

Pastors Bring Grace to Men's Ministry

Today's average man is like a deer caught in the headlights of a Hummer. He doesn't fully understand—and so can't apply—what God has to say about a man's identity, purpose, relationships, marriage, sex, fathering, work, money, ministry, time, emotions, integrity and dozens of other subjects.

However, men routinely “bluff” when asked, “How are you doing?” Pastors observe this all the time. For that reason, I think we should be just as concerned about the men who have not yet become statistics as those who have.

Many of these men are under the loving discipline of a God who, like the hound of heaven, refuses to let them wander too far from the green pasture.

They are like sheep without a shepherd, and they regularly show up at church on Sunday morning looking for—what? Actually, many of them don't really know what they're looking for. They probably think they're looking for relief from temporal troubles, but what they need is a personal encounter with the Good Shepherd. They need to become disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

It's not as though these men want to struggle or fail. But their *capabilities* are not equal to their intentions. As Denzel Washington—playing a recovering alcoholic ex-military bodyguard in a Latin American country in *Man on Fire*—said, “You're either trained or you're not trained.” Spiritually, most men are not.

The Opportunity

Reaching these men is one of the great strategic opportunities—and needs—of our time. Instead of the “men problem,” some quarters need to start seeing the “men

opportunity.” Pastors are the logical choice. Pastors bring grace to the equation. They see men not so much for what they are, but what they can become in Christ. Pastors are the ones whom God has called to instruct, encourage, correct, challenge, inspire and call men to “act like a man.”

It is the pastor who can help men refocus from the vicissitudes of the temporal onto the goodness and greatness of our holy, loving God—a God who is not caught off guard by the recession, and a God who is not wringing His hands about how the economy will turn out.

This is a significant yet solvable problem. God’s vision is that every man in your church becomes a disciple of Jesus. Men’s ministry needs to be redefined so that it is “all-inclusive.”

Most pastors also desperately need more lay leaders. Another opportunity in discipling men is that some will grow into leadership. For example, a friend of mine started a small group with seven men in his Birmingham, Ala., church. During the next seven years, his ministry grew to seven groups totaling 128 men.

At that time, his church needed about 150 leaders to function properly. One hundred of those leaders came through his small groups. But what’s especially intriguing is that approximately 75 of those men—fully half of the church’s leadership—started in his groups as cultural Christians who would (probably) not have otherwise stepped up to become church leaders.

Most church leaders we talk to are profoundly dissatisfied with the number of men in their churches who are effective disciples. But the majority of churches that have tried to implement men’s discipleship initiatives have not been able to sustain them. They need better information, models, methods and processes grounded in research, field-testing and biblical authority.

The Answer: The Disciple-Making Church

If you project out 20 or 50 years, can you visualize any way of ever getting the world right if men are wrong? The “men problem” is the root cause behind virtually every problem that ails us. It’s an untreated cancer that keeps producing more and worse tumors.

One day a major donor said, “Pat, I can’t support your ministry anymore.”

I said, “That’s fine, but tell me why.”

He said, “My heart is really in prison ministry and teenage crisis pregnancy centers.”

I laughed out loud. I said, “By all means, please support that important work. But why do you think so many young men end up in prison? And why do you think a young teenage girl would hop into bed with a boy?” (We dialogued more and he did continue his support).

Let’s treat the symptoms—of course, but let those who can (pastors) also treat the disease. A disciple-making church offers the only *systemic* solution to what ails us. As someone has said, “The church has many critics, but no rivals.”

By the beginning of this century, there had been many false starts in churches—even our best churches. Many pastors and laymen had devoted as many as 10 years to untested strategies that really were doomed to fail from the beginning. And I didn’t see any reason to think things would be different in another 10 or 20 years—unless we came up with a fresh approach.

A Research-Based Approach

At the same time, I sensed the need for a more research-based approach to men’s discipleship. So in 2002, to augment my masters in theological studies, I embarked on doctoral research, which led to earning a Ph.D. in management in 2006.

For my dissertation I studied the question, “Why do some churches succeed at men’s discipleship while others languish or fail?”

My research revolved around two major issues. First, I wanted to learn, “How do church-based men’s discipleship ministries that succeed differ from those that languish or fail?” Second, I wanted to discover, “What are successful pastors doing differently than the pastors of ineffective or failed ministries to men?”

I compared and contrasted churches that had effective men’s discipleship programs to churches that had ineffective or failed programs. Here is the indisputable bottom line: *The senior pastor is the key to everything*. The three main factors in the highly effective churches were:

- A senior pastor with the *vision* to disciple every man in the church.
- A senior pastor with the *determination* to succeed.
- A senior pastor who found a *sustainable strategy* to make disciples.

Of course, Jesus is the perfect example of these three factors. In fact, His sustainable strategy has outlasted every institution, organization, kingdom and government ever established.

Without the pastor, men’s discipleship in your church will never be more than a fringe activity.

A Pastor-Led Approach

The pastor can accomplish what laymen can only dream about—and so much more quickly. With the support of his senior pastor, John started a small-group ministry in his very busy 1,000-member church in Atlanta. Over the span of seven years, his ministry grew to ten groups with a combined total of about 120 people.

Then a new senior pastor led the church. He shared his vision for small groups. He convinced the leadership that the congregation should stop coming to the church building on Wednesday nights. Instead, he wanted to break people into small groups that would meet in homes.

In the spring he announced that they would start the new small-group ministry in the fall. Over the summer he preached on the importance and value of small groups. On the first night, 817 people met in small groups.

It took seven *years* for a talented, committed layman (he's in top management with a Fortune 500 company) to recruit 120 people into small groups—even with his pastor's full *support*. With the pastor's *personal involvement*, it took only seven *months* to recruit 817 people into small groups—an increase of nearly 700 percent.

What men really need is for their pastors to take responsibility for men's discipleship in their churches. That certainly doesn't mean the pastor has to do it all—in fact, that would even stunt men's growth. But at the end of the day, it is the pastor who has to bring the vision, determination, and strategy to the party.

The preceding was adapted from Patrick Morley's book, Pastoring Men: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why It Matters Now More Than Ever.

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