

How to Take the Mystery Out of Reaching Younger Men

Reaching younger men—especially millennials—is a hot topic these days. The deceiver wants us to think that suddenly, after all these centuries, there is now some new, mysterious, opaque wall between the generations that cannot be described or penetrated.

That's myth No. 1, and it's nonsense. They're our children, for Pete's sake, not aliens.

What is myth No. 2? It's that we can't reach them because they don't want to be reached.

Time out. Do any of us really believe that young men don't have the same dreams and aspirations we also had at their age? Has there been a human nature "reboot" in some secret corner of the cosmos? That's ridiculous! We all want to love and be loved, to understand and be understood. But younger men need help.

For example, Trevor, a young man in his late twenties, asked me to mentor him. On our fourth visit (long enough for him to size up whether or not he would trust me), he sat down and blurted out, "I have a mediocre business, a mediocre marriage, and a mediocre relationship with God." Trevor was already a Christian—that wasn't the problem. But he just couldn't see how he could ever become a joyful man passionately living for Christ. That's because his father was never in the picture. What it meant to be a godly man, husband, and father was completely unexampled to him.

How do we reach younger men like Trevor with the hope, nurture and guidance that can only be found in Jesus and His gospel?

Some Things Never Change

The way to reach younger men is the same as it has always been. We have to love them and mentor them into manhood, and that takes time. A man can resist, but it's pretty difficult to resist unconditional love (think "dog"). That's what happened to me.

Some men who had been disciplined themselves and were walking with the Lord took me under their wings and showed me the ropes. Jim Gillean, in particular, made me his project. He gave me a vision for biblical manhood. He spent time with me. He cared. And he inspired me to turn around and disciple others—like Trevor. Reaching younger men is that simple.

What can you do? Stay alert. Be intentional. Decide in advance that you want to disciple younger men. Make yourself accessible. Make time. You can disciple "along the way," or you can lead a group, or you can meet one-on-one. Start with a decision to be part of God's great plan for the next generation.

You may need to give it some time to gel. Twenty-five years ago God told one of my best friends, Rick, "Disciple young men so that they can go and disciple others." But when my friend Rick went out to disciple young men, he couldn't get any to join him—at least not right away. But today, he's the master when it comes to discipling younger men.

Want to be like Rick? One thing to keep in mind is that it takes five years to fully sustain a new ministry, so we always use the axiom, "crawl, walk, run." All disappointment is the result of unmet (overly optimistic?) expectations.

Silver Bullets

Here's the silver bullet for discipleship: When God puts a man in your path who is stuck, discipleship means finding out why and then helping him solve that problem.

And here's silver bullet No. 2: Care about people until they care about people. That's how we change a young man's world.

Besides, you can't get your official "I Am a Disciple" card until you are making other disciples. And by the way, start with the younger men in your our own family.

And here's a different wrinkle: Don't "mind your own business." Men tend toward isolation when they have problems, so go ahead and intrude. Remember that no man fails on purpose. Yet many men make seemingly small compromises which slowly, over time, ruin their lives. So show young men the booby traps.

You may need some guidance and resources. The tried and true principles in the No Man Left Behind Model and book will work just fine with younger men too. Also, get *The Young Man in the Mirror* for high school boys (read out loud together in small groups with an adult mentor/discipler). I think the devil wants to make us think that the tried and true "just won't work here—ours is a special case"—but that's just nonsense.

The Elephant Story

When elephants overcrowded South Africa's Kruger National Park, the government authorized killing adult elephants and relocating their offspring to other parks.

As the orphaned male elephants became teenagers, they were clueless about what normal elephant behavior looked like. When their testosterone levels spiked, the orphaned bulls turned aggressive. In one park they savagely killed 39 rhinos. A park ranger watched as a young bull elephant intentionally knocked over a rhino and trampled it. The situation was out of control.

Then rangers brought several adult bull elephants into one of the parks. Just by being themselves, these animals "mentored" the younger bulls, demonstrating to them what normal male elephant behavior looked like. No more rhinos were killed after the mature bulls arrived.

It's not easy to become a man. Many young men like Trevor have

grown up as “practical” orphans. They’ve been left to guess at what normal male behavior looks like. The faith of young men today is under severe attack. That’s where the battle is raging. And frankly, mature Christian men are just not getting the discipleship job done. Consider these challenging words:

“If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is proved; and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.”

It has been 40 years since Jim Gillean disciplined me, and I’m still singing his praises. That’s the love and respect some young man can have for you too. So pass it on. Take a younger man (or several) under your wing and show him the ropes. That’s where the battle rages. That’s where you’re needed.

Note: This article is a combination of a blog post from June 12, 2014 and excerpts from How God Makes Men.

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