EFFECTIVE MEN'S MINISTRY

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The book you hold in your hands is worth its weight in diamonds. I personally know each of the authors to be a man of deep wisdom, insight, and passion for Christ. Their commitment to reaching men staggers my imagination. These spiritual giants represent a handful of the most gifted disciple-makers alive today. Their simple interest is to help you reach and disciple the men of your church.

No man fails on purpose. No man wakes up in the morning and says, “Well, I think I’ll see what I can do to ruin my life today.” But many men do fail. This book is a profound effort to assist leaders and would-be-leaders who seek to help such men.

If you are a woman picking up this book, you are holding the answer to these questions: Why is my husband not on fire for the mission of our family and the church? Why is our Sunday school not compelling enough for my husband’s interest? What can be done to have a more Christ-focused family? How can I help our church be a vibrant life- and community-changing instrument of God we all want? If you are a woman, I implore you to read this book, to get your husband to read this book, and to give one to your elders and pastor to read.

If you are a man holding this book, read it for the answers to these questions: How can I face my work with new purpose and courage? How can I lead my family with new vision and tenderness? How can I be a part of a life-changing and world-changing group of men to whom God will one day say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?

Perhaps you are a pastor. If not, I hope you will pass this book along to your pastor when you are finished. Any man who ever became a pastor did so because he wanted to nurture a flock and grow a church. Few, however, expect the resistance they find. It’s like the young basketball player who did such a terrific job in practice that his coach put him on the starting team. Ten minutes into the season opener, however, his performance was downright terrible. The coach called him over to the sideline and said, “What’s going on? You’re not moving the ball or scoring.”

“Coach,” he said, “I’d be doing great if it weren’t for all those tall guys out there waving their arms in my face!”

This book will help you identify effective ways to minister to your men—even if you’ve got a lot of arms waving in your face.

You already know it’s not easy. As one of our leaders put it, “A man is a hard thing to reach!” Men’s ministry is trench work. But few ministries have as much potential to revive our families, churches, and communities. When one man turns to Jesus Christ, it breaks a chain of bondage to sin and broken relationships. One changed man can set an entire family lineage for many generations to come on a whole new
course of joy, peace, and reconciliation. I know of nothing in this life quite so intoxicating as watching a man come to faith and repentance.

Your System

In the business world, we have the saying, “Your system is perfectly designed to produce the result you’re getting.” If you manufacture cars and every third car rolls off the assembly line missing a front right fender, then your system is perfectly designed to produce that result.

The same principle applies to our ministries. If we have men in our churches who don’t “get it” spiritually, we can assume it’s because our ministry system is perfectly designed to produce the result we’re getting. This book is about redesigning your system to produce men who love God, serve the Lord, and provide spiritual leadership to their families.

Building an effective men’s ministry boils down to managing momentum. It’s about overcoming the inertia in men and keeping them moving. I would like to give you a system to create, capture, and sustain momentum, which you can use to process the terrific ideas you are about to read in this book. The system is represented by Figure 1.

Understand your Purpose

Notice the circle at the center of the diagram. A dynamic men’s ministry begins with a clear understanding of your purpose for the men in your church, around which everything else revolves. The first step is to write down what you’re trying to accomplish and why. Then you will have a tool to filter out what you don’t need to do. For example, if your purpose statement is, “To reach and equip the men of our church to be spiritual

Create
Momentum

PURPOSE

Sustain
Momentum

Capture
Momentum

Figure 1
leaders for their families, church, work, and community,” you probably wouldn’t focus on service projects. Instead you would focus on discipleship groups.

*Create Momentum*

The first challenge in having a dynamic men’s ministry is overcoming the inertia in men. When NASA launches the space shuttle from Cape Canaveral, they strap it to a booster that contains 500,000 gallons of liquid fuel, all of which burns off in 8.5 minutes. Then the shuttle literally coasts another 4 million miles. Why is that? You need only as much energy as is required to put a stationary object in motion. But it takes a lot of energy to overcome inertia. You are about to read a host of ideas proven to get men’s ministry off the ground.

*Capture Momentum*

It is crucial to capture momentum once you’ve created it. The first error is to attempt too little. You wouldn’t go to the expense of cooling your house to a comfortable 72 degrees in sweltering summer heat and then leave all the doors and windows open. You would try to capture what you had created.

The second error is to attempt too much. If you say to men who have attended the first men’s ministry event of their lives, “Next week we are going to begin a three-year inductive study of the Bible in the Hebrew language”—well, you get the idea. Give your men a definite next step that they can visualize themselves taking. Don’t try to shift them from first gear to fourth gear. Offer them a second gear—small group studies that last three, four, maybe six weeks in length.

*Sustain Momentum*

The greatest challenge in reaching men through your church is keeping the men involved after the novelty wears off. Capturing momentum is crucial but not enough. You need to sustain the momentum for the long haul. Sustaining momentum is really about offering as wide a variety of compelling men’s growth and discipleship opportunities as possible. The more you offer, the better. Give men—whether on the fringe, in the mainstream, or leading the charge—every chance to hook into something.

In this book, you will read numerous ideas on how to engage men for the long haul: Bible studies, book studies, men’s workbooks, issues-oriented small groups, accountability groups, prayer groups, early morning leadership development with the pastor, and ongoing ministry projects such as mentoring teens.

Finally, notice in the figure the arrow going up from “sustain momentum” to “create momentum.” The principle of the parable of the sower is always working against the command to make disciples. We will experience drop-off at every step. That’s why it’s important to periodically create additional momentum.
Men Are Worth It

This book is a project of the National Coalition of Men’s Ministries (NCMM), and each of the authors is an NCMM member. Founded in 1996, NCMM’s vision is “a disciple-making ministry to men in every church.” We want to accomplish this by serving you and equipping your church to have a more effective ministry to men. We exist to serve you. Over 200,000 churches already have representation in NCMM through their denominational leaders. Learn more about how NCMM can help you by visiting our website (www.ncmm.org).

Working with men isn’t easy. It takes a long time to make a disciple. But there is power and hope in the gospel. In fact, the gospel is the only place men will find hope. So, yes, it’s worth it.

Start small. “Do not despise this small beginning, for the eyes of the Lord rejoice to see the work begin” (Zech. 4:10 LB). Start with however many men God gives you—two, four, six, or eight. Remain faithful to those men.

Don’t lose heart. If you’ll commit to working with the men of your church, I can offer this promise: God may not give you the church you wanted, but he will give you the church the world needs to see. And that will glorify our great and holy Lord.

Perhaps you feel as if it’s too late for you. It’s never too late. A Chinese proverb says, “The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.”
BECOMING A SPIRITUAL PARENT

Phil Downer

Many of the New Testament writers describe their ministries in terms of parenting. Paul calls the Galatians “my dear children”; he tells the believers at Thessalonica that he cares for them “like a mother caring for her children”; and he calls Timothy his “son.” John repeatedly addresses those to whom he writes as “my children.” Peter encourages his readers to long for the milk of the Word of God so they will grow. Even the writer to the Hebrews talks about spiritual infancy and the importance of moving toward maturity in Christ. We’re all called to become mature and to make disciples of others (Matt. 28:19).

If you are going to disciple a fellow believer, you need to take the approach of a parent. Even if the person is your peer, you need to decide in your mind that you are offering spiritual guidance the way a father tries to guide and assist his son. With a baby Christian, you’ll need to be attentive, giving a lot of individual attention, explaining things, and protecting the new believer from harm. Babies don’t know much; more important, they don’t know that they don’t know. So the greatest thing you can do for a new Christian is to create a strong personal bond so that he knows he can rely on you. The church has a tendency to create discipleship programs as a substitute for personal care, putting people through a particular curriculum in hopes of helping them mature. That’s a recipe for failure, because a new believer doesn’t need information as much as he needs a meaningful relationship with a spiritual parent. Within the context of a trusting relationship, he can receive information.

A Christian needs to understand the Scriptures in order to grow, but without a relational context, it is easy to get the mistaken notion that spiritual maturity is simply a matter of having all the right answers. Genuine spiritual growth, however, occurs in relationship with a family of fellow believers, in which the new Christian has a model to follow, a guide to lead him, and the strong support of mature believers to help him through the hard times.

My spiritual parents taught me responsibility, helped me discover how to pray and study God’s Word, and encouraged me to develop a love for people. The love, support, and accountability they offered were invaluable. I also saw their willingness to stick by me, even when I failed.

It takes patience and love to be a spiritual parent, but if you try it, you’ll experience the joy of seeing new believers move down the path of maturity. Some things will change quickly; others will change slowly. God knows the needs of each person and is working in each life to help establish growth. We want instant maturity in our culture, but the spiritual life is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes time to learn how to live as Jesus would. Nobody just shows up to run a marathon; they train and prepare themselves for the race. The Christian life is all about preparation. What we do flows out of who we are, and God is in the business of changing who we are. A spiritual parent can be a mighty tool in the Lord’s hand to shape the life of a new believer in training.
Changing from the Inside Out

We don’t send babies to school to teach them how to grow, do we? So why do we send spiritual babies to discipleship classes? New Christians need education, but more than that, they need close, nurturing relationships. The personal attention that a spiritual parent can offer is much greater than what the new Christian could get from a classroom.

It used to be that people growing up in this country were shaped not only by parents but also by aunts and uncles and grandparents. We’ve lost much of that because of the mobility of our modern age, but the good news is that the church still offers an extended family experience. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we can disciple others as part of a team. No one individual has everything it takes to bring another to maturity, but collectively, every healthy Christian community does. Together we can reach the skills of spiritual survival and can nurture the character of those new to the family.

The Spirit of God is at work in our lives, helping us to become like Christ. We’d all like to see continual upward growth, but in reality, most of us experience a “three steps forward, two steps back” pattern. Some people seem to get stuck in perpetual babyhood, which can be disastrous. A church made up of immature believers soon begins mistaking immaturity for maturity. They substitute carnality for holiness, losing the ability to impact the world for God’s purposes. But a man who has been properly discipled grows up into maturity. That’s why the writer of Hebrews says that “solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14 NASB, emphasis mine).

It seems that the more I know about God, the less comfortable I am with myself. I keep wanting to improve the old me, but that can’t happen. God isn’t interested in the old me; he wants to remake me into a brand-new me. He wants to transform me completely. I fear being co-opted by our culture, becoming more comfortable with the things of this world than the things of God. But if God is at the center of how I view the world, my life is bound to change. I’ll begin to see things his way. I’ll find myself surrendering some things I thought I couldn’t live without. His values will eventually become my values. When this happens, my behavior will start to change. What I do will begin to line up with who I am.

Christians often think that changing our behavior reveals our maturity, but God wants to change us from the inside out. He’s not satisfied with simply watching us try to change ourselves. Instead, the Spirit changes us as we walk close to him, as we spend time in the Word and in prayer, and as we learn to imitate Christ. If he can help us see the world from his perspective, our worldview and values will change, having a significant effect on our behavior.

The role of the spiritual parent is to keep new Christians close to the Spirit. Let them see how God has changed your life. Reveal your God-given perspective and values to them, so they can begin to think in a whole new way. Remember, our goal is not to change all of the world at once, but to help change one life at a time. As God works through us as spiritual parents, we’ll see him change other people from the inside out.

The discipleship process mirrors the growth process. We have to understand that new believers will progress from child to adolescent to adult, so we must adjust the focus of our relationships accordingly. As a spiritual child, the new believer requires daily
feedings, attention, and some diaper changes. The diaper changes come not always when the baby asks for it but rather when he needs it. If he has made a mess of his life, as a spiritual parent you are there to help clean it up. You’ll sometimes have to ask the hard questions and hold him accountable for his actions.

As the spiritual child becomes an adolescent, a more two-way and consensual relationship develops, rather than strictly father to son. Adolescent believers will have doubts and ask questions about the faith, and it’s your role to try to answer them.

Often, growing believers need to try things on their own and make their own mistakes. It is advisable at this stage to get them involved in evangelism and discipleship, so they can share the excitement of bringing someone else to maturity. Their early attempts to share their faith or disciple someone may be marked by a few disasters, but along the way, they’ll discover that God wants to use them in the lives of other people. What’s important is that you don’t want the men you are discipling to think they will always be spiritual babies dependent upon your instruction. Move them into some activity in which they can stretch their spiritual muscles by getting involved in the lives of others.

Two-way communication is essential for the adolescent stage of discipleship. Rather than always considering yourself the leader, foster mutual respect and approval. If you never listen to the man you are discipling yet expect him to take your advice, you will end up with rebellion. I once discipled a brand-new Christian, a man sixteen years my junior, who wanted help with the challenges of his family, his job, and his walk with the Lord. Along the way, he asked how he could pray for me, and I briefly mentioned a problem I was having with an associate named Del. My young friend started asking questions, and I found myself becoming irritated, because in my prideful heart, I didn’t believe that this spiritual baby could possibly have much wisdom in my situation. After about ten questions, he asked me, “Phil, if you were to do it over again, would you hire Del?” After I told him no, he said, “Well, then you need to admit your mistake and let him go.”

I was struck by his abrupt conclusion and began to explain that it would be unfair to simply cut Del loose. After listening to my rationalization, this brand-new believer went on to point out the biblical principles that God has a wonderful plan for our lives (I could hear myself saying those same words several weeks before), that Del was God’s child, and by my keeping him in the wrong position, I was perhaps depriving Del of God’s best in his life. At that point, I had to admit my blind spot. I took the advice, and it was absolutely the perfect result for both Del and the team.

Had I ignored my young friend, not only would I have lost the benefit of his wisdom, I probably would have lost his respect. No one wants to be ignored. No one likes to feel unappreciated. This man was a successful businessman, and my treating him like a child would have killed any mutual respect we had established. Respect and communication are two of the most important elements of the discipling relationship. They reveal trust, appreciation, honesty, and your belief that the other person is growing in the Lord.
Leading by Example

While serving with the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam, I found myself in charge of a team of new marines patrolling a territory infested with booby traps. These little devices were nearly impossible to see on the jungle trails, but if they were stepped on, they could turn a man into a mass of raw flesh. They were one of the hidden enemies that haunted our every step in Vietnam.

While we were on patrol, two of my men tripped a detonator, and we had to medevac them out before taking up positions for our night ambush. With the scent of the explosion still in our nostrils and our comrades’ screams of pain still ringing in our ears, we moved down the trail several hundred meters with great caution. Our team was to establish a position on a small knoll that looked like a perfect vantage point but was also likely to be booby-trapped. My temptation was to send one of the new marines to scout the area and set the machine-gun position, but I knew it was my responsibility to look out for these men’s lives. Because I had greater experience in dealing with booby traps, I knew that I should be the one to clear the area.

On my hands and knees, I crawled along the trail to the clearing, searching every inch as I went. As I squirmed along the ground, I could picture what would happen to my head if I tripped a detonator. The men behind me, who had been with me for only a few hours, knew nothing about my leadership or my concern for them, but after I took the risk to sight out the trail and clear the area for the machine-gun position, they gave me loyalty and respect beyond belief. We forged an alliance that carried us through fierce battles.

Sometimes you’ll have to risk your neck for someone you’re discipling. Discipleship often means sacrificing ourselves for another man. But God calls us to protect the men he entrusts to us. Our disciples’ growth and protection comes ahead of our personal interests.

One of the most exciting things about discipleship is when your spiritual sons become not just brothers in the faith but mature spiritual warriors on whom you can depend. Sometimes they’ll even grow into spiritual big brothers. Many of the men I’ve discipled have gone on to master aspects of the faith far beyond my own expertise. At times it can be humbling, but it is also wonderful to realize that you had a hand in helping a man grow to spiritual maturity. It’s fulfilling to see how a man’s obedience to Scripture can lead to tremendous growth in both spiritual things and professional pursuits.

The Pitfalls of Parenting

We must be careful to approach our spiritual children in love, particularly those of us who have had terrible parental role models in our lives. A spiritual parent should never become an autocratic or authoritarian figure. If we treat our Timothys in such a way, they will exit the relationship quickly. If a spiritual parent is demanding or impossible to please, he will never develop the long-term relationship necessary to the discipleship process. But if we sacrificially and unconditionally love the individuals God has entrusted to our care, discipleship will become the most fulfilling ministry imaginable.

One of the most common pitfalls of parenting is performance-based relationship. We often make the same mistake in parenting our disciples that we make in our families:
making our children, both spiritual and natural, feel that our love and acceptance depends on their performance. Performance-based discipleship can lead to legalism and is always destructive. Remember, the disciple isn’t living to please you; he’s living to please God. If you insist on some particular behavior, he’ll quickly sense that your love and commitment are conditional, and he will look for a better relationship elsewhere.

We need to allow space for God to work in our disciples, understanding that he is ultimately in control. Our role is to listen to a problem, encourage a right response, and then have the freedom to forgive when a Timothy decides to take a wrong turn and suffers the consequences.

A second common pitfall is the problem of overcontrol. My tendency early in my Christian walk was to try to protect my Timothys, to shelter them from other influences beyond myself and a handful of other like-minded men. My narrow-mindedness ignored the workings of the body of Christ and God’s desire that he be in charge of the growth of his children. After all, these were his disciples, not mine.

In one of my early discipling relationships with a man, I had covered all the bases pretty well except for financial stewardship. My wife and I had always been big givers; the problem was, we were also big spenders. We looked at our finances as being 10 percent God’s and 90 percent our own. Because of my own immaturity, I never offered my friend help in the financial area, and he suffered from my narrowness and unwillingness to share input from others. I learned something from that relationship: I am not an expert in many areas, so I’d better learn to listen to those who are. Remembering my own shortcomings has saved me from being overly controlling with different men on various occasions.

A third pitfall is assuming that everyone is just like us. We need to allow room for different backgrounds, personalities, and positions. For example, if your Timothy is a cofounder or owner of a business, he may feel free to be a vocal supporter of Christ in the workplace; but if he is the youngest member on a team of lawyers, his position may dictate that he keep his mouth shut and pursue a ministry of prayer until God gives him an obvious opportunity to speak.

Your Timothys will be different from you. Don’t expect that just because you like classical music, the men you disciple will share your taste. We need to help others grow in accordance with their own bents. If you’re discipling someone who is a technician and you’re a generalist, you need to seek the assistance of someone else who can relate to the man in his own context. You can still have a strong relationship, but you’ll find yourself more effectively reaching and understanding men if you learn to speak their language.

Overprotection is another pitfall that spiritual parents fall into. Typically, we want our children to be perfect or competent before taking on new challenges. Just as it is important for our natural children to stretch and take on areas in their lives in which they may fail, it’s important to let your Timothys do the same. For example, new Christians in dead churches are often asked to serve on the board. Your disciple’s natural inclination may be to try to change the church. Although you may want to counsel your Timothy as to the difficulties and challenges inherent in that process, once he has it in his mind that he wants to do it, you must be careful not to break the relationship just because he hasn’t followed your advice. Support him in his endeavor, offer your wisdom and encouragement, and let him learn the hard lessons if he needs to.
Parents also want to protect their children from sin, but if you give your child a list of do’s and don’ts, you’ll often just drive his behavior underground. Set up some sort of regular accountability session with your Timothy in which both of you are checking on each other and learn to openly share both your joys and your struggles. You can’t protect your Timothys from temptation, nor can you take responsibility when they fail, but you can arrange for open communication so that there is someone they can talk to about what they are facing.

Some of the best friends I have on earth are the men I have been involved with in discipleship. We’ve been through some severe challenges over the past twenty years, and it’s often been not just our spiritual parents but our spiritual children as well who’ve come to our aid, support, and counsel at crucial moments in our lives. We’ve grown as brothers in Christ and have developed the love and commitment that brothers have toward one another.

If you will invest in the lives of men and choose to make a significant difference in their lives rather than settling for worldly success, you can be part of God’s plan to change the world. If you ask the Lord for the name of one man you can disciple and form an alliance with—spending time with him, holding him accountable, and developing a relationship that will thrive as you both mature through the spiritual life cycle—you’ll find that you have a friend who is closer than family. You’ll find fulfillment that can never come from making money or acquiring material possessions. Instead, you’ll have the satisfaction of knowing you are one of the links in the chain that stretches back to the Lord Jesus Christ. And at the end of time, God will weigh the eternal impact of your life by your spiritual children and grandchildren. You have a chance to be part of the greatest ministry ever. It all starts when you make the decision to come alongside a friend and help him to grow.

For more information on discipleship, contact us at PhilDowner@DNAministries.org.