

Men's Ministry Leaders, Don't Forget Young Men

"Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us." (Titus 2:6-8)

What do you think is the most common question we hear from church leaders? That's right, "How do I get more young men involved?" It seems that all across the country men's groups and men's events are filled with "seasoned" men. Thank God for these men—they are a solid foundation for many churches.

But, if we don't figure out the deal with young men, in thirty years a lot more churches will have been sold and turned into night clubs and bowling alleys.

Last summer I experimented with a simple idea that turned out amazingly well. It ended up being one of the best experiences I have ever had as a father, so I wanted to share it with you. While this idea doesn't pretend to be a comprehensive solution to the problem of reaching young men, it will give you a practical plan to impact the lives of a few young men at a time.

The Idea

My son was just finishing his freshman year at college and planning to return home for the summer. He'd been able to line up a summer job in Orlando and I was praying and thinking about ways for us to connect while he was home. I knew that he would likely be very busy between catching up with old friends, our vacation schedule, a few trips he had planned, and his work. So I wanted to be intentional but also simple.

I believe the Lord gave me an idea: try to schedule six or eight breakfasts with committed Christian men I knew in the community. The three of us would meet for a one-hour breakfast and they could share their story and a few key principles that they found helpful in living out their faith.

I knew it was the right time in my son's life—it wouldn't have been the same while he was still in high school, and it probably would not have been as effective if we waited until he was 25.

I approached each man with an email and then followed-up with a phone call. Because my son is very interested in business, all the men I approached were business leaders. But they were also a diverse group from different industries, educational backgrounds, and ages. I wanted my son to hear from many different voices, believing that God would use them to enlarge his perspective and strengthen his faith.

After the first breakfast got scheduled, I didn't know what to expect. The man we were meeting was a dynamic young leader who serves Christ in a very active way. But what would my son think as he sat with his dad and listened to this man's story of life and faith?

All my prayers and hopes were answered in a way far beyond what I could have expected. As we left the breakfast that morning, my son was beaming from ear to ear talking about how incredible the time was. He couldn't wait for our next meeting, and before heading off to work, turned and said, "This is a great idea, and you're the best dad ever." I headed to my car, wiped the tears from my eyes, and thanked God for blessing us in such a wonderful way.

Over the summer we ended up having breakfast with eight different men. Each of them shared a different perspective and set of insights. And after each breakfast, my son seemed to be more enthusiastic about the idea, profusely thanking me for my

efforts.

The Lessons

Here are some of the specific lessons we learned:

1. **Reliance on Scripture** – Several of the men shared how important God's word has been in their lives. They talked about how vital it was for them to read and study it regularly. One man told the story of being involved with Pat Morley's Bible Study in college. His quote: "I got a business education from school, but I got an education in biblical manhood from the Bible Study."
2. **God is in control** – We heard story after story of how God had led and worked in men's lives. One man eventually came to Christ in his thirties through a friend who had been sharing with him since high school. God blocked the path of another man to keep him from something that seemed like a perfect deal, only to lead him in a direction that turned out so much greater.
3. **Integrity and doing the right thing** – Several men shared about temptations they had faced during their careers to cut corners or work with those who were. One man shared about having to stand up to a very influential leader in the community who wanted to do a deal that wasn't completely ethical. Several others shared how their bad experiences with others who didn't stand by their word helped them strive for absolute integrity in their life.
4. **Practical business and life lessons** – Every meeting was filled with wonderful reminders about the basics of work and manhood. Several men mentioned that one of the easiest ways to stand out today is simply to work diligently and with excellence. Another talked about the importance of going the extra mile. At the fourth breakfast, the leader we were with shared about the value of follow-up, including written thank you notes. Here's the cool thing – I had already told my son he should send written notes to the first three men. The

notes went out the next day.

5. How to use influence, success and wealth for God's glory

– One of the most important aspects of our time together was that these men all demonstrated how to use their lives for the glory of God. Most men of means and influence in our culture today use their assets for their personal pleasure and fulfillment. My son got to see firsthand that these are men who are more committed to serving God than they are their own desires.

I was so grateful that these men would take the time to make an investment in my son. And I think most of them were grateful to have an opportunity to speak into a young man's life and share what they have learned.

Most of all I am grateful for how God used their words to make a difference in my son's life. They truly did "set him an example" and "show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned." (Titus 2:7)

Many times after breakfast my son would call me on his way to work to talk about what was said. Several times over the months since the breakfasts he has reminded me of something that was shared by one of the men and then applied it to something he was going through.

Here's the really interesting part: I found myself doing the same thing. Each time we left the breakfast I was personally challenged and encouraged in very specific ways. Over the next days and weeks I found myself applying what I heard from these men to my own life. I originally scheduled the meetings for my son, and he was definitely blessed by them; but I came to realize that God had scheduled them for me as well.

How You Can Make This Happen

Here's a step-by-step plan for implementing this with your son, grandson, or a few young men in your community. (Based on my experience, I would limit it to at most three young men –

that would be a breakfast of five people including you.)

1. Pray about and decide which young man or men you would like to invest your time in.
2. Find out when they will be available—Christmas break, spring break, or next summer.
3. Figure out how many slots for meetings will be available. Limit them to one or two per week so they have more impact.
4. Pray, and then make a list of men that you think would have an impact on the lives of the young men. Shoot for twice as many men on the list as you have slots for meetings. Some men will be busy or impossible to connect with during your time window.
5. Prioritize your list and approach the first few men, giving them their choice of available time slots. Email them first, then follow-up with a phone call a few days later. Follow-up with a phone call to confirm the appointment and explain your purpose.
6. At the breakfast, be prepared to ask a few key questions on topics you want to make sure are covered. I used questions like, “What has been the one or two most important lessons or ideas that have contributed to your success? What has been one of the most difficult situations you encountered? If you could tell a young person one thing as they got started in business and life, what would it be?”
7. Don’t lose the momentum; keep scheduling breakfasts several weeks in advance to give men the opportunity to get them on their calendar.

Your Turn

There you have it, a practical and simple way to make a difference in the lives of younger men. Invest 15 or 20 hours to significantly impact a young man, and God may just use it to change your life as well.

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