here is a person who gives into rage – could you do a rage face.

Over here is a person who never gets angry at all – could you be timid.

This, my friends, is praus. Praus is in the middle of these two extremes. A praus man, who has all his strengths, gifts, emotions contained and controlled for the betterment of others, only gets angry at the right time, in the right measure and for the right reasons.

Such men, who by their very praus nature, take responsibility, demonstrate integrity, have a heart for the vulnerable, are humble, sacrificial and come to serve others – they are powerful, and they are the men who God entrusts the earth.

**Let me wrap it up by saying this:** Shortly after Jesus revealed this to me, I asked Jesus if being Praus would see my thrive in my workplace?

I was expecting him to say yes. Afterall, 'the praus inherit the earth right'.

Well, he said, "no" (Shrug): He said, "No, you won't thrive in that culture and that's the point. Don't you see, by being Praus, and by bringing me into that place, that culture will not survive. Praus is in direct conflict with ruthlessness. It is like a light that cannot be overcome by the darkness. So, your current work culture, will fall like the tower of babel and brick by brick, we will build something new. That is kingdom power."

And do you know what. That's exactly what happened. But, in view of the time, I will save that story for another day.

Because now, I am delighted to introduce you to The Urban Crofter's Men's Ministry: **The Praus Movement.**

**View here:** [www.gentleandstrong.com](http://www.gentleandstrong.com)