

The importance of men in church

By Paul Subritzky,
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In his book, *King Me*, Steve Farrar relates this story: "I live in Texas and I own four cows. I believe that makes me a Texas cattleman. It all started a couple of years ago when I bought two pregnant cows. Six months later, another cow showed up. Four weeks later, a baby bull showed up. That's when life got interesting.

"Before that baby bull showed up, I would walk across the pasture and the last thing on my mind was cows. But once the baby bull got about six months old, I couldn't walk across that pasture without thinking about him. That little bull thought he owned that pasture. And he didn't like me coming onto his turf. So he would charge me without warning. I used to enjoy walking across that pasture... But the bigger that bull got, the less I enjoyed the pasture. This little bull was too aggressive. He wouldn't be quiet and calm like the three females that shared the pasture with him. He was ruining my evening walks with his aggressiveness and willingness to do battle. He wouldn't co-operate and act like the other cows.

"So I made a call to the vet. Three days later, when I drove by the barn there were two testicles hanging from the fence. That night I walked in the pasture and the bull didn't charge me. He looked at me slightly cross-eyed but he didn't charge. He had been castrated. He was now just like his mother. And from that day on, he has acted like his mother."

Today many Christian men feel emasculated like that young bull. Some are moving on, as they feel alienated attending a church which they believe has become overly feminised. Men are particularly sensitive to this in a society which already devalues and denigrates masculinity to the point where male identity is in crisis.

While it is true that the majority of church pastors are male, in most cases the congregations are made up primarily of women. The 2001 NZ Church Life Survey revealed that 61% of church attendees were women and 39% were men. This is a gender gap of 22%. In some churches, single women outnumber single men 2 to 1.3 while 25% of married women who attend church do so without their husbands.

"The church is a peculiar organisation, led by males, but dominated by women and their values," according to David Murrow, author of the well-known book *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. It is the women who keep the church programmes running; they teach the Sunday School, run the crèche, sign up for the duty rosters, volunteer for the choir, the missions committee and the outreach program, and are



One of Promisekeepers' popular men's truck pulls.

often the most regular attendees at the prayer and home group meetings. David Murrow, who will be speaking at the Promise Keepers "Leave No Man Behind" Auckland men's event in October, suggests that, "with so much female participation, the church has gained a reputation as a ladies' club in the minds of men."

Women are important for the church. They bring many positive abilities and have shown themselves to be remarkably spiritual, committed and faithful. But as Jack Hayford puts it, "If the church is to reach its maximum potential, men must find their places in God's economy."

When a church encourages men's ministry to move men forward, experience shows that women's ministry is also stimulated to move – either causing something new to start, or bringing revival to an existing women's programme. This parallel impetus brings balance and a solid foundation for church growth. Having both men and women working alongside each other allows the complementary strengths of each gender to be a powerful force in the life of the church.

It is important not to underestimate the value of men for the health of the church, especially for:

- **Evangelism and growth.** As Ian Grant has said, "it takes men to reach men." Furthermore, men also play a vital role in bringing whole families to Christ in ways women cannot. If a man comes to Christ first, 93% of families will follow.

- **A risk-taking outward focus.** Men will often take risks that women aren't prepared to take and this outward focus is crucial to the mission of the church.

- **Leadership.** Godly men are called to 'father' the church and give leadership.

- **Raising the next generation** – especially boys, who may withdraw from church if Dad is not involved and they perceive it as a threat to their emerging masculinity. An estimated 90% of boys will leave church before they turn 20 and many will never return.

Jesus was a tradesman who ran a family business, and he related well to men. The men he called to follow him were robust, masculine men – typical blokes! Simon was a zealot; Peter was a rough and ready fisherman; James and John were nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder." Yet most Sunday services speak to the heart of a woman – they involve "getting dressed up, socialising, singing and sitting through a sermon," according to Drew Dyck in his article *Pray*

for Men!

For women, who he says are "expert listeners and master minglers," Sunday services provide a warm and secure environment for interaction and care. For men, however, they can be more like a marathon, which for many is hard to endure.

But the mission of getting men moving, both within the church and into the church, is not a choice – it is a necessity. To keep churches on a positive continuum of growth, it is essential to commit to building the type of churches where men will want to be involved and contribute their skills, abilities and resources, and where they will feel welcome and valued.

Of course the ultimate goal is not just to move men into the church, but for them to grow in relationship with God – and the church is the place He has ordained for this to occur. Current Promise Keepers surveys of New Zealand churches, across a range of denominations and age groups, indicate that the number one priority of men is spiritual growth. The challenge for churches is to ensure they have a process in place for men to grow spiritually.

Over the last decade, a wealth of experience has been gained by churches that have re-examined these issues. More and more churches are actively working against the gender imbalance and succeeding in drawing men and engaging them in the church. Some of the key factors these churches are addressing include:

- **Spiritual crisis.** "This crisis is spiritual at the core. The hearts of men have been penetrated by a demonic deadness. Men have been lulled into a spiritual stupor." Change must begin in the hearts of men by the Spirit of God, and the key to this is prayer. At Promise Keepers, we are aware of a denomination

in Auckland that is praying and fasting specifically for the men's ministry in its churches.

- **Spiritual growth.** Men want to grow spiritually. Social activities will not sustain men. If they are not being led toward a deeper faith in Christ, they will disengage.

- **Challenge, vision and risk-taking.** Men are energised through rising to challenges that seem impossible. Casting courageous vision and calling men to take the risk of achieving it pushes them to their maximum potential. Churches that foster high expectations will attract men. "People do not resent being asked for a great commitment if there is a great purpose behind it," says Rick Warren.

- **Measurable outcomes/project orientation.** Men are focused on achieving measurable goals, particularly at work. They struggle to understand why a program exists if there is no evidence of fruitfulness. If you want to see men involved, ensure your projects are focused on tangible results and evaluated regularly.

- **Environment.** Often church services are designed to better meet the needs of women than men. To make your church more bloke-friendly, ensure there are items in your foyer that are relevant to men and incorporate action points in your sermon on Sunday that men can apply on Monday. Include men in worship by using songs with lyrics that exalt an awesome God in a key men can sing.

Many churches are now actively engaging in the battle for men's souls. This is a battle the church cannot afford to lose. Men are moving into churches and growing spiritually through effective and focused men's ministry and particularly through men's small groups. The way forward may not be easy, but the map now has clear directions.