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And Promises to keep

Getting men into the church



Impact: Didn't you mention that having stadiums filled with men was the vision of PK founder Bill McCartney?

Gorsuch: It was a picture of what it might look like but we didn't set a goal that we had to fill stadiums. It just grew so fast that stadiums became the obvious thing to do.

Impact: Was PK seen as a reaction to feminism?

Gorsuch: That is a very important question: is this just a backlash to some of the feminist tendencies that have been so prominent during the 80s and 90s? The answer to that is obviously not. From the outside looking in it could appear that way, but as you get into the men's movement you'd find that it is responding to a deep heartfelt need that the men have to find a new spiritual vitality in their lives. Most of the men are struggling with a certain boredom and fatigue in life, and they are struggling to find a place that is safe for them to learn and grow in their own spiritual life.

A woman from a feminist magazine called me and started saying that this was just an old white patriarchal thing. I invited her to some of the events and she made a lot of notes, and then she wrote an editorial praising the men's movement. So here a feminist who just took the time to see what we were actually doing, wrote an editorial syndicated across the country praising the men's movement for the positive contributions it is making to the home and to the community, and so on. But there are still criticisms because you can't please everybody. But those who have taken the time to explore what is going

> Author of

Men's Ministry, one of the top resources on the topic of getting men into church, Geoff Gorsuch is also a co-founder of the National Coalition of Men's Ministries in the US. Speaker for *Man in the Mirror* and *Promise Keepers*, he was in Singapore last September to conduct the MITM Seminar on 'Seven Seasons of a Man's Life'. **Impact** met up with him.

Impact: As an early leader of the *Promise Keepers*, can you explain its 'big-stadium events'?

Gorsuch: We didn't plan it. We didn't plan it to be men in the stadiums lifting their arms and praising God to happen. It just happened.

Yes, we did say come to the stadium and we would put on a show where we had some great speakers and some great music. We led the men in praise and worship and then we had great men speakers challenging the men to become better men.

Yes, we had a programme but it was something that we did not make happen; we were responding to what was happening. In other words, it started with 70 and then it became 4000, then 22,000, and then it just kept going, so we didn't know how big it was going to get or what kind of vision we were ultimately going to accomplish. When God moves, it take a form of its own, a life of its own and all you can do is keep up with it.

on have come to the conclusion that it is positive. They were not put off by it. In fact, they were astounded that men wanted to love their wives better and be better fathers and husbands. They were astounded to find out that men wanted to study servant leadership.

When we say leaders, we are talking about servant-leaders according to the model of Jesus Christ. I have never met a woman who is uncomfortable about Jesus leading her. Women get upset when you don't clarify what you mean by leadership, when they think that leadership was how their fathers used to lead their homes or experiences they had with men who were not interested in servant leadership, not leading as Jesus led. Yes, they have grounds to be concerned, but throughout the whole men's movement, our emphasis is on being like Jesus and leading like Jesus, serving like Jesus. Whenever the women understand that, they relax.

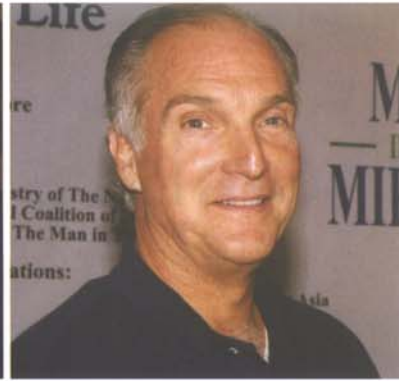
Impact: Why did the events draw so many men?

Gorsuch: I think it was a safe place. Men don't go to church, at least men in the US. They'd find church uninteresting. They won't go to church. But if you say that we are going to have a men's event in a football stadium, they'd feel comfortable there — that is a safe place. It became such a safe place that they could feel their spirituality and uniqueness as men. And they did.

The church has become in a lot of nations a place primarily run by women. If men feel that it is a place for women and children and not for men, they are going to protect themselves; they are going to be guarded. But if they feel it is a safe place, which is what a stadium was for men, they can just relax and be men. So that is why the events were so successful.

Impact: So it could be assumed that fewer men were found in church? Why?

Gorsuch: That is what happens. Our research in the US came up with two things: Men find church boring and irrelevant. They



found it boring in the sense that the pastor didn't speak to them in terms of the realities they faced and were dealing with in the marketplace. So it was irrelevant to what they did. And the worship style didn't engage them. They didn't sense a safe place to relax and worship God.

However, what has happened is that as men went to these stadiums and began to do Bible studies in small groups, they gradually came back to church with some ideas how to make church more relevant to men. And now most pastors who are allowing those who have been touched by the men's movement to express leadership in the church, are creating male-friendly churches where men are comfortable, where men are in servant-leadership roles, where they are engaged in the church, its activities and feeling good about the church, wanting the church to grow, to impact the community. All that had to start in a stadium, in a Bible study, in a business centre, somewhere they can get a perspective of their own masculine adventure in Christ to take that back into the church.

And they did and now the church is being revitalised. They had to find the adventure in Christ before taking it to the church; they weren't finding it in the church. They had to take the adventure to the church. See the difference?

So it is both that men have to be mature enough to want to serve the church because that is what Jesus wants them to do, and the church has to give them a place to do that,

and to engage them in a masculine sort of way. As a church learns to work with men, more men engage in the church. I will tell you outright that there are many pastors who have been trained and know how to engage men in the church. As the training increases, the men's movement increases. I do seminars for pastors where I just teach them how to preach and teach men, lead men and so on, because they had never had that in the seminary. They have asked me to do that because of my military and ministry background where I can help them understand how to engage men.

A lot of churches are dysfunctional when it comes to men. Women are more comfortable; so are children. There are women's and children's programmes. Many pastors do not even have a men's programme, not even a men's luncheon or breakfast or anything in their churches. In fact, the ministry of the men's movement is also to train pastors how to minister to men, because they were taught in seminary how to have women's ministry, children's ministry and how to preach; seminaries across the board did not have curriculum on men's ministry. What we have done in the men's movement is to put curriculum for men's ministry inside seminaries, and now they are starting to get training in men's ministry in the seminaries.

Impact: What's so different about ministering to men?

Gorsuch: I will give you some basic differences that need to be respected. One difference is that men respond to challenge



and women to security. Now challenge and security are on opposite poles to each other. You tell a man to climb a mountain, and he will say okay, let's figure out how to do that. You tell a woman the same thing — there is less interest in doing that but there is more interest in creating security and fellowship. If you have too much routine and security and relationship, men are bored. They need to have adventure.

The second thing you have to respect is that men process in a linear fashion and women, in a more intuitive way. That means men want timetables and sequence and logic as to how they're going to get from A to Z, they want A, B, C, D... Women are more intuitive in their reasoning, so as a result they don't need a logical progression of planning and a lot of churches don't give that logical planning of "how we are going to grow our church." They talk instead of fellowship and the like. What men want to do is "show me a plan how we are going to grow our church, where I fit in." Most pastors do not have a master plan for their church. They don't show the men where they fit in — they don't have a programme for their men and growth. They have fellowship and sermons on Sunday; there is nothing wrong with that but they don't have a plan which men can gravitate to and take hold of.

Another difference you have to respect is between the way men and women process frustration; men primarily through anger, and women primarily through tears. If a church does not create a place where men can

express some anger, some deep frustration, or deep hurt, where they can cry out to God, they won't process their frustration and that will cause them to stop coming. They have to have a place safe enough to do that. It does not have to be in the church building. It can be in a men's fellowship that plays baseball, softball, football or soccer, and they have a beer after the game and then they talk. It can be in a situation that is outside the church but is related to it.

The next thing (is that) a lot of pastors are intellectual, and into books. A lot of men are not into books; a lot of men are into activity. If a pastor is very intellectual, he also has to have people around him in the church who are very active, athletic or activity-oriented and so on. That is not a pastor's fault. He just needs to know that he needs to be balanced. If he is a theologian, a lot of men are not going to respond to him. They can't relate to a theologian directly, they have to relate to him through other activities and means. But if he also has an activity base in his church that is masculine, they can relate to that. I notice this all over the world too.

Impact: What about getting in touch with emotions, with the Psalms for instance, as you mentioned in the seminar?

Gorsuch: There are a lot of emotions in Scripture. In recent years I have discovered just how much I am capable of feeling the presence of God as I read the Psalms. Psalm 103 is one of my favorites.

When I was young, I said I was going to kill all the dragons and never get hurt. We have God to thank that David did not have any Prozac. Otherwise he wouldn't have written some of his best psalms. It is not that you choose to get in touch with your emotions; it is just that life catches up to you eventually as a man and begins to squeeze you for an emotional response. At that point, you need a vehicle to help you express your emotions, and that is where the Psalms come in handy. It is not that a man decides, "Oh, today I am going to get in touch with my feminine side, or today I am going to be more emotional." But life catches up with us because we are busy working, busy repressing our feelings, just doing jobs and stuffing our feelings down there somewhere and eventually after 10, 15, 20 years in the workplace, our feelings start to just emerge and you can't repress them anymore. If you are not quite old enough to understand that, you have to take my word for it first. A lot of men I know in their forties start to cry for the first time in their lives. They have just been busy and all of a sudden, they tear up and get weepy, and wonder where that came from, why they are doing this and so on. After you have been kicked around in the marketplace for 20 years as an adult, you have emotions that have to be expressed. It is at that point the Psalms reach in — they're like God's gift to the emerging male emotion. The Psalms just reach into your heart and give you words to express to God your thanks, praise, fears, tears, frustrations, anxieties, worries... They are a vehicle which you can tap into.

Geoff Gorsuch is Director, Men's Ministry, of the Navigators. He resides with his family in Colorado, USA.