

Why Are Men Leaving the Church?

I am often asked, “Why are the men leaving the church today?” Sometimes it comes out as, “What can we do to keep the men of this church?” or “How can our church reach more men?” There is no easy answer, but in this article I would like to provide some basic principles that will help you develop a male-friendly church.

The overriding principle is simply this: The environment you develop is more important than the events or programs you put on. A man is looking for an environment that is consistent with who he is as a man and a place where he feels comfortable belonging and becoming the man God wants him to be.

1. Men are looking for relevance. Most men in our society today do not see the value of going to church because it is not speaking their language, and it is not addressing the issues they face. For example, a recent survey showed that 92 percent of churchgoing men have never heard a sermon on the subject of work. The unspoken message is: What you do for 60 to 70 hours a week does not relate to what you do on Sunday mornings. The most important issues for men are their work, family, marriage, sexuality, and finances—and rarely are these addressed from the pulpit today. Some of the key questions men are asking are:

- What is true masculinity?
- What is success?
- How do I deal with guilt feelings?
- What is male sexuality?
- Is purity possible today?
- What does a healthy marriage look like?
- How can I raise my children to be successful?
- How can I be a man of integrity in the workplace?

- How can I be a leader in the home, church, workplace, and world?
- What is my purpose in life?

2. Men want to be involved in a cause greater than themselves.

Men want to be involved in something driven by a compelling vision. Men want to know what hill the church is climbing, where we are going, what we are about. The church has the greatest and most far-reaching mission on earth and we should not be bashful about challenging the men of our congregation with it.

3. Men want a shot at greatness. I have never met a man who wanted to be a failure or a loser. Men want to win. They want to be heroes. They want to come in first. Unfortunately, it seems the church today wants nice men, not great men.

4. Men want to be challenged. Men tend to view the world around them as something to be overcome or conquered. It's high time we told them they do not have to check their competitive drive at the door of the church. If they are seeking risk, adventure, change, competition, and expansion—tell them how to find it within the mission of Jesus.

5. Men are looking for action. Men today are looking for something to do; they do not like sitting around and theorizing about the 27 views of the second coming of Christ! Men measure themselves by productivity and gain a portion of self-image based on what they do. Their desire for adventure is often expressed in the desire to be on the solution side of things. Many churches today are in maintenance mode, rather than being missional.

6. Men are looking for leaders and want to be leaders. This principle is simple: Men do not follow programs, they follow men. They want to follow a bold, courageous, visionary leader. Establish an environment where strong leadership is

attractive. Not only are men looking for a leader to follow, they want to become leaders themselves. They want to lead in their family, workplace, church, community and world. One of the things you can do is equip them to lead.

7. Men are looking to have fun. If men walk into a church and see a bunch of serious, stoic-looking people, shouldn't they wonder if Christianity really is a killjoy? The world is a serious place; men are looking to laugh and have fun to balance that reality. They love a good joke, funny story or movie. I encourage you to develop a ministry environment in which men have fun together.

8. Men are looking for brothers. Most men have many acquaintances but very few men have a good friend. According to statistics, the average man over 35 years old does not have one close friend. Men need teaching on how to develop and strengthen friendships and an environment where they can find genuine male friends.

9. Men are looking for healing. Many are using socially unacceptable means to deal with the pain—making their work or their hobbies their life, misusing sex, drugs or alcohol. Unless these wounds and hurts are dealt with in a healthy way, they will never become the man that God wants them to be. They will never be able to have healthy relationships or move on from childish behavior.

I hope some of these insights from my own ministry to men will serve you well as you seek to minister more effectively to the men of your church and community.

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