

Bible and the Headlines: Man Keeping

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English is a very plastic language and every year new words are added to its lexicon. One such word, introduced in the last 12 months, is “mankeeping” and it is being featured in the headlines.

On June 19th, the British internet media company UNILAD announced, “Scientists Explain Why 'Mankeeping' Is the Reason Women Are 'Quiet-Quitting' Relationships.” The piece articulated the highlights of an American Psychological Association study on “male friendship recession.” The researchers define ‘mankeeping’ as, “The efforts women make to compensate for men’s thinner social networks, which can strain their time and well-being.” According to the study a sizable number of women are, “. . . opting to spend their lives in solitude rather than pick up the pieces of the added emotional labor” of their friendless man.

The New York Times carried, “Why Women Are Weary of the Emotional Labor of ‘Mankeeping’,” in its July 28th edition. The article was an interview of the researcher of the APA paper in the previous paragraph. The researcher told the Times, “Women tended to have all of these nodes of support they were going to for problems, whereas men were more likely to be going to just them [the woman].” Other experts told the Times, “No one person can meet all of another’s emotional needs, . . . Men need to be vulnerable with other men.”

The woman’s magazine Evie on July 28th featured, “‘Mankeeping’ Is the Latest Feminist Buzzword and It’s Undermining Real Femininity.” The article took exception with the New York Times article. The piece suggested the Times, “. . . should prioritize addressing the urgent crises facing men: rising male suicide rates, deteriorating men’s mental health, and widespread male loneliness.” The Evie article defended the need males have for men-only environments, and notes the continuing decline (even hostility) to such spaces.

The Bible shows that ‘mankeeping’ was not a problem for our patriarchs. The male network around Biblical leaders were integral to the narrative. Whether it is Aaron and Hur supporting Moses (Ex 17:12) or Job’s three friends during his trials (Job 2:11 and 13), there was no “male friendship recession.” The best Old Testament antithesis to mankeeping is found in King David. When David lost his bestie the king declared, “I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan. Our friendship was exceeding beautiful, and amiable to me above the love of women. As the mother loves her only son, so did I love you” (2Sa 1:26).

There is no “male friendship recession” in the New Testament either. The apostle Paul was surrounded by men for support as evidenced by the letter to the Colossian church (Col 4:4-12). Of course the most important male friendship circle was surrounding Jesus. He made his friendship with the twelve disciples explicit when he told them, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (Joh 15:15). Jesus even asked his friends Peter, James and John to help prepare him for the crucifixion (Mat 26:38).

If women are tired of mankeeping, they should tell their boyfriends and husbands to be more like Jesus. That should fix him.