

# A Few Good Men

By Willie Oliver

The Department of Family Ministries oversees the work of Men's Ministries and encourages local conferences and churches to give attention to a specialized ministry to men in order to develop a stronger commitment to God, to their families, and to the mission of sharing the gospel with their friends, neighbours, and colleagues.

Today, the new phenomenon of men's ministry is catching on.

Traditionally, women have outnumbered men in local church membership and leadership, even though the corporate leadership is still disproportionately male. The majority of our pastors are male, but the infrastructure of church activities and ministry is staffed by women.

A combination of factors has influenced the preponderance of female leadership and involvement in local church ministries. For example, in the past, men were the traditional wage earners while women stayed home and looked after the family. They had more freedom than men did to take an active part in church activities. Then, in the mid-twentieth century, feminism became a dominant social movement, and women began to claim their rightful role in employment and leadership at all levels, including the church. The civil rights movement also had an impact on women's roles. The fight against racial segregation and social stratification did not fail to recognize that a just and equitable society would emerge only when all people, irrespective of colour, gender, or ethnicity, would have their rightful and equal roles in society.

The church did not escape the influence of the women's movement. Indeed, many women have felt empowered to exercise their leadership talents and come forward to be more active in the church in more influential ways than the ways traditionally open to them. Their ministry has strengthened the church. One effect of this emerging role of women has been its impact on men. While the more egalitarian relationship between men and women in society has positively affected the relationship between genders in the home as well as in the church, the new trend has alarmed some men.

This is nothing new. A closer look at the issue of male-female relationships will clearly show that Bible authors raised similar questions back in the first century, before there ever was a modern women's movement.

## Mutuality Between Men And Women

Paul spoke candidly on the issue: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself . . . For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh . . . Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring

them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 5:21, 25, 28, 31; 6:4. NIV).

Paul advocates mutuality in the relationship between husband and wife. He also indicates that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church. A loving husband is one who nurtures and cares for his wife by relating to her as a partner, rather than treating her like someone under his control. A loving husband will properly provide for his wife (see 1 Timothy 5:8). The fact that a man’s wife may work outside the home does not lessen the husband’s God-given responsibility to support his wife and children.

Imagine the great potential for church growth and nurture around the world if we have vibrant participation of men and women, fathers and mothers, in the home and in the church. The most significant family or social problem facing the family today is the physical absence of the father from the home. Fathers make unique contributions to their children’s lives.

Men’s ministries is a ministry that has emerged precisely to support men in their roles as husbands, fathers, and committed Christians. Every time I participate in a men’s ministries conference, I notice the impression it leaves on the men who attend. At the end of the weekend, men leave with a stronger commitment to God, a stronger dedication to their families, and higher dedication to share their faith with others. Anything that has this kind of effect on men in the church is positive.

## **MEN’S MINISTRY**

The mission of this ministry is to galvanise the energy of men for God, family, and community. The ministry aims to nurture men who love and are committed to God, their families and their communities.

Would men’s ministry add to the burden of local pastors? No. In fact, the ministry has the potential to lessen the load on the pastor and serve as a facilitator of vibrant ministries in the local congregation.

### **Starting In the Local Church**

How do we start an effective men’s ministry in the local church? Here are some steps.

- **Start With a Core Group Of Men.** The core group is the heart of an effective men’s ministry. Other men are not excluded from joining the core group. However, the core group provides a foundation of prayer, direction, and leadership for the entire men’s ministry.
- **Focus On Relationships, Not Programs.** Plan on relationship-building types of events like men’s conferences; men’s special events (cookouts with an afternoon of softball, father-son campouts, father-daughter banquets); marriage and fathering seminars; witnessing-in-the-workplace seminars; men’s church events (a

monthly men's breakfast gathering); and men's small groups (prayer groups, Bible study groups).

- **Have Clear Goals.** Take a profile of your men in order to find out who are the men you will be serving. The profile will identify interests and strengths among the men in the church. Be sure to have a core group of men. Someone other than the pastor needs to be directly responsible for the activities of the ministry. Develop a mission statement. Without a clearly defined purpose for this ministry, you will lose focus.
- **For Men Only.** This does not mean that programming events with women and children are not vital to the health of families. But this does mean that certain needs of men can only be met when men gather with other men. Men also talk more freely on spiritual and emotional issues when they are just with men. An effective men's ministry will recognize this dynamic and structure the ministry so as to provide an environment where they can share their weaknesses, struggles, triumphs, and challenges with other men.
- **Pastor-Supported Ministry.** Men's ministry is dependent to a great degree, on the support and encouragement from a staff pastor. This ministry, however, is pastor-friendly. They honour the pastor's schedule and responsibilities by communicating plans and strategies and by asking for his/her input. When a pastor is actively supportive of men's ministries, the ministry has greater momentum and a stronger foundation. It more readily draws men together, especially if the pastor is a good teacher. A pastor's support and encouragement can greatly enhance the men in your church-especially if the pastor invests time and energy in a core group of lay leaders.
- **Ministries With Flexibility and Variety.** Successful men's ministries offer a variety of entry points and opportunities for men to grow spiritually and to make relational commitments. These ministries honour and respect each man's spiritual journey, seeking ways to enhance his faith and commitment to God. Annual men's conferences and sporting events are great non-threatening entry points for a man. However, these activities by themselves will not meet the relational needs of a man or consistently challenge him to an active faith. When men's ministries offer enough variation to honour the different levels of spiritual maturity in all men, they effectively gather their men. Not all men will commit to prayer groups. Not all men will attend a sporting event. Not all men will commit to a small group. That's O.K. Effective men's ministries are flexible, accepting men where they are and providing a variety of opportunities for men to convene.

Avoid implementing too much too soon. Men's ministries take time to grow. Often, motivated and excited pastors or laymen will develop a program without taking the necessary time to communicate the mission of the group to various levels of men's gatherings. Be careful not to force an elaborate program upon men, for which they are not yet ready. Take time to build a substantial, reliable foundation that can survive the growth and the challenges that come with that progress. Embrace this ministry and by the power of God watch the men who have been on the margin come into the mainstream of church life and add to your few good men.