

JARED BROCK AND AARON ALFORD

BEARDED GOSPEL MEN



THE EPIC QUEST FOR
MANLINESS & GODLINESS

Introduction

THE MANIFESTO

BY JARED BROCK

Charles Finney. George Müller. D. L. Moody. Jolly Old Saint Nick.
What do all these men have in common?

Beards.

Your humble authors have experienced a vast array of diverse Judeo-Christian traditions and have discovered one powerful thing that unites the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox worlds: follicle faithfulness.

Men have been growing facial foliage since the beginning of time. While it's not officially mentioned in Genesis, we're pretty sure that in the *Beardginning*, God created the heavens and the beard.

Did you know that Abraham had a beard? Of course you did. So did his son Isaac. Though not as hairy as his caveman brother, Esau, Jacob is often depicted with a manly mane. King David wore a beard, as did his wise-guy son, Solomon. It goes without saying that Moses' face was well forested, and Aaron's beard is specifically mentioned in Psalm 133.

Technicolor-dream-coated Joseph also had a crumb catcher until Pharaoh turned him into a smooth-cheeked Egyptian. Noah (a.k.a.

Russell Crowe) had a beard, obviously. And let's not even pretend that Methuselah was baby-faced. Job, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezra, and the apostle Paul—all bearded.

Do you know who else had a twenty-four-hour five o'clock shadow? Jesus "The Man" Christ.

And if we believe what we see on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, then the bearded Michelangelo certainly was a prophet painter for knowing even God Himself displays Santa-like plumage.

Is there a connection between hairiness and holiness?

Yes.

One might even say that we are justified by face. Every hair is a prayer, every collar cover an offering of love. Beards teach men contentment—when you have a beard, you have enough.

Throughout history, Christian men have gloried in male-pattern magnificence. Saint Benedict of Nursia wore a superb double-forker. The benevolently bushed Euthymius wouldn't allow clean-shaven monks to enter his Judean Desert monastery. Saint Francis of Assisi had a beard, and now there's a pope named after him. He's clean-shaven, but we're praying for him.

Let's pause for a moment and consider all the people who didn't have a beard. Hitler. Mussolini, Stalin, Mao. The Devil himself (pointy goatees don't count).

The documentation of beardliness is a hallowed tradition. Abbot Burchard of Bellevaux wrote *Apologia de Barbis* in 1160 as "a treatise on the biblical, theological, moral, social, and allegorical implications of beards."¹ In 1531, Pierio Valeriano Bolzani wrote *In Support of Beards for the Clergy* after the (beardless) Pope Clement VII thought about forcing priests to manscape their forested faces.² Little did he know that a beard covers a multitude of chins. As nineteenth-century orator Thomas S. Gowing once declared in a speech, "Though there are individual exceptions, the absence of Beard is usually a sign of physical and moral weakness."³

Of all the great Christian men who wore beards, none stands so highly as the headless martyr Sir Thomas More. On the day of his beheading, the tufted knight supposedly positioned his beard away from his soon-to-be-severed neck, saying, “This hath not offended the king.”⁴

Beards mean leadership. John Knox, Menno Simons, and George Müller founded entire denominations, most likely on the strength of their beards. The well-bearded General William Booth founded an army on the strength of his food saver. Hasidic Jews, Quakers, Greek Orthodox, hipster pastors, and worship leaders—all bearded. A beard confers instant leadership. It’s the difference between “Mister” and “Sir.”

Speaking of bush-faced worship leaders: David Crowder or those unbearded Newsboys? We rest our case.

Just look at the history of *Beardianity*: Charles Spurgeon, Saint John Chrysostom, Lactantius, James the Greater, Saint Nicholas, Saint Patrick, Dwight Moody, Gregory of Nyssa, Charles Finney . . . beards, beards, bearded beards. Why do godly men choose to grow their own neck scarves?

Because it’s the right thing to do.

Yet, despite a clear biblical and historical bias toward beardliness, a number of Christian institutions and Bible colleges have, throughout the years, created policies that expressly forbid the cultivation of facial manliness. Historical anti-beards include Bob Jones University, Moody Bible Institute, Pensacola Christian College, and even the Salvation Army—despite General Booth’s titanic topical topiary. In fact, Liberty University’s 2009 dress code insisted that “facial hair should be neatly trimmed.”⁵ So much for liberty.

Hear these words, baby-faced college deans: Dihydrotestosterone, the chemical that promotes beard growth (and sadly, balding) is God’s gift to man-folk. For it is by grace we are saved through face, not of ourselves, lest any man can boast. Beards or baldness—perhaps God has chosen whom we will serve.

But don't take our word for it—we barbates stand on the shoulders of elegantly bearded giants.

*Growing a beard is a habit most natural,
Scriptural, manly, and beneficial.*

—C. H. SPURGEON

*The beard must not be plucked. “You will not
deface the figure of your beard.”*

—SAINT CYPRIAN (EVEN HIS STATUE HAS A BEARD.)

*The nature of the beard contributes in an incredible
degree to distinguish the maturity of bodies . . . to
contribute to the beauty of manliness and strength.*

—LACTANTIUS

*The beard signifies the courageous . . . the earnest, the active, the
vigorous. So that when we describe such, we say, he is a bearded man.*

—SAINT AUGUSTINE

*[God] adorned man like the lions, with a beard, and endowed
him, as an attribute of manhood . . . a sign of strength.*

—CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

You need biblical proof, you say? Then let there be no shaves of gray about it. I will give you three, nay four proclamations, but be forewarned: if we hear the Word of God, yet fail to do what it says . . .

*If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me,
and I shall become weak and be like any other man.*

—JUDGES 16:17 ESV

*The men were greatly ashamed. And the king [David] said,
“Remain at Jericho until your beards have grown and then return.”*

–2 SAMUEL 10:5 ESV

*You shall not round off the hair on your temples
or mar the edges of your beard.*

–LEVITICUS 19:27 ESV

*The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be
alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

–GENESIS 2:18

So there you have it. We, like sheep, have gone astray—shave henceforth at your own peril. And so I exhort you, as Paul did the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 ESV).

WELCOME TO THE PUB

BY AARON ALFORD

*Of the seven dwarves, only DOPEY had a shaven face. This
should tell us something about the custom of shaving.*

–TOM ROBBINS

Now that you hold in your hands these hallowed pages (paper or digital), let us begin with a little clarification. What exactly do we mean when we say, “Bearded Gospel Men”? What defines a Bearded Gospel Man? Are you a Bearded Gospel Man? The first part and the last part are the easiest to define. The words *bearded* and *man* shouldn’t require a lot of explanation. If you have scruffy stuff growing on your face, there is an 89 percent chance you are bearded, and you are a man.

But what does it mean to be a Bearded *Gospel* Man? That's the clincher. The shortest answer is that, along with having a manly mane, you can proclaim that most basic of Christian tenets, the Apostles' Creed. But of course a Bearded Gospel Man is something more than just a well-churched dude with a beard. It's a man who's letting himself be changed by that gospel. A man who is striving to truly embody that gospel.

And if a Bearded Man is striving to be a Bearded Gospel Man, he knows he can't do that on his own. He needs the grace of God, the company of good friends, the kinship of true community, and the wisdom of that great cloud of witnesses. It's in that spirit of friendship, community, and wisdom that we present this book.

But first, a little history: Bearded Gospel Men started as a Tumblr blog and Facebook page by Pastor Joe Thorn. It was a joke, really. Mainly memes about beards and good-natured barbs about the superiority of the unshaven, mostly in the context of Christianity and church life. Bearded Gospel Men gathered momentum and eventually became a community of tens of thousands of people. We began to offer not just joke memes, but content about the Christian life, church history, and masculinity, and we received some great feedback. As BGM grew, we attracted more people from the entire spectrum of the Christian faith, from Franciscan friars in Brazil to good ol' Baptist boys in Alabama. Brothers from around the world were united in their love of the beard! We also gained a lot of followers who would not consider themselves "Christian" by any stretch of the imagination, and for a time we struggled with how to see this Bearded Gospel Men thing. Until we landed on the image of a pub.

Pub is short for "public house," and that's what we wanted to be: a pub that happens to be owned and operated by Christians, where everyone is welcome to hang out. If people wanted to share a few laughs at the bar, they'd be welcome to do that. If they wanted to sit down at a booth for some chitchat, they'd be welcome to do that too.

Or if they wanted to take some time to talk about deeper things, there would be some comfy chairs by the fireplace for serious conversation. Since then we have endeavored to be a place where everyone is welcome, everyone is treated respectfully, and everyone leaves feeling a little happier for having come for a visit. We won't ooze Christianese all over the place, but faith is smack-dab in the middle of all this.

It's in the spirit of the pub that we welcome you to these pages. In each chapter, you will meet some of history's greatest Bearded Gospel Men. Introduce yourself. Listen to their stories. Some will make you laugh; a few may get you a little misty-eyed. Ask questions. Let these men challenge you. There are no antismoking bylaws in effect at this pub, so grab your pipe and take a little time for reflection while you thoughtfully stroke that beard (an action that is scientifically proven* to make you wiser!). It is our hope that as you surround yourself with these godly men, you will be spurred on to thought, prayer, and action.

The bar is open. The fireplace is lit. Old friends and new await you.

Welcome to the pub.

THE JOURNEY

BY JARED BROCK

People loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

—JOHN 3:19

Men today are not a stellar species. We do most of the murdering. We commit almost all the rapes. We wage the wars, commit the felonies, and precipitate the global economic crashes due to our greed and

* Not actually scientific or proven. But it feels true, doesn't it?

stupidity. Over 95 percent of Fortune 500 companies are controlled by men. We run the big banks, the conglomerates, and the military industrial complex that has slaughtered tens of millions of our fellow brothers. We created the porn industry, rigged the electoral process, and degraded God's creation on a scale never seen before in history.

What is wrong with us?

Seriously—what is so broken inside the male heart that makes us want to dominate, seek, kill, and destroy?

The answer, in short, is darkness. We live in the dark. We suffer in silence. We allow our sin to fester.

We need help.

For the most part, the Christian resource industry hasn't helped. My friends in the Christian music industry tell me their record labels actually have a target market in mind: Her name is Jenny. Jenny is married. She is twenty-five to thirty-four years old. Jenny is a stay-at-home mom. Jenny has two kids. Write your songs for Jenny.

In the Christian publishing world, women do about 70 percent of the book purchasing. So who do you expect publishers to gear their books toward? I don't blame the publishers—they're just fulfilling demand. The truth is, most devotionals aren't made for men. Publishers don't write a lot of books for men in general, because men couldn't be bothered to sit down and read them. This is our fault. So their books are geared to women. Not that there's anything wrong with birds or flowers, but we wanted to write a devotional we'd want to read ourselves.

So here's the plan: each day for the next thirty-one days, we're going to introduce you to some of our favorite Christian dudes throughout history. These guys lived their faith in real, tactical, practical ways that led millions of people closer to Jesus, in big efforts and small acts of love. Each entry will also include a verse of the day, a quote to contemplate, and a prayer.

But this book isn't meant to be read alone. Each entry also contains

three questions to answer with a partner or small group of brothers. Genesis 2:18 makes it pretty clear: “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Like going to war, or making an exodus from Egypt, or taking a journey to Mordor, we need one another’s help along the way.

There are thirty-one days on this book’s journey, but don’t beat yourself up if you miss a day. Take your time. If it works better for you, take a full year to go through this book with your friends. It’s better to use a good system that works than a perfect system you’ll later abandon. Just take it one day at a time.

It’s time we help ourselves. It’s time we form bands of brothers to help one another through life. It’s time to go on a healing journey together.

First John 1:7 offers us a double incentive to do so: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

Together we find our healing. In surrender we find our strength.

About the Authors

Jared Brock is co-founder of Hope for the Sold, a non-profit organization dedicated to combating exploitation, and author of *A Year of Living Prayerfully*. He's happily married to his best friend, Michelle, and his writing has appeared in *Esquire*, *Catalyst*, *Relevant*, *Huffington Post*, *Elite Daily*, and *Writer's Digest*. Brock runs a documentary production company, is the director of *Over 18* and *Red Light Green Light*, and has been interviewed on TODAY.com, *100 Huntley Street*, and *The 700 Club*.

Aaron Alford is originally from Ontario, Canada. He has studied improv at The Second City, hitchhiked across Ireland and Italy, and, as a missionary with Youth With A Mission in Modesto, California, helps run a street café for the homeless with his friends. He enjoys beautifying the world with whimsy, compassion, pipe smoke, and an admirable beard.

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