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4Giveness

For the guys in 4Him, music is easy. Friendship is hard.

by **Chris Lutes**

The crowd roars as 4Him takes the stage of a packed auditorium. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder at the center of the stage, the performers, all dressed in black, break into broad smiles. Then break into song:

*Oh I say the measure of man
Is not how tall you stand
How wealthy or intelligent you are
'Cause I found the measure of a man
God knows and understands
For he looks to the bottom of your heart*

From the upbeat "Measure of a Man" to the softer "Sacred Hideaway," each 4Him pop tune is packed with a spiritual truth and wrapped in tight, ear-pleasing harmonies.

And personalized solos.

After performing several songs together, each member takes a turn showcasing his own vocal talent—with the other three dropping back into the shadows. Between songs, the foursome teases playfully with each other. Amid the jokes and laughter, there's an overall sense of camaraderie. As you watch these guys perform, you can't help but think they're close. Even the best of friends.

But the guys in 4Him readily admit that friendship hasn't come easily for them. The reality is, when they formed 4Him seven years ago, they weren't

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good buddies who'd decided to pull together a musical group. They were, in fact, four strangers who'd met each other while touring with a vocal ensemble called Truth—a sort of "training ground" for talented and aspiring Christian singers. After touring for a time with Truth, they discovered their voices were a good mix. 4Him was born.

"We were drawn together because of a common talent," says Mark Harris, the group's chief songwriter, "not because of common backgrounds or interests."

As 4Him started touring extensively, the guys began to experience personality clashes. Small, even petty, things could set another member on edge. Criticism over someone's singing style would lead to hurt feelings. And one guy's insistence upon an "absolutely perfect" recording session could leave the others exasperated.

"You put a bunch of people together in a crowded dressing room and a packed tour bus, and you've created a situation that's ripe for conflict," explains Marty Magehee. "Add four strong personalities to that and you're going to have some major friction. No one wants to give in to the other."

By 1995 the problems had become more than the four of them could handle alone.

"We came to a point where we could have turned our backs and walked away from 4Him," Mark says. "But in spite of our conflicts, we really did feel God had a purpose for 4Him. We did not want to give up, yet something had to change."

Out of desperation, they found help from several friends and pastors. With these friends and Christian leaders present, they began to open up and let their feelings spill out. The guys now meet regularly with this group of men, known as their "accountability board."

"One of the most important things we're learning," says Mark, "is to say, 'I'm wrong! I'm wrong!'"

"And that's so hard for me," admits Andy Chrisman. "I'm such a perfectionist. I have very strong opinions. My nature is to never admit I'm wrong about anything."

"But when I refuse to admit I'm wrong, I'm headed for big conflicts with these guys. I'm learning to let go of my need to always be right."

"I have invested several years into my relationship with these guys," adds Kirk Sullivan. "I've come to realize that I can't throw away what I've invested in 4Him for the sake of some words spoken in anger."

As the guys have learned to work through their problems, they've discovered the power of asking for forgiveness—and of granting it. And they've realized how essential it is to put God's love into practice in their relationships.

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"I can honestly say we really do love one another," says Mark. "And I think this love grows stronger because we are now dealing with our day-to-day conflicts more openly and in a way the Bible commands us to."

"Unconditional love comes to mind," says Kirk. "No matter how good someone's intentions are, he's going to disappoint you. But those disappointments must not let me stop loving him."

"When I find myself angry at one of the guys, I stop and take a good look at my own imperfections. I've simply realized how much I need to work on my own character flaws before I start trying to work on someone else's."

Along with learning to accept one another's differences, they're also learning to appreciate those differences.

"What I've come to appreciate about Andy," says Kirk, "is that he's so even, so consistent. He doesn't lose his cool and he's very disciplined. He's almost my opposite."

"And what I appreciate about Kirk," puts in Andy, "is that he really loves life. If you want to go watch a funny movie, watch it with Kirk. He'll make you laugh from beginning to end. ..."

"Kirk never hides his feelings. If you want someone to shoot straight with you, go to Kirk."

As the guys continue to talk, they're all quick to compliment each other. There's Marty's good attitude and wacky sense of humor, says Mark. There's Mark's undying loyalty, returns Marty.

No doubt about it. 4Him is definitely not the group it used to be.

"We've been through our battles together," says Mark. "We've not only survived those battles, we've actually come out stronger."

And amid it all, they've become something they hardly thought possible:

Good friends.

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