

Conferences Aim to Mend, Transform Men and Families

Times are becoming increasingly difficult for men in America, with men hard-hit by recent job losses. That's why two events are being held this weekend to offer men encouragement, tools for healing and empowerment.

Beginning Thursday, Bishop T.D. Jakes will host his 16th annual ManPower event. The three-day conference is designed to give men facing "tremendous" pressure the skills "to overcome those forces that have traditionally held them back," said Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter's House in Dallas.

Meanwhile, Denver-based Promise Keepers (PK) will host its Igniting Transformation conference Saturday in Orlando, Fla. The event, which is the ministry's fifth gathering this year, will focus on empowering families spiritually and, in a new trend for the ministry, will be open to women and youth.

Speakers include PK President Raleigh Washington, along with PK chairman Bill McCartney, Bible teacher Anne Graham Lotz and former Florida State University football coach Bobby Bowden.

Because of the high number of broken families-most of which are led by single mothers-Washington said by not allowing women to attend, they're ignoring half of America's families. "We need to transform [all] our families who in turn will transform the church, and transformed churches will transform cities," he said.

In Fort Worth, the ManPower event will center around the theme "Mended." The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, is speaking at the event for the first time and expects a racially diverse crowd at this year's conference, which typically draws mostly African-American participants.

Rodriguez notes that the economic downturn has taken its toll in men of all ethnicities, affecting them socially, spiritually and psychologically. A 2009 Financial Times poll found that men bore 80 percent of layoffs after the recession hit, especially those in construction and manufacturing industries, and African-Americans and Latinos.

Though they may have “been through hell,” Rodriguez said he wants men to know that “at the other side of the challenge is the greatest season” of their lives. He says they need to do what Jacob did in the book of Genesis and “hold on.”

He believes ManPower has the potential to be “an unprecedented gathering of men where God has already made an appointment to show up, and I think the consequence of that gathering is going to have a ripple effect across this nation.”

PK also has its eye on bringing spiritual transformation in the U.S. Washington said these are “perilous times” and hopes the Orlando event will help draw people back to hearing and obeying God’s Word. He said right now the church is living in a famine.

“It is a famine of meditating in the Word and doing exactly what it says,” he said. The results, he said, are apparent: abortions, crime, and pornography, to name a few.

Though PK has focused more on smaller gatherings in recent years, Washington said the ministry will do whatever God calls it to do, whether a city or regional event, or a large-scale gathering like its Victory Weekend, to be held Sept. 24-26 during NASCAR’s Dover International Speedway event in Delaware.

PK’s Orlando conference will be the second of four scheduled since a June fire that devastated the ministry’s headquarters in Denver. “We virtually lost everything,” Washington said. PK is currently 85 percent operational, he said, and hasn’t skipped a beat when it comes to holding conferences.

Because of donations and fundraising, PK has also been able to offer their events free-of-charge, including Saturday's conference. Washington expects close to 6,000 to attend.