

Pray for Men!

The crisis is spiritual at the core. Men's hearts have been penetrated by a demonic deadness.

Next time you're in church, perform a little experiment for me. Look around the sanctuary and count the number of women. Then count the men. If your congregation mirrors national averages, six or seven out of every 10 people with you in the pews will be female—meaning only three or four out of 10 will be male.

Visit a church during the week and you'll find the proportion of women to men even more lopsided. Seventy percent to 80 percent of participants at midweek activities are female, a phenomenon that prompted one pastor to comment, "If it weren't for the postman, every visitor to the church during the week would be a woman."

In some churches single women outnumber single men 2-to-1. Married guys are staying home too. Twenty-five percent of married women who attend church do so without their husbands. The gender gap is just as wide for young people. An estimated 90 percent of boys will leave the church before they turn 20. Many will never return.

Of course every church is different. Some have large numbers of actively engaged males. But by and large men are missing en masse. They are dropping out—and staying away—in ever-increasing numbers.

So, what's behind this trend? And how can we reverse it?

Some cry conspiracy. The church has been feminized to keep men

away, they claim. Emotive sermons and flowery choruses have made church unendurable for the average guy.

Though I do not see evidence of a conspiracy, there is some validity to this critique. I agree that, on the whole, church services are designed to better meet the needs of women than men. Consider an average Sunday morning. It involves getting dressed up, socializing, singing and sitting through a sermon. For women—those expert listeners and master minglers—it's a dream come true. For guys it can be a marathon.

Yet let's not let men off too easily. An emasculated church may actually be the consequence of male absence, not the cause of it. If men want man-friendly services, there is something simple they can do: get more involved!

Besides, not every aspect of a typical church service is geared toward the softer sex. There's still a place in the church where men outnumber women—the pulpit.

Just think of how many football illustrations and baseball metaphors a churchgoing woman must endure in her lifetime. Ninety-five percent of senior pastors are men. So chances are, if anyone's needs are being overlooked in the Sunday sermon, it's probably women's.

Ultimately poor church attendance may be symptomatic of a larger problem: a general lack of male spiritual vitality. Nowhere is this dearth of spiritual life more apparent than in the home. In my parents' generation an image of a father, Bible in hand, leading his family in devotions was not unfamiliar. Contrast that with the picture of the modern Christian male: a spiritual stand-in who snores through the

occasional sermon before retiring to the sofa to let cable television wash over him.

There's no doubt that we need to change our methodology to attract men.

Thankfully a dialogue on how to do that is emerging. We should be part of that discussion. We should welcome suggestions and be open to change.

However, better methods alone won't suffice. This crisis is spiritual at the core. The hearts of men have been penetrated by a demonic deadness. Men have been lulled into a spiritual stupor. We're dealing with a power that will be broken only through prayer.

It may seem odd to pray for such a large segment of the population, but I believe that right now the enemy is winning the battle for men's souls. If we hope to turn the tide, we must advance on our knees.

So I'm urging you: Please pray for men! Pray that the Holy Spirit stirs their hearts. Pray that they will rise up to become the spiritual champions God created them to be. There's too much at stake. Do not sleep through this battle!

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