

Men, Here's What Your Pastor Would Love to Tell You, But Can't

The following letter first appeared as the Prologue to *Pastoring Men*. It was intended to show pastors that I understand what they're going through.

But it has occurred to me that, if you're a layman, you too would learn a lot from it about how your pastor thinks, his pressures, and his dreams.

Although it's fictitious, the letter is based on conversations with hundreds of pastors during the past 25 years. I believe it represents their desire—and yours—to help men become disciples, as well as the frustration in pursuing that goal:

Dear Laymen,

I would like to get some things off my chest. Since I could never say these things to my own men (and survive), I will say them to you. I offer these thoughts humbly.

Frankly, I get nervous when some of my men get all excited and start talking men's movement lingo like *father* wound, masculinity, etc.

What often happens is that the least respected men in the church—the ones who talk about Jesus all the time but struggle to keep a job—"take over" the men's ministry. No one would follow them on a bet—I know I wouldn't want to be in a small group they led.

So, honestly, it's just easier for me to let them do what they want. I want to help them, but in my heart I don't really think they have what it takes, and they will eventually peter out and I'll be back to zero—or worse. Don't get me wrong. I

love them. And I have faith that God has good plans for them. But, at least at this point, they need to be the ministerees, not the ministers.

What I can Get Behind

I'll tell you what I can get behind. I can get behind a disciple-making plan that men I respect are personally involved with.

Let me tell you a secret. If you really want to get me involved, here's what you would do. You would find between six and twelve of the most respected men in the church—normal guys. Invite them to a meeting to explore and pray about reaching more men for Christ. Give me a heads up *before* this exploratory meeting, so I'm not feeling blindsided. Don't try to take it too fast. Pray a lot. Don't be afraid to ask men for a big commitment.

Once you have some men willing to make a go of it, then come see me. Please. When you do come see me, don't act like you're the first ones who ever thought of reaching the men in our church. I've beaten my head against that wall for years trying to get men more involved.

How to Win Me Over

Give me space—and time—to process how it would work. Don't try to "close" me right away. Everyone thinks if they just lean on me hard enough, then their program can go. Show me some stats; build the case; why should I add to, change, or tweak my existing focus?

Ask me how ministry to men can help me. Find out what I think are the problems our men face as husbands, fathers, workers, churchmen, and men in general. I pick up quite a lot, you know, in the course of a day.

And come see me before you have the whole concept designed—I will need to make sure the plans mesh with our vision and other church ministries. Besides, I probably can make a unique

contribution as the pastor.

We can meet and discuss why we need to reach men, how men in our church are doing, what kind of men we want to produce, what will constitute success for us, and how we will measure progress.

Make it easy for me to support a ministry to our men. Talk about getting men into small groups to study the Bible. Talk about helping men to understand the gospel. Talk about how we can build men up as godly men for the home, church, workplace, and community. Talk about integrating men into the existing ministries of the church. And not just some of our men, but all of them!

Don't talk about adding a bunch of new programming like retreats, seminars, etc. But, first things first. Let's see how you can help make the ministries we're already committed to work.

Just So You Know What I'm Up Against

Like you, I want to serve God and have a successful ministry. I got into this field because I sensed a calling from God to make a difference for the gospel of Jesus.

The other day someone asked, "Why don't you care about the men in our church?" Why would they think that? It hurts when people question my motives.

I work hard to be an effective leader. The demands are unbelievably diverse—and they excite me. I love the variety of public communication, private counseling, leading a staff, inspiring volunteers, administrating an organization, marriages, baptisms, funerals, committee meetings, and more.

Here's what I see happening when it comes to men's ministries: A man brings me an idea, but often acts like I had nothing else to do but drop everything and embrace his idea ... an idea he did not do a very good job researching, explaining, or

finding others to support. He has no plan. In fact, what he really wants is to dump the whole idea in my lap and be done with it. He thinks I'm the professional so it's my job. Are you surprised that a pastor would speak so bluntly? Don't be. We're human, too, and we all feel this way sometimes.

You have no idea how many people let me down. Hey, I'm not feeling sorry for myself, and I'm certainly not angry. Indeed, I thank God for those people who, when they tell me they will get something done, I can bank it. But often I have not found people to be very dependable. It's as though their word to the church is the first thing that gets cut. Even that wouldn't bother me so much if they would just tell me. As it is, most of the non-performers don't tell me until the day they were supposed to be finished.

I Want to Build a Growing Church

So please, keep me in your prayers. Think the best of my motives. Help me see that you are really serious about reaching our men. Show me that you don't merely want to start something, and then dump it in my lap.

And by the way, you will have more clout with me if I see that you have a track record of actually ministering to men yourself.

I'm excited about what we could do together that we could never do alone. I am eager to partner with you to grow Christ's church. When can we get together? {eoa}

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