

A New Man, An Engaging Vision



STEVE SILVER at work in one of his favorite writing spots in Maine. His ministry, Men's Golf Fellowship in Naples, Florida, can be found at mgfnaples.com. Find his book, *New Man Journey* at newmanjourney.com.

Lunch. It was only lunch.

“Let’s pay for lunch,” Sandy Silver said as nonchalantly as a husband might expect. But Steve Silver had a calculator in his head. And this lunch, at this time, in this place, with this many people, was adding up in a hurry. Steve balked. “We’ve picked up too many checks already,” he said.

That little comment set a spark to dry tinder, and the ensuing hours constituted a very rough patch. You never want misery in your marriage; you especially don’t want it when you’re vacationing in Tuscany, Italy, in celebration of your fortieth wedding anniversary.

But looking back on it, as brave in humility as this requires a man to be, Steve Silver will tell you now, three years later, that this was the end of one of the enduring traits of what he calls his “Old Man.”

“Sandy’s default is ‘pay for everything,’” he says. My default is ‘protect the nest egg.’” Steve won’t soften the story in his clinical review at this stage. He admits the outcome of his response was “horrible.” But if you can’t learn lessons from what you’ve done wrong, that Old Man never goes away.

“I made a decision then that I needed to change in that area,” Silver says. “I said, to myself ‘You know what, Steve? This is a no-win, decade-long battle. You are much better off going with her attitude than yours on this. Number one, it’s going to dramatically improve your marriage if you stop fighting this fight. Number two, she’s probably more right in this than you are, because by being overly generous with our family, we’re not going to go broke and the chances are it will make our whole life that much nicer.’ I chose almost three years ago to go that route, and I haven’t looked back. It was a big deal—a *big deal*.”

You get the sense in talking to Steve Silver that anything having to do with putting aside this Old Man for

the New Man is a big deal. It should be. He’s spent a significant portion of the last two years writing and advancing these ideas in his book, *New Man Journey: Finding Meaning in Retirement*.

Not that he’s rushing to call himself an author. Mostly he is a retired business advisor, with expertise in operations and technology, who splits his time between Naples, Florida, and Brookfield, Connecticut. It was in Naples that Silver found his second calling ten years ago.

“When I retired early, I was faced with the question that most of us are: how and with whom I wanted to spend my time,” Silver remembers. But a dichotomy challenged his direction. “I asked myself, ‘Do I want to make church friends or golf friends my main social structure?’ And the truth is I found myself looking more forward to hanging with golf friends.”

That was a tough call for someone others certainly would have recognized as a “church man.” Silver had become a Christian when he was just 23 years old at Sandy’s prompting. He had lived his entire adult life in Evangelical circles. But he found himself, as many do when retirement forces the question, at a crossroads. And that’s when he heard himself say, “I don’t think that my love for, interest in, desire to be with this group of guys is necessarily a bad thing or a wrong thing. I really care for these guys, I like their company, I relate to them, they’re like I am, they care about the same things I care about. I just want to be able to share my faith with them. I want to know where they are in their faith. I want to be able to talk to them about things that really matter deeply

to me.”

And so, in 2003 Men’s Golf Fellowship (MGF) was birthed in Naples. “We made a big hypothesis, which was that men want and need faith in their lives at whatever stage and whatever level of maturity that faith is,” he says. There were several other men who expressed a similar interest to his own in engaging golf friends in conversations about things that matter beyond golf scores, markets, restaurants, travel, and health. Silver’s own stories of growing in the faith point often to the influence of his wife. While MGF doesn’t exclude women, who are often more likely than men to engage in discussions about their faith—couples banquets kick off and conclude each season—the Fellowship in Naples is committed to engaging men in spiritual conversation. Men, who are usually not as forthcoming about personal matters, find in MGF a safe and encouraging place where they can have conversations about the challenges and opportunities that face older men and about what faith has to do with all of that.

Naples is one of those Florida destinations that throw their doors open to “snowbirds,” residents from northern states who want to escape the harsh winters at home. Silver and his MGF working team plan a series of breakfasts each year from January through March for ten weeks. The breakfasts welcome speakers with business, golf, political, creative and other backgrounds—topics of direct interest to the audience. In recent years, these speakers have included PGA commissioner Mike Whan, major champions Bernhard Langer

FINE WORDS

From January through March each year, the Men's Golf Fellowship team hosts 10 large gatherings, with a featured speaker offering personal insights and stories to 200 or more attendees. Here is a sample from recent speakers.

Mike Whan, LPGA Commissioner

- On answering God's 'knock at the door'



You can't ignore the knock forever. The only advice I'd give anybody who isn't there today is if you decide to open the door, just leave it open... My wife said that my life changed and certainly my family's life changed when I gave up the remote control on my life, and that's true. I always thought it would be scary to live life without holding the remote control, and I found out it was much more scary to be holding the remote control.

John Edwardson, former CEO of CDW and Burns International and COO of United Airlines



- On taking inner city children to visit their mothers in prison

It was about an eight-year journey with two different families, driving into the inner city, picking these kids up on a Saturday morning, and then taking them to visit their mothers in prison. I thought it was going to be much different than it was. I thought of it as, *I can pick these kids up, I could do briefcase work while they were visiting with their mother, and they would come back out of the prison.* I didn't realize that I was going to have to go into the prison with them... Both women that I worked with over this period were in prison for murder. It was a life-changing experience to sit in a prison cafeteria with prisoners and families all around—a little bit different group than I typically associated with, but a very leveling group, I have to tell you, because it was very clear to me that God loved all of the people in that room just as much as God loved me.

Bob Doll, Chief Investment Strategist at Nuveen Investments



- On talking to God

We need to have an attitude of worship. I used to talk to myself. I now talk to God. It's a whole lot more fun talking to somebody else than mumbling to yourself. And it's good to talk to somebody who knows a lot more than you do. So live a life of worship. Think about who it is that you claim is important to you.

and Tom Lehman, investment strategist Bob Doll, Pitney Bowes CEO Murray Martin, Merry Maids founder Dal Peterson, political strategist Ralph Reed, Wayne Huizenga, Jr. of Huizenga Holdings, and widely read Christian apologist Josh McDowell.

Silver researches and invites these speakers, all of whom deliver their messages without cost to the Friday breakfast groups at Silver's club—Pelican Bay Golf Club. Those who attend, usually about 200 in number, pay only for their breakfast. For those who can't get to a breakfast (more than 1,000 men make up MGF's contact list), the speakers are videotaped and highlights of their talks are made available on the MGF website.

It is these talk highlights that can become the catalyst for conversation in the smaller MGF discussion groups going on throughout the week at private clubs. "We've got 15 groups in season now and will be adding 10 more in 2014. Our vision is to have an MGF discussion group in every club in Southwest Florida. The more word of mouth spreads and men attend the larger breakfast events, the easier it becomes for a few guys to start an MGF group in their club," Silver says.

The groups are not formal Bible studies. The leaders of MGF want men of all faith backgrounds to come with whatever questions or personal challenges they might have. The trained leaders point out Bible passages that help participants understand what God's thinking on the subject is. Couple this non-threatening discussion with prayer and you have the formula for meeting men right where they need it. Silver describes the dynamic this way: "The Scripture is introduced into a conversation that is immediate and relevant to what men are going through.

"If prayer is requested or offered for specific situations, it may be the first time that some men have ever prayed out loud for something or for somebody. Prayer has an amazingly powerful impact because when men pray together, regardless of their theological points of view, the Holy Spirit shows up. And the Holy Spirit is able to quicken minds, open hearts, and provide insights and perspectives that otherwise men might not necessarily have."

It is through these discussion groups that Silver has become increasingly aware of just what it means for men to grow in their faith

in Christ and to start shedding the Old Man and putting on their New Man. “My observation is that men, especially men, have built a life around their accomplishments. Men are driven by goals and achievements. Men who have been successful in their careers have put tremendous value in these past lives. That’s not appropriate when retired. It’s a rearview mirror value. It’s not particularly relevant to our current state.

“I think that is the biggest challenge: letting go of our former accomplishments and transitioning into a new value system that isn’t measured by professional or financial success. I think the new measurement, the new paradigm is *all* about relationships—the quality of our relationships with our spouse, our adult children, grandchildren, and almost as importantly, with our friends.

“Do we ever pause to ask the questions: What does all that look like? How do we quantify the quality of our relationships? How can we measure it? And if we measured it with the same standards that we measured our professional lives, would we rate ourselves as highly?”

According to Silver, the Old Man in us rarely asks such penetrating questions of himself or questions with God in mind. When a man allows himself to be made new in Jesus Christ—a change to which Silver dedicates significant explanation in his book—his way of evaluating himself also changes.

The same process takes place in women when Christ wins their heart, but Silver’s ministry is to men. While many leaders in the world of men’s ministry have recommended steering clear of the terms “personal relationships” and “intimacy” when dealing with men, Silver isn’t so sure this applies to those at the latter end of their lives.

“It’s very much a part of our conversation,” he says. “I believe that the more intimate we are, the more we let down our guards, the more willing we are to realize that we are in need of forgiveness and intimacy—I think that intimacy drives everything.

“Usually the older we get, the more we want intimacy. We hunger for deeper levels of intimacy in our marriage, with our children and with our friends. A relationship with Christ is by nature the most intimate.

“The thing that prevents us from intimacy is our fears, our pride, our hurts, our conceptions about how close we should or shouldn’t be with people, how far we should or shouldn’t go in our relationships. I believe that Christ has demonstrated that his standard is that there is no boundary in love. Love means intimacy with those closest to us—and especially with him.”

Steve Silver and the men who work so earnestly with him to make Men’s Golf Fellowship important for so many men are not your typical golfers. They love the game. But more than that, they love those with whom they play the game. They want to share with them Jesus, the one who calls them to new life. MGF is Old Men becoming New Men and welcoming others to take the journey with them. ʘ

THINKING AHEAD

No matter how far distant your own retirement may be, we all do well to lay plans now. Steve Silver, who moved into his own retirement at 56 (he’s now 66), offers some insight into how you might prepare with excellence at five important markers of life.

Don’t be too quick or pressured to discover or select a career. You have time. Think and (especially) pray about carving out a career based on something you’re passionate about. It’s not all about money or others’ expectations. Hold on to this principle—it will pull you in the right direction.

As you become established in marriage, children, and career, the pressures of life build on many fronts. You may find yourself longing for a freer, less-pressured time. Relax! Ask the peace of Christ to rule in your heart. Trust him with your current challenges and future outcomes. He won’t disappoint you.

It’s possible that your children are entering or well into their teens. They may need your love, wisdom and (yes) friendship more now than ever before. Your relationship with them is now your highest priority. Don’t let anything (pride, frustration, disapproval) stand in the way of that. Humble yourself, invest time (not money), and pray, pray, pray!

Your marriage has changed over the years. Some things have improved. Others have gotten worse. Whatever else you do, don’t major in the minors. Give up petty and non-productive disagreements, competition and bickering. You may be at the crossroads of the best years of marriage ahead or of self-imposed unhappiness. Jointly and prayerfully seek mutual forgiveness and reconciliation in all things. That’s all you need. Nothing else matters. You’ll be amazed by how well this works.

Look forward to these years. They’ll be your best. If you’ve allowed the Lord to be in charge of your life these past 40 or 50 years, everything will be more peaceful, softer, and simply more enjoyable. You’re now in the sweet spot of life. Stop striving and competing. Just ask God to use the sum total of who you are, what you know and what you’ve acquired to glorify him. Believe me, he will.