

Why We Need to Show Men Christ Instead of Fixing Their Behavior

Too often, we ask men to conform to our Christian men's subculture as a show of spirituality. "Use these buzzwords." "Pray with this posture." When this happens, we often end up asking men to be religious at the expense of being spiritually transformed.

Or, we ask them to perform certain activities to show their commitment to God. "If you love God you will be in church on Wednesday night." One man readily responds to calls for "performance" Christianity because that's the nature of his relationship with his own dad. His dad has always made love conditional upon his son's performance.

It's ironic. The more we try to influence behavior, the less real, lasting change we see. Such an approach will simply burden men down and wear them out.

When men come to a prayer breakfast, conference, Bible study or church, they come because they have an unmet need—a void to be filled. They come looking for a piece of bread they can drag away that will nourish their souls. They come thirsty for living water (John 4:10, 7:38).

Rather than showing men a list of do's and don'ts, we must show them Christ. Our job is not to fix their behavior. Our job is to make Christ ever more attractive so that He can do His life-transforming work in them. God's grace changes men, not some effort on their part to be good enough.

When we help men connect with Jesus, He works the change in behavior from the inside out. He changes the desires of the man. We can only give a man a new rule book; Jesus will give

him a new heart.

Men Who Need Christ

Nowhere is this external focus more damaging than with men who need Christ. A man who has built up regular participation in one of your more accessible activities—like basketball or the softball team—is easily pushed away by someone telling him he’s not behaving correctly.

It is sometimes difficult for leaders to understand how to apply a “sustain” step to men early in their spiritual journey. After all, you can’t really expect a man whose only experience with your church is participating in a sports outreach ministry to sign up for a 24-week small group.

Sustaining change in a man who is just becoming aware of his need for Christ is much more about keeping “captured ground” than leapfrogging him to daily devotions and an accountability group.

Sustaining momentum for men at this stage may take place with opportunities very similar to the capture step that got him involved in the first place. Remember, the key is relationships. Consider the softball team as an example:

One of your leaders, “Sam” has a neighbor named “Pete.” After trading several favors, loaning each other tools and watching a playoff game together, Sam mentions he is on the church softball team. When Pete expresses interest, Sam invites him.

The season goes great. Everyone has a lot of fun on the team. No one takes it too seriously, though they all enjoy winning. Pete gets to know a few guys on the team. At the end of the season, they have a barbecue to celebrate, and the pastor comes to thank the guys for playing and representing the church with good sportsmanship.

The “Create value” step was the invitation to join the

softball team. The “Capture momentum” step was the barbecue at the end of the year. Now what?

First, has Pete really progressed in his spiritual journey? Certainly! For 10 weeks running, he has spent an evening with a group of mostly Christian guys. They say a quick prayer before and after the game. Pete has begun to see that these guys are “normal.” And there are some guys who have earned his respect.

Now you must find a way for Pete to maintain the relationships that he has begun to build. It may be another season of softball or a weekly businessmen’s luncheon that some of the guys go to. As these relationships begin to grow, Pete will have more opportunities to see Christ in these men’s lives.

Help Men Develop a Love for God’s Word

Disciples are “pupils.” They are students of Jesus. They are men who desire to become more like Christ. To become like Him, they must first know Him.

We can say with confidence that we have never known a man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God’s Word.

Some groups study Christian books (like those offered by Man in the Mirror, for which we are grateful), but book studies, fellowship groups and prayer partner groups are no substitute for bringing men into direct contact with the living Lord through His living Word.

All men are affected by God’s Word when they are exposed to it regularly. Have you noticed that when you are consistently in the Bible, you begin to understand it better? Your desire for the Scriptures grows the more you interact with them. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. When a man is not in the Scriptures very often, his desire for them doesn’t have a chance to grow.

Sustain by Creating A Culture of Prayer

Bill, a man whose wife had just died of cancer, was talking with Stan, whose friend was sick with leukemia. Stan said, "He's very sick. I guess the only thing we can do is pray."

Bill looked into Stan's face and said, "No, the thing we can do is pray."

We can't do anything without God's blessing, but we can do all things when we tap into the purpose of His will. Prayer is God's designated way to release His will in men's lives. Prayer is the currency of our personal relationship with Jesus. It will do us no good to leave it on account. We must take some out and spend it on men's souls. Prayer is the thing we can do.

Ensure that prayer is a part of everything you do for the men of your church. Train your leaders to integrate prayer into every activity. No man participating in an activity related to the church is going to be surprised by the inclusion of a prayer during the event.

Your leadership team ought also to be built on a foundation of prayer. But don't merely ask God to become a part of what you want to do in your church and city. Instead, pray that you will become a part of what God is doing in your church and community.

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