

## Building Men Into Mature Leaders *A Foundational Issue for the Church*

As the decade unfolds almost every challenge facing our culture, families, and churches can be traced or related to the absence of men. Will we see men become what they should be in order to do what they should do?

At the beginning of the 1990s many of us who were involved in the Christian men's movement thought we were seeing the beginning of a movement that would become a wildfire and change the whole climate of the church within the United States and maybe the world. Now, a decade later, it is critical that we evaluate where we have been and what we have produced.

Looking back it is clear that many men were changed and there has been a hunger awakened in men to know God and to discover the pathway to godliness. But somehow this has not produced the change in the church that we had hoped for. In fact, looking at the population as a whole there are fewer men involved in the church now that there were in 1990. The church is losing young men at an alarming rate and more Christian marriages are ending in divorce than ever before. We must ask why this is and what can be done to change it?

The church must answer one critical question: Is building men into mature godly leaders foundational to the church? Following this, there are two important sub-questions that follow. Is this biblical? Is so, are we living this as a church?

I have been told that if you want to know what I am really committed to take a look at my checkbook. Let us use that same principle to evaluate our priorities as the Church; do we see the building of men as foundational to the church? How much do we really spend on building men? One percent? Two percent? Less? Aren't we really saying that we don't see men as foundational but one of the special needs groups that probably needs some attention but it isn't very high up on our list of priorities? When Christ set out to build His Church didn't he focus His efforts on 11 men who were to become the foundation of that church? Shouldn't we follow His model? Servant Leaders who are reproducing in others what has been reproduced in them.

As men responded to the men's movement in the 1990s they saw their role as going back to the local church and administering a program for men and that program was to be centered on a series of events. We wanted to produce godly men but no one knew what that looked like or how to get there. As long as we had an exciting speaker or an engaging issue men came, but we were caught in a trap. If we didn't provide something more attractive each time, we started to lose men. We thought the goal was having a men's ministry. What was missing?

First, the real goal was to call men into the passionate pursuit of God, to know Him and be known by Him. Second, there was no group modeling the pursuit of God as inviting

to men of the church to join them in this process. Where men were willing to be men's ministry to one another first as they entered into the pursuit of God together, ministry to men flourished and where they wanted to administer men's ministry it died. We needed men who were willing to pioneer, identify, and overcome the barriers that keep men from pursuing God. Then they could lead other men into that pursuit.

What were the barriers to overcome? There are many things that can become barriers that keep men from pursuing God but there seem to be four universal barriers.

First, most men experience a father vacuum. This vacuum is caused by their relationship with their earthly father and controls their view of their heavenly Father. This issue is rarely addressed in the normal life of the church. Men are not open to feel safe enough to approach this tender issue. Until it is, they are not free to pursue God.

Second, the church lacks a safe masculine environment. Without a safe place, a man will not find his identity in the church and he will not expose those issues within him that God must change. We need a place in the church that a man can come home to.

Third, men do not trust their leaders and their leaders do not trust them. In order to follow someone into the pursuit of God we must trust him. Men who are biblical leaders build trust. We must become men who can be trusted so that other men will join us in the pursuit of God.

Fourth, men see their relationships with God as obligations rather than opportunities. We must stop trying to earn the right to approach God, which leads to isolation; trying to be good enough so that He is obligated to give us a life free of pain, which leads to disappointment; and grasp the opportunity to be in relationship with Him. Only then can we pursue Him.

Without a pathway and models how will these barriers be broken down? Without a core group of men willing to allow God to reproduce in them what they need to reproduce in others, it will be almost impossible for a man to go where he is to where he needs to be.

#### *What needs to happen?*

- There needs to be a consensus that the building of men into mature leaders is foundational to the Church.
- Identify men who are willing to pioneer the process. Under the guidance of a pastor, these pioneers must become what they want men to become. This is an extended process not an event.
- These pioneers must watch for and identify the plan that God is revealing to them to invite the men of the church to taste what they are experiencing and join them in the process.
- Continually ask the question, what is keeping our men from pursuing God? Focus on the answers, and help men remove the barriers.

The opportunity is tremendous, yet time appears to be short. Don't miss this opportunity to be part of what God is doing among men.

*HonorBound Magazine for Men*  
*July/August/September 2001*