

## PART 2

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# THE THREE GENDER GAPS

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There are actually three gender gaps plaguing the church today. The three gaps form an unholy trinity that is keeping men away from Christ, and sapping the life of men who do show up on Sunday.



*The gap of presence.* Women attend church in greater numbers than men. This is true all over the world, in nearly every branch of Christianity.

*The gap of participation.* Women are more serious about their faith. They are much more likely than men to participate in the life of the church beyond Sunday morning worship services. They are also more likely to practice Christian disciplines such as prayer, discipleship, and evangelism.

*The gap of personality.* Entire personality types are largely missing from the church. These types show up frequently in the Bible but are no-shows in today's congregations. The absence of these personalities makes it harder to attract men to our churches.

# 7

## THE GAP OF PRESENCE

**The Gap of  
Presence**

The Gap of  
Participation

The  
Gap of  
Personality

THE TYPICAL AMERICAN CHURCHGOER IS A WOMAN. THE U.S. Congregational Life Survey pegged her as a fifty-year-old, married, well-educated, employed female.<sup>1</sup> An ABC News/Beliefnet poll found that a worshipper is most likely an older, black female who lives in the South.<sup>2</sup> Figures from Census 2000 and a study by Barna Research estimate a weekly gender gap of more than 13 million in America's churches:<sup>3</sup>

Adult women in church	48,660,177
Adult men in church	<u>35,348,028</u>
Gap size	13,312,149

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey concurs: "While the U.S. population is split fairly evenly between men and women, there are more women (61%) than men (39%) in the pews. This difference is found in every age category, so the fact that women live longer than men does not explain the gender difference in religious participation."<sup>4</sup>

Today 20 to 25 percent of America's married, churchgoing women regularly attend without their husbands.<sup>5</sup> After Thom S. Rainer studied two thousand American congregations, he noted, "Most churches indicated that their members included a significant number of churched

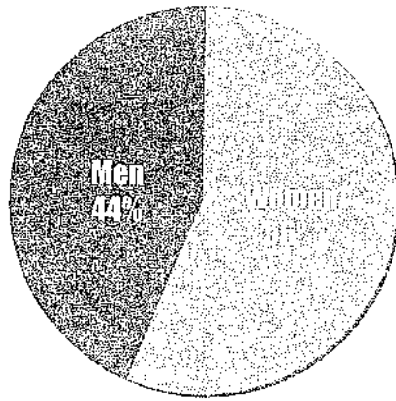
wives who were married to unchurched husbands." He told the story of a woman named Carol, who loves her Sunday school class because "every woman in the class is in the same boat I'm in. We're all married, but our husbands don't attend church."<sup>6</sup>

To my knowledge, there is no Christian sect or denomination in America that attracts more men than women. Various surveys have indicated anywhere from 3 to 9 percent of America's churches have more men, but in five years of research I never found such a church.<sup>7</sup> Rod Stark, a sociologist of religion, speculates that churches on military bases or Metropolitan Community Churches (a heavily gay denomination) might attract more men. (If you know of a church that consistently draws more men than women, please post me a message at [www.churchformen.com](http://www.churchformen.com).)

### WHAT KINDS OF CHURCHES HAVE THE BIGGEST GAPS?

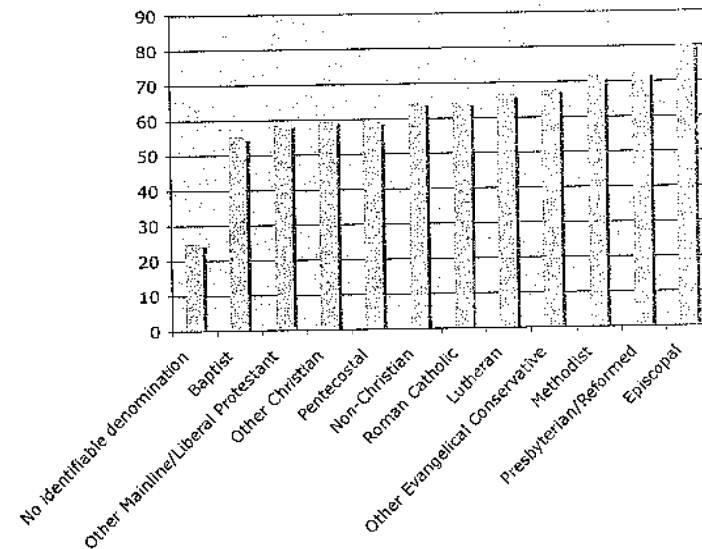
This section highlights some results from the National Congregations Study (NCS) of 1998. The NCS shows us what kinds of churches suffer the worst gender disparity.

To conform to the findings of the NCS, any congregation with at least 12 percent more women than men will be considered *gender gapped*. So for our purposes, a gapped congregation looks like this:



### GENDER-GAPPED CHURCHES BY DENOMINATION

Percentage of congregations reporting at least a 12% gap



Clearly, nondenominational churches are the least likely to report a gender gap. Just 25 percent of these independent congregations report a large surplus of women. Among the major denominations, Baptists are least likely to report a gap. (Before you Baptists start celebrating, note that more than half of your congregations report a substantial gender gap.) Other Protestant, Pentecostal, and Catholic churches are more likely to be gapped, and the liberal mainline churches are the most likely to be gapped. An astounding 80 percent of Episcopal churches report a noticeable gender gap!

These numbers suggest the gender gap and church decline go hand in hand. Mainline denominations such as Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Christ, and Episcopal have been hemorrhaging members for decades, and they are also very likely to be short on men. On the other hand, nondenominational churches are growing by leaps and bounds—and are much less likely to report a gap.

These figures also point to the denominational loyalty of women. Men are absenting themselves from all kinds of churches, but seem

particularly disenchanted with the established denominations. In many cases faithful women are keeping the doors of these traditional churches open, but with scant male participation they seem unable to reverse the fortunes of their congregations.

The Catholic Church is having a particularly hard time attracting men. An ABC News/Beliefnet poll found that just 26 percent of U.S. Catholic men attend Mass on a weekly basis, compared to 49 percent of Catholic women.<sup>8</sup> This poll was taken *before* the worst allegations of sexual abuse by priests came to light.

But no one has it tougher than the traditionally black denominations. A staggering 92 percent of African-American churches in America reported a gender gap, the highest of any faith group.<sup>9</sup> Observers such as Edward Thompson and Jawanza Kunjufu confirm that 75 to 90 percent of the adults in the typical African-American congregation are women.<sup>10</sup> Contrast this to black Muslims, who are overwhelmingly male.<sup>11</sup> The African-American community faces the prospect of separate religions for each gender: Christianity for women, Islam for men.

Which faith groups in the U.S. have a reverse gender gap? Surveys indicate that atheists, freethinkers (a form of atheism), agnostics, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and *no religion* attract more men than women.<sup>12</sup> Food for thought.

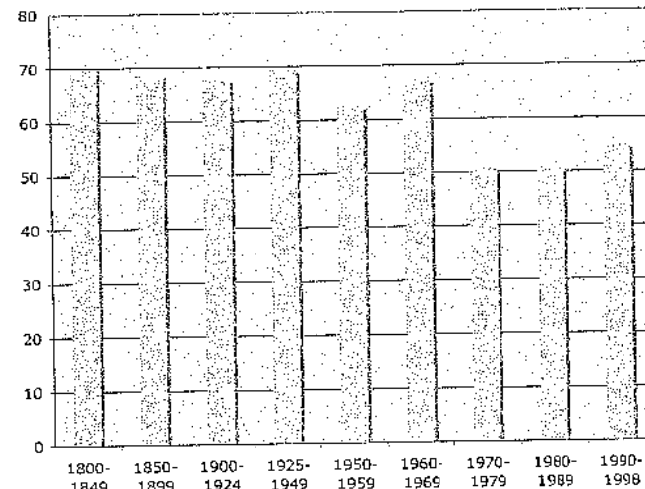
### GENDER-GAPPED CHURCHES BY YEAR OF FOUNDING

Younger churches seem somewhat more successful in attracting and retaining men. This suggests that as a church ages, it loses its men and is unable to attract more.

What causes this? Think of the needs of a young church. Start-up congregations need men's gifts. Risks must be taken. Plans must be made. Buildings must be built. Men love this stuff. They have a lot to offer a young church. But as a congregation ages, it begins to value feminine gifts such as nurturing, stability, and close-knit community. Philip Yancey notes, "I have watched a pattern time and again: a church starts off with high ideals, generates a flurry of activity, and then gradually tempers its vision, settling for something far less than ideal."<sup>13</sup> Women stay loyal because of the relationships they've developed, but

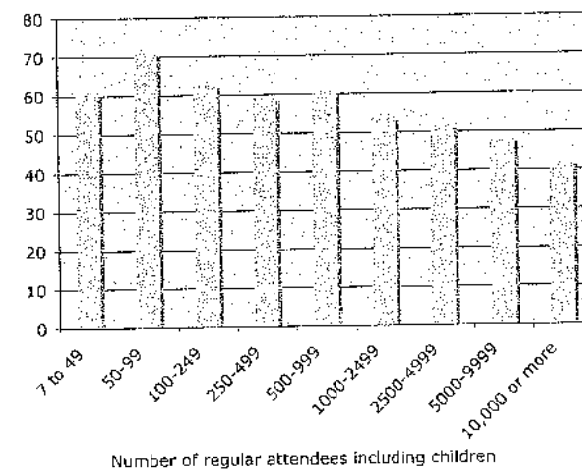
the less relational men fall away. Men need vision—not just relationships—to stay motivated in church.

### Percentage of congregations reporting at least a 12% gap



### GENDER-GAPPED CHURCHES BY CONGREGATION SIZE

#### Percentage of persons in congregations reporting at least a 12% gap



The typical U.S. Protestant church draws eighty-four attendees on a Sunday.<sup>14</sup> This is exactly the size of church most likely to report a gender gap. But as a church gets larger, the likelihood of a gap decreases.<sup>15</sup> This brings up a chicken-or-egg question: Do men attend because the church is large, or does the church grow large because men attend? Let's examine both sides of this question.

### **CHICKEN: MEN PREFER LARGE CHURCHES BECAUSE THEY ARE LARGE**

Men love the quality offered by large churches. They are often led by a gifted pastor who's a talented speaker. The music is superb. The presentation is slick and polished. Men are not embarrassed to invite their friends, because they know everything will be done with taste and professionalism. Large churches have a buzz of success about them that men find attractive.

Men see their values emphasized in big churches. These congregations speak the language of risk, productivity, and growth. They become known in the community. Big churches measure effectiveness, celebrate achievement, and are constantly launching new projects and initiatives. A large church's greatest weakness—difficulty creating warmth and intimacy—is actually a plus for a lot of men.

Some cynics have suggested that men are drawn to large churches because they can hide out, simply attending Sunday worship while avoiding the pressure to get involved that might hound them in a smaller church. Others suggest that men like the anonymity of a large church. The most cynical suggest men use large churches as a business networking opportunity (hundreds of potential clients versus a handful in a typical congregation).

### **EGG: THE CHURCH GROWS LARGE BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY MEN**

This theory suggests churches grow when they have a core of strong, committed men who are true followers of Jesus. The presence of spiritually alive men buoys the entire congregation.

Does this seem surprising to you? Christ established this pattern. He poured His life into twelve men for three years. These men drew other men. Three thousand men became followers of Jesus at Pentecost—changed not only by what they heard *but also by what they saw*: a small group of men empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is how the church grew in New Testament times, and it is no different today. Men come to Christ, and by extension, to church, when they see other men living under the influence of God's Spirit. This brings us to one of the key points in this book:

*Men don't follow programs; they follow men.* A woman may choose a church because of the programs it offers, but a man is looking for another man he can follow. Throughout their lives, men are transformed through encounters with inspiring men. Every successful man will tell you of a father, an uncle, a teacher, a coach, or a sergeant who made the difference in his life. The movies men love often feature an inspirational coach, commander, or teacher. Men are dying for a leader. Every man, regardless of his age, needs another man to look up to and say in his heart, *I want to be like him.*

This is why a dynamic pastor can turn a church around. Bold leadership attracts men. But even more attractive than a dynamic pastor is the sight of men in the pews who are true followers of Christ. Their mere presence in a worship service adds a crackling excitement that cannot be manufactured.

Spiritually alive men are vital to the health of a church. I've spoken to men who drive for miles to attend such churches, passing dozens of other churches along the way. Furthermore, women seem to love worshipping in the presence of transformed men. It's hard to close the gender gap in these churches, because even as men pour in, women gush in faster!

This is not to minimize the importance of godly women. Their presence is essential to church health as well. But transformed men are so precious *because they are so rare!* Every church has upright Christian women, but seeing a spiritually alive man is so unusual that people take notice. Saint Irenaeus said, "The Glory of God is a man fully alive!" When the men are unengaged, passive, or absent, the church declines. But when there's a core of spiritually alive men, the church thrives!

Have large, young, nondenominational churches found the secret to closing the gender gap? No, because these congregations still draw many more women than men. There is no branch of Western Christianity that's even close to conquering its gender gap.

### THE GENDER GAP: NOT JUST AN AMERICAN PHENOMENON

The gender gap exists all over the world. Although some evidence suggests that Eastern and Greek Orthodox churches in Europe and Asia do not suffer a gender gap, every other branch of Christianity does. No variant of Catholic or Protestant church is immune. Research finds a pattern of male absence going back at least a century in the churches of England, Wales, Spain, Germany, and France. Asian, Australian, and African churches also attract more women than men on a typical weekend.<sup>15</sup> The gender gap now threatens to stall the explosive growth of evangelical/Pentecostal churches in Latin America. Joshua Georgen of Latin America Mission notes, "Following Jesus Christ isn't usually seen as the most macho thing for a man to profess. As a result, throughout Mexico many mothers take their children to church services alone, while their husbands remain at home." The lack of male involvement creates a vicious circle: most church leadership positions go to "well-meaning and seemingly more responsible Mexican women." But Mexico's *machista* culture makes it difficult for men to be subject to women, further eroding male participation. "Hence, the lack of male involvement has created a church in Mexico with a leadership and workforce highly skilled in reaching women and children."<sup>17</sup>

### IS THE NUMBERS GAP A MODERN PHENOMENON?

Most people assume that the gender gap is something new. Men used to be more religious, right? Wrong. Men have been underrepresented in the church for at least seven hundred years, according to Dr. Leon Podles. Men began to withdraw from church life during the thirteenth century when a new bridal mysticism began to sweep the church. A call to weakness and passivity replaced the church's historic emphasis on struggle and self-sacrifice. The Virgin Mary took center stage. Mother

church took care of everything spiritual. Medieval men simply attended Mass, took the sacraments, and paid their tithes and indulgences.

Religious men might have settled the New World, but their holy zeal did not always guarantee their presence in the pews. New England churches whose rolls go back to the 1600s show the majority of their members were always women.<sup>18</sup>

The gender gap became a yawning chasm in the 1800s. The great evangelist Charles Finney wrote in the 1830s: "Women composed the great majority of members in all churches." Fredric Dan Huntington, an Episcopal rector, wrote in 1856 that the church was "composed chiefly of females and aged men."<sup>19</sup> Even in the post-Civil War Bible Belt, one observer wrote, "The altars of our churches are pitifully devoid of young men," and "There has scarce been a religious young man here in years."<sup>20</sup>

### WHERE DID ALL THE MEN GO?

The shortage of men was partly due to new working conditions brought on by the industrial revolution. Men were working longer hours at factories and mines, some of which operated on Sundays. Others had to leave town to find work, spending long stretches away from home and their familiar parishes. Women, children, and aged men were the only ones left in church.

Clergymen, finding the pews filled with women, began to tailor their messages to them. The vengeful God of the Calvinists was supplanted with a warm, comforting Jesus who matched the sensibilities of the predominantly female congregation. One of the era's favorite hymns began, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul, Let Me to Thy Bosom Fly."<sup>21</sup> This romantic view of Jesus was popular with women whose husbands had little time for them. But men were repulsed by Christ as lover and had no desire to fly to His bosom.

During the Victorian era, men and women were consigned to strict gender roles, but pastors were something in between, a special class of men who were allowed to exercise feminine gifts. Pastors moved in feminine circles; preaching to women, counseling women, drinking tea and eating cakes with women. The image of the thin, weak, sissy pastor was common in literature of the day. Ann Douglas writes, "It seems highly

likely that, in a period when religion was more and more the province of women, many of the young men drawn to the church were seen to be deeply attached and even similar to the women they knew best, namely their mothers."<sup>22</sup> Victorian women adored these effeminate, sensitive, caring men, but their husbands were not impressed. They steered clear of church as a result.

As the twentieth century dawned, women and pastors worked against male pleasures such as drinking, gambling, cursing, and whoring. Their political alliance reached its zenith in 1919 with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, making alcohol illegal in America. For many men that was the last straw. Surveys taken in the 1920s found a 60-40 gender gap,<sup>23</sup> similar to the one we find in today's church.

Then, the unexpected. After the privations of the Great Depression and World War II, prosperity returned to America. And men returned to church. The 1950s and 1960s were something of a golden era for church attendance. Americans filled the pews in historically large numbers. It's no coincidence that male involvement was also at a record high. Church growth expert Lyle Schaller's 1952 survey found adult attendance in America's mainline churches was 53 percent female, 47 percent male, mirroring the U.S. population.<sup>24</sup> Men went to church, and the church grew.

The 1950s and 1960s were the heyday of the so-called *builder* generation. Church buildings popped up like mushrooms after a rain. But once the paint dried, men began to get bored. There was nothing for them to do. The church of the 1960s knew nothing of discipleship and offered men no way to exercise their masculine gifts. So they began to drift. They either left the church or became spectators. Spectators became critics. Pastors bore the brunt of this criticism. The tension between men and pastors returned. Men became uninterested in church; pastors became uninterested in men.

The 1950s and 1960s were an anomaly. Men have been less interested in the Christian faith for centuries. Men have had the pulpit; women have had the pews. But even this is changing. Mainline Protestant seminaries now admit about as many women as men, and overall, more than a third of divinity students are women, a number that has been steadily rising

since the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> If current trends continue, women will eventually dominate the clergy, just as they have every other aspect of church life in America. Dr. Podles predicts, "The Protestant clergy will be a characteristically female occupation, like nursing, within a generation."<sup>26</sup> *Newsweek* columnist Kenneth Woodward thinks this may not be such a good idea:

On any given Sunday, in Protestant as well as Catholic churches, there are always more women than men. More women than men study for the ministry in the major divinity schools. Most Christians do not get their formation in the faith from men but from women: Mom, the Sunday school teacher or the nun who prepares the kids for their first communion. As I see it, the last bastion of male presence in the church is the altar and the pulpit. I would hate to see the priesthood turn into an essentially female calling.<sup>27</sup>

The New Testament had its own builder generation. The Bible records the stories of dynamic men who sacrificed everything to see the kingdom of God built up. Their focus was not physical buildings, but building the church into a force for positive change in the world. The early church grew like mad, and if there was any gender gap, it seemed to be a surplus of men rather than women, although the Bible is not clear on this.

Nevertheless, both men and women played prominent roles in the origins of Christianity. It was a shared stage. Today men still have the lead roles, but the supporting cast is almost totally female. That's the subject of the next chapter.

## THE GAP OF PARTICIPATION



HOWARD HENDRICKS OF DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY sees two kinds of people in the church: the *pillars* and the *caterpillars*. The *pillars* uphold the church with their prayers, their work, and their donations. They build the kingdom of God by the sweat of their brows. The *caterpillars* crawl in on Sunday morning, sing a few songs, listen to a sermon, and crawl out again, not to be seen for a week.

If your church is typical, most of the pillars who uphold it are female. Women are much more likely than men to devote themselves to Christianity beyond simple church attendance. Researcher George Barna found women are

- 100% more likely to be involved in discipleship.
- 57% more likely to participate in adult Sunday school.
- 56% more likely to hold a leadership position at a church (not including the role of pastor).
- 54% more likely to participate in a small group.
- 46% more likely to disciple others.
- 39% more likely to have a devotional time or quiet time.
- 33% more likely to volunteer for a church.

- 29% more likely to read the Bible.
- 29% more likely to attend church.
- 29% more likely to share faith with others.
- 23% more likely to donate to a church.
- 16% more likely to pray.<sup>1</sup>

Women put more faith in their religion, according to a study by the Gallup organization. American women agreed far more often than men when given these statements about their spiritual lives:<sup>2</sup>

	M	W
Religion is very important in my life.	48	68
I'm a member of a church or synagogue.	59	69
Religion can answer today's problems.	59	72
When making decisions, I pay attention to God.	40	56
When making decisions, I pay attention to my own views.	54	37

In addition, 38 percent of men described themselves as *spiritual but not religious* compared with just 28 percent of women, suggesting "traditional religious institutions may be somewhat less equipped to fulfill the spiritual needs of men."<sup>3</sup> This is further evidence that men are interested in God, but uninterested in Christianity as it's currently practiced.

The Gallup organization's Congregational Engagement Index measures the commitment of individuals to their particular faith community. Not surprisingly, 28 percent of women are fully *engaged* in the life of their church versus 21 percent of men. *Actively disengaged* members are the opposite: 24 percent of men are actively disengaged versus just 16 percent of women.<sup>4</sup>

The most interesting finding was that women are *more* scriptural in their beliefs than men. Barna concludes:



The survey data show that nearly half of the nation's women have beliefs which classify them as born again (46%), compared to just about one-third of men (36%). In other words, there are between 11 million and 13 million more born again women than there are born again men in the country.

Women are also more likely to share their faith with another person and to provide spiritual mentoring to others. Women are doing the leg-work of evangelism today and fulfilling the Great Commission while men sit on the sidelines. Barna sums up his findings: "Women are the backbone of the Christian congregations in America."<sup>5</sup>

### DENOMINATIONAL AND PARACHURCH ORGANIZATIONS ATTRACT MORE WOMEN

Women's organizations within churches are much stronger than their men's counterparts. Almost every Southern Baptist congregation has a WMU (Woman's Missionary Union). There is no equivalent Baptist men's organization that even comes close in size or influence. Same with the Presbyterian Women, who are active in practically every congregation in the United States. Although there is a Presbyterian Men's organization, few churches can muster enough guys to join. Nationally, the United Methodist Women outnumber the United Methodist Men 875,000 to 248,000.<sup>6</sup>

Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) International is the world's premier parachurch Bible study program. It offers three to five times more classes for women. Here are numbers from five states in different parts of the country:<sup>7</sup>

State	Women's Classes	Men's Classes
Texas	84	26
Massachusetts	3	0
Illinois	26	5
Washington	39	13
South Carolina	8	3

BSF's gender gap also shows up in different regions of the world:

Nation/Continent	Women's Classes	Men's Classes
Canada	11	3
Europe	17	2
Africa	18	11
South America	5	2
Australia	40	5
Asia	24	7

### WOMEN ARE THE GREATEST PARTICIPANTS IN CHRISTIAN CULTURE AND COMMERCE

Women are more likely than men to shop at a Christian bookstore, watch a Christian TV station, or listen to Christian music. Christian retailers and media executives know this. They market and sell their products accordingly.

In every Christian bookstore in America the women's section is bigger than the men's section—usually three to four times bigger. Savvy booksellers know women buy about 75 percent of Christian products, so they work hard to create an atmosphere of femininity. The moment a man walks into a religious store he knows he's out of his element. Susan Faludi describes her visit to a Christian bookstore this way:

The "men's" section was consigned to a back shelf . . . [It was] hopelessly outnumbered and outflanked by the pink devotional pamphlets and rose-adorned spiritual guides that lined the other shelves, frilly Bible covers and lambs-and-chicks crib ruffles that jammed the cabinets, flower-festooned jewelry and smiley-faced Jesus figurines that blanketed the display cases, out-of-focus portraits of serene homemakers sipping tea and sniffing flowers that covered the walls, and uplifting sugary music that emanated from floral jewel boxes, windup infant mobiles, and music-box-bearing stuffed animals, generating a cacophonous cross talk of treacle.<sup>8</sup>

A look at the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA) top one hundred Christian books shows "six titles directed to the special needs of

men and 21 titles to the special needs of women. This latter category, which ranges from *Hugs for Mom* to *Bad Girls of the Bible*, reflects the fact that most buyers of CBA books are women."<sup>9</sup> In fact, the CBA magazine does not have a men's interest category. When Pat Morley, one of America's leading men's ministers, approached CBA about starting one, he was turned down.<sup>10</sup>

Not only do women read most of the Christian books; they write most of them as well. Although many of the blockbuster titles are still written by men, there are far more women writing for the church market. I recently attended a Christian writers' conference that attracted sixty-five women and five men. I felt as if I'd stumbled into the studio audience of the *Oprah* show.

Women are more likely to listen to a Christian radio station. Radio listeners in general are an exact replica of the population: 51.7 percent female, 48.3 percent male. But Christian AC radio (the format playing on most contemporary Christian music stations today) draws an audience that's 63 percent female and 37 percent male. Christian stations garner, on average, 21 percent more women listeners than mainstream stations.<sup>11</sup>

K-Love, America's largest syndicated Christian music radio service, with affiliates in 189 cities and towns,<sup>12</sup> targets its programming at eighteen- to forty-five-year-old women. The K-Love disc jockeys have created a mythical average listener, whom they call Kathy. She is a mother in her midthirties with two kids, a minivan, and a mortgage. Kathy is very busy, driving her kids to soccer practice, piano lessons, and youth group. As she drives, she listens to K-Love. Kathy's name comes up frequently during staff meetings, and the DJs make sure their on-air antics won't upset or offend her sensibilities.

Finally, women are more likely to watch Christian television than men. Barna Research found that women are the primary users of all forms of Christian media. The older the woman, the more likely she is to watch.<sup>13</sup>

### THE GAP OF PARTICIPATION IS REAL ...AND COULD BE GETTING WORSE

Has your church experienced difficulty getting enough volunteers to run its various ministries? You are not alone. Nationwide, churches are

struggling to find volunteers. Women used to have lots of time to volunteer, but with so many working (or home-schooling or taxi driving their kids) there's not much energy left for church work. George Barna sounds this note of caution:

While women represent the lion's share of Christians and the majority of participants in religious activities, many women appear to be burning out from their intense levels of involvement. Maybe most telling has been a 22% slip in church attendance since 1991 (55% to 45%). There has also been a 21% decline in the percentage of women who volunteer to help a church (29% in 1991 and 24% in 2000). Women's monumental effort to support the work of the Christian church may be running on fumes.<sup>14</sup>

This may be the hidden tragedy of the gender gap: without men shouldering their share of the ministry load, women are feeling trapped, overworked, and underappreciated. Some are actually leaving the church because of these feelings.

Women cannot and should not be the pack mules of modern Christianity. Men need to take their rightful place in the church. But as we've seen, many men don't feel they *have* a rightful place in today's church. Changing that perception is the first step to bridging the gap of participation.

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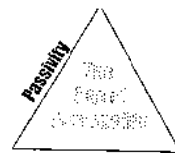
## THE GAP OF PERSONALITY



NOW WE BEGIN OUR EXPLORATION OF THE THIRD GAP, *THE GAP OF PERSONALITY*. This gap is harder to understand because it's tougher to quantify. Classifying people by their church attendance or participation habits is easier because noses can be counted. Personality types are harder to pin down.

Nevertheless, certain types of people rarely involve themselves in a local church. I call this *the gap of personality*. Although individual congregations may have a great diversity of personality types, the church in general is short on certain types of people, while it yields a bumper crop of other types. Think of the gap of personality as a triangle with three sides. We are going to explore these sides one at a time. Side one is known as *the passivity side*.

### THE PASSIVITY SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE



Churchgoers are more likely to have passive personalities than the population in general, according to Dr. Mels Carbonnel, who has administered personality tests to thousands of Christians over the past twenty years. While about 62 percent of Americans have passive personalities,

about 85 percent of the Christians whom Carbonnel has tested fall into the passive category.<sup>1</sup>

What are the implications of this imbalance? Any institution so heavily tilted toward passive personalities will itself become passive. It will tend to value tradition and stability over innovation and growth. Anyone who's served in leadership in a local church knows this is true.

In most churches passivity is a highly developed art. Tradition is revered. Change and innovation move at a glacial pace. Even the slightest change at church can make people very upset. For example, two Christian monks got into a bloody fistfight when a chair was moved from one spot to another.<sup>2</sup> In another tragic case a fifty-three-year-old parishioner put arsenic in the coffee at a Lutheran church, killing one man and sickening fifteen others. He was upset over talk of a merger with another congregation.<sup>3</sup> Every pastor can tell you stories of members who've become hysterical over minor changes to a worship service. You might say that today's church is full of *passivity activists* whose greatest energies are devoted to fighting change.

What's even more disturbing about this finding is that many of the people tested by Dr. Carbonnel are Christian leaders, such as pastors, teachers, and elders! In the secular world people with active personalities gravitate toward leadership positions. But in the church it is usually the passive who lead. A leadership crisis is hobbling the church, and a lack of bold, visionary leadership is driving men away from churches.

George Barna uncovered similar results.

"We recently interviewed more than 2400 Protestant pastors and discovered that 92% of them said they are leaders. Then we gave them the definition that we use of leadership and saw the proportion drop to less than two-thirds," Barna continued. "When we then asked if they felt that God had given them one of the spiritual gifts that relates to leading people, such as leadership, apostleship or even administration, the proportion plummeted to less than one out of four. Finally, we asked them to dictate to us the vision that they are leading people toward—that is, the very heartbeat of their ministry—we wound up in the single digits."<sup>4</sup>

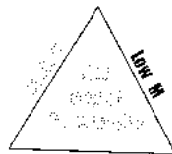
Barna discovered that today's church is led by wonderful, loving people who are not gifted in the area of leadership. Most paid leaders in America's churches today are either teachers or musicians who may have never been trained in leadership, nor do they possess a vision for leading a congregation. It's not just paid staff. Christian leaders at every level tend to have passive personalities.

Churches led by people with passive personalities drive men away for at least two reasons:

1. Passive-led churches are very busy, but no one stops to consider whether all this busyness is achieving anything. Men would rather join the Rotary Club—at least it accomplishes something.
2. Passive-led churches are not moving toward a compelling vision—and according to Proverbs, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (29:18 KJV).

Men want to devote themselves to something that's effective, not something that's going to make them busy. Many women will put up with passive leadership out of loyalty, but most men will not. Men are achievement oriented and have little tolerance for a team that always plays defense and never plays offense.

### THE LOW M SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE



Studies show that men who are interested in Christianity have a less masculine outlook on life than other men. I call this tendency *low M*. The church has a reputation for attracting gentle, sensitive, bookish guys who are less masculine than average.

Is there any truth to this? Dr. Leon Podles cites a study by psychologists Lewis M. Terman and Catharine Cox Miles. The pair presented a set of questions to men and women. They studied how each gender answered the questions; those responses that were most often chosen by women were deemed *feminine*, and those most often chosen by men were deemed *masculine*.

Men who expressed an interest in art or religion were more likely to answer *like a woman* than other men. In other words, the answers of artistic and religious men looked more like the answers given by women. The researchers wrote, "Interest in religion or art is a mark of definitely greater femininity than lack of interest in these matters." They continued, "Most masculine of all are the men who have little or no interest in religion." Podles observes, "Very masculine men showed little interest in religion, very feminine men great interest . . . young men, athletic men, and uneducated men tended to be more consistently masculine than old men, sedentary men, and educated men."

Now here's a surprise: the pattern held with women too. Women who had highly feminine scores were also especially religious, while women who had more masculine scores were neutral or averse to religion.<sup>5</sup>

This study seems to indicate that anyone, man or woman, who has a very masculine outlook (high M) on life tends to shy away from the church. Isn't this true in your experience? Think of the macho men you know. Think of the driven, career-oriented women you know. Are they in church on Sunday? Even if they do attend, do they seem particularly devoted, or is their true allegiance elsewhere?

On the other hand, those who have a less masculine outlook (low M), be they men or women, tend to flock to the church. This may explain why so many gay men are drawn to church, while lesbians avoid it. A study published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* found that "gay men were significantly more active in religious organizations [as a percentage] when compared to heterosexual men." The author notes that gay men are similar to female heterosexuals in their religiosity and attend church "without having to be dragged to services by female partners—as is the case for heterosexual men." Yet "lesbians and female bisexuals have very low rates of religious activity."<sup>6</sup>

Why do so many effeminate and gay men attend church? Maybe because the church is one of the few institutions in society where there's no pressure to act like a man. In fact, men are encouraged not to. Where else in our society can a man express his feminine side and be applauded for it?

Furthermore, as men get older and more sedentary, they tend to develop a more feminine outlook on life, focusing on security rather than

risk taking. These are precisely the men the church is still somewhat successful in attracting. Mostly absent in church are young, athletic, and uneducated men, who possess a more masculine outlook on life.

### CHURCH: NATURAL HABITAT OF THE SOFT MALE

The lack of machismo among churchgoing men has not gone unnoticed. The average churchman is what writer John Bly calls *the soft male*. He is a tamed man. Mr. Rogers is his mascot. The stallions hang out in bars; the geldings hang out in church. Gordon Dalbey writes,

"The greatest disappointment in my lifetime of ministry," a friend and fellow pastor in his late 50's once declared to me, "has been that I just never seem to be able to draw men into the church." He paused and sighed, confused and frustrated. "Sure, I've gotten males—but frankly, they've been mostly quiet and withdrawn guys with strong, dominant wives. I wish I could get some real men in my church!"

Susan Faludi, after observing men at a Promise Keepers rally, put it this way:

If they were plotting the overthrow of a feminist world, they showed no signs of it. Mostly they seemed intent on being mannerly and tidy. In an era when the sports spectators who were the bleachers' usual clientele left the stadiums littered and vandalized, the Promise Keepers were careful to throw away all their trash. They obediently took notes during the speeches and displayed at all times their Promise Keepers ID bracelets, which looked exactly like the identification bands worn by hospital patients . . . They were willfully docile, as though, if they just obeyed long enough, they would at last get their reward.<sup>8</sup>

We're clean. We're courteous. We're conscientious. Above all, we're nice. What our Sunday school teachers told us years ago is still true today: we are God's little lambs.

Successful Christian living is defined not by the bold actions we take, but by the foolish actions we avoid. It's not the goals we accomplish, but

the sins we escape that make us good Christian men. We are supposed to be weak, humble, and sweet. Real men visit our churches, look around at the soft males sitting in the soft pews, and beat a path to the exit. Real men do not want to be safe—they *want to be dangerous*.

Real men have no place in the church today. Frankly, we don't want them. We say we do, but if a number of real men showed up, we wouldn't know what to do with them. I call these perpetual church avoiders *the missing men*.



### THE MISSING MEN SIDE OF THE TRIANGLE

Many types of men are absent from the church today, but these three subsets of high M men seem particularly alienated: risk takers, fun lovers, and dangerous men.

#### Risk Takers

There was a time when being a Christian could be hazardous to your health. In the first century emperor Nero employed Christians as human torches. Thousands of early Christians perished on crosses or in the jaws of ravenous beasts.

Although there are still many risk takers in the persecuted church, our comfortable Western churches attract relatively few. There's a shortage of high-achieving men who possess a risk-taking mentality. Adventurer types are largely absent from churches today. Entrepreneurs are under-represented.

So how can a church attract risk takers? By taking risks! Pursue outrageous, God-given visions. Develop ministries that are dangerous. Send people on foreign mission adventures. Tell the stories of men who have jeopardized everything for Christ. Start with the stories of the martyrs. Scores die every day for Christ, yet their stories are rarely told in Western churches. The Web site [www.persecution.org](http://www.persecution.org) tells the stories of modern-day martyrs. Visit this site regularly. It will deepen your faith.

We need risk takers in the church today. Without risk takers church-governing boards have a tendency to play it safe because they are

composed of cautious people. After years of safe, practical decisions, a church begins to decline. Men leave. *A growing church is a risk-taking church.*

### **Fun Lovers**

Fun-loving people are underrepresented in church today. It's little wonder why. Church services aren't much fun. They're usually very serious affairs. A daring pastor might tell a joke at the beginning of the sermon, but he'll get complaints if he tells two jokes. Laymen who try to liven up the service with humorous announcements or silly skits might draw a stern rebuke or an angry letter from a longtime member.

If you're a party type, you may end up on the church fellowship committee. *Fellowship* is a term invented by Christians who fear the word *fun*. The fellowship committee is a grudging admission from the powers within the church that there is a time and a place for fun, just as long as it doesn't break out spontaneously, especially during a worship service! The fellowship team is an ingenious mechanism that controls the joy and celebration, allowing them to burst forth only at theologically acceptable times and in preapproved locations.

Fun-loving people may detect joy bubbling somewhere beneath the surface of the church, but because it rarely breaks forth, they fall away. They seek out a more lively church that doesn't take itself so seriously, or they opt for a party lifestyle. This lifestyle requires staying up late on Saturday night, so many fun lovers just skip church. After all, in most people's experience the dullest party is more fun than the hippest church service.

John Piper describes the worship service as "The Feast of Christian Hedonism." The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and *enjoy* him forever" (emphasis mine). We're supposed to enjoy God. Isn't it possible we're also supposed to enjoy church? We need fun-loving people in church to help us recapture the joy of worship. Only then will we recapture men (more in chapter 20, "Worship and the Masculine Spirit").

### **Dangerous Men**

This is a catch-all category for a third kind of man who doesn't go to church. How many ex-cons go to your church? How many

Harleys roar into the parking lot Sunday morning? How about mud-covered pickup trucks? How many tattoos are visible during the worship service?

The dangerous man is another kind of risk taker: he's adopted a lifestyle and a persona that tell the world he's someone you don't want to mess with. But not every dangerous man is a biker or an ex-con. Any man who projects an image of roughness falls into this category. Construction workers, diesel mechanics, sailors, welders, and the like are dangerous men. Just the kind of men Jesus hung out with.

When a dangerous man shows up in church, he often feels judged. Lee Strobel quotes one such man: "I thought people were going to whisper behind my back, 'Look! It's one of them. It's one of those hell-bound pagans! Quick, hide the valuables! Protect the women!'"<sup>10</sup> Some preachers spend a lot of pulpit time predicting doom for worldly people. Such preaching makes dangerous men feel unwelcome.

Men who like dangerous things or who work in dangerous jobs may feel out of place in church. Loggers, oilfield workers, military men, and hunters are openly vilified in some liberal churches. On the other hand, men who have dangerous habits such as smoking and drinking are shunned in some conservative churches.

We need dangerous men in the church. Jesus attracted dangerous men. These social outcasts were His biggest fans. It's a sure sign of church health when dangerous men start showing up on Sunday. But they won't stay unless we stop condemning them and learn to speak their language: the language of risk.

## **WHY THESE THREE GAPS ARE SO ALIENATING TO MEN**

*The numbers gap.* It's a vicious circle: there are fewer men in church, so fewer men attend. Men look around the sanctuary for other men they can relate to. If the sanctuary is full of women, children, and wimps, a man's gut tells him this is not a place for him. He may drop out, leaving one less man for the next guy to relate to.

*The participation gap.* Men who try participating beyond Sunday morning find ministries dominated by women and their values. They

feel incompetent and drop out. Low male participation keeps other men from volunteering, and so on.

*The personality gap.* Men are looking for strong, risk-taking leaders to show them the way. They are looking for healthy role models for their sons. Men need wise spiritual fathers who will tell it to them straight. They are not finding them in church, so they look elsewhere.

With God's help, we can close the three gaps. But every churchgoer must do a better job of understanding men. Join me now for a journey through a man's subconscious mind, the field upon which these battles will be waged.

## PART 4

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# THE STRAWS THAT BREAK MEN'S HEARTS

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Up to this point I've been pretty general in explaining why men resist church. Now we get down to specifics. Perhaps you turned to this section hoping to find a smoking gun, some secret force that is barring men from the riches of life in Christ. Or you may think I'm about to identify some quick, easy method that's guaranteed to get any man to come to church.

Sorry. I wish I could say, "This is it. Here is the barrier that is keeping men from the church." But there is no single barrier. There is no smoking gun. Truth is, there are many different reasons men hate church, because there are many different kinds of men.

Remember the story of the straw that broke the camel's back? For the next three chapters we'll sift through the pile of straws that are squeezing the masculine spirit out of our churches. Individually, these straws are trifles, but together they form a heavy burden that is crushing men's hearts.

Before we dig into this pile of straws, here's my top-ten list of excuses men give for not wanting to go to church:



10. I don't have time.
9. Church just doesn't work for me.
8. It's boring.
7. It's irrelevant to my life.
6. I don't like the pastor.
5. I don't want to talk about it.
4. It's too long.
3. They ask for money too much.
2. It's for wimps.

*(drum roll, please)*

*The number one reason men give for not going to church, that perennial favorite:*

1. There are too many hypocrites there.

Do these excuses address the real reasons men don't go to church? Not really. Women face these issues as well but still make church a priority. If you want to get past the excuses to discover the real barriers, you must ask *why*: *Why do men think it's too long? Why do men find it boring and irrelevant? Why do men think there are too many hypocrites?* And here's the big one: *Why are these attitudes so common in men but rarely found in women?*

# 14

## MEN ARE AFRAID . . . VERY AFRAID

MEN AND WOMEN FEAR DIFFERENT THINGS. ACCORDING TO Sam Keen, "Men's fears focus around loss of . . . independence and women's around the loss of significant relationships. We [men] most fear engulfment, anything that threatens to rob us of our power and control. Women most fear abandonment, isolation, loss of love."<sup>1</sup>

If Keen is right, then modern church culture seems likely to frighten men and comfort women. Today's churches place heavy emphasis on giving up power and control—something men need to do, but dread doing. Meanwhile, church involvement means friends and relationships, something women deeply desire. In this way, churchgoing shields a woman from her deepest fear, while it forces a man to encounter his deepest fear.

Now, on top of this deep fear, Christians unwittingly pile other things that make men anxious. A number of common Christian practices can reduce a man to a mouse, emotionally speaking. Rather than face these multiple traumas, men just take a pass on church. In this chapter, I'll identify several things men fear and show you what an individual Christian can do to help the men who show up on Sunday.

### MEN FEAR INCOMPETENCE

Men hate to be outshone by women, but it happens all the time in church. Because men are not as studious as women, they often lack the Bible knowledge and Christian vocabulary it takes to shine in an evangelical church. Sarah Sumner writes, "Most men who are bad golfers would rather go play bad golf than go to church. That's how incompetent they feel in the house of God. It would take a miracle for biblically

incompetent men to feel excited about gathering with a group of biblically competent women."<sup>2</sup>

Why aren't men becoming competent Christians? As I said earlier, the path to Christ now leads through a classroom. Study. Read. Learn. Attend classes. Acquire knowledge. Perfect your theology. It's a path few men are willing to walk, unless they happen to be the studious type.

### **MEN ARE AFRAID TO SING IN PUBLIC**

If you're going to be a Christian, you'd better like to sing. Christians rarely gather without breaking into song. Yet many men feel incompetent singing aloud unless they have a voice like Pavarotti's. Exhortations such as, "C'mon, Ralph, just make a joyful noise," don't help.

The only place men sing together is a masculine venue. Men will sing the national anthem at a baseball game. Soccer crowds are renowned for male singing (lots of beer helps loosen their tongues). Men in military formation sing in deep cadence. Promise Keepers rallies feature robust singing for three reasons: (1) most of the men are already Christians, (2) they know the songs, and (3) they are in a sports arena with no women around.

Even among churchgoers, singing is more popular with women than men. We polled our fifteen-hundred-member church: while three-quarters of the women chose praise singing as a top priority, only about half the guys chose it.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Lewis has noticed a curious trend in his Arkansas megachurch: praise skippers. These people (mostly men) consistently arrive half an hour late to the worship service. Lewis suspects these fellows are tardy on purpose to miss the singing. There are also a number of men who sneak out as soon as the sermon is over, perhaps for the same reason.

Personally speaking, I love to sing. But I have talked to enough unchurched guys to know that public singing can be a barrier for them. They may not mind a few short songs, but today's contemporary churches feature twenty, thirty, or even forty-five minutes of nonstop praise singing. Verses repeat over and over. And over.

I'm convinced there are a million unchurched men who would attend a worship service this weekend if *they just didn't have to sing*.

Pastor Lewis dropped singing from his Men's Fraternity gatherings and attendance leaped. Some church planter is going to figure this out and reap a rich harvest of men.

### **MEN FEAR BEING SINGLED OUT AND EMBARRASSED**

The conventional wisdom is that visitors to your church expect a friendly greeting and want to be recognized. Rick Warren points out that visitors actually hate all this attention: "Ironically, the way many churches welcome visitors actually makes them feel more uncomfortable than if they'd just been left alone . . . one reason large churches attract so many visitors is because newcomers like being able to hide in a crowd."<sup>4</sup>

I believe men are particularly embarrassed when they are introduced in church because they are naturally less relational or they're worried about who sees them there. It's especially bad for an unchurched husband who's introduced by his holy wife. He may feel she's showing him off, like a trophy.

### **MEN ARE AFRAID OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE**

Many non-Christians fear that if they start going to church, they might have to adopt a boring, straitlaced lifestyle, like the one lived by Ned Flanders, a character on the animated sitcom *The Simpsons*. According to a writer in *Christianity Today*:

Religion informs nearly every aspect of Ned's life, from the doorbell that chimes "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" to his air horn that blares the Hallelujah chorus . . . He belongs to a Bible-study group and keeps notes stuck on his refrigerator with a sign of the fish magnet . . . Ned does not allow the kids to use dice when playing board games because dice are wicked. He is hesitant to buy the children Red Hots candies because there is a lascivious caricature of the devil on the package. The kids' favorite games are Good Samaritan and Clothe the Leper.<sup>5</sup>

A common fear among men is that Christianity will turn them into a nerd or a nut. Wayne Jacobsen notes, "Everyone knows somebody

who got excited about God and decided to *live by faith*, which means he stopped working and lived off those who were working. Others have even waited for a word from God before they brushed their teeth."<sup>6</sup>

Other men see Christianity as the end of fun and challenge. Pastor Lee Strobel had this attitude during his years as an atheist:

I'd think to myself, "Boy, I never want to end up like that." In other words, if Christianity requires a person to become a societal misfit who has no social life except church services and prayer meetings, count me out. [I saw] Christians as being boring, out of touch, and living a "plain vanilla" lifestyle that's devoid of excitement, challenge, or fun.<sup>7</sup>

No man wants to become a Ned Flanders. Fortunately, this barrier often falls away when a man meets Christians who are engaged with the world and enjoying life.

### **MEN FEAR THEY WILL HAVE TO CHECK THEIR MINDS AT THE DOOR**

Well-educated people, and men in particular, have a hard time taking things on faith. They have been taught to believe only what they can measure, identify, and prove with the scientific method. A Gallup study found that young, well-educated males are the group of Americans least likely to be fully spiritually committed.<sup>8</sup>

Many men object to the anti-intellectual, antiquestion atmosphere in some churches. Ed was raised Baptist, but "the last church I went to, I committed the cardinal sin of expressing my opinion and it involved questioning the Bible, or more to the point, my interpretation of it. I was chastised for not having blind faith. Well, it's been twenty-two years, and I haven't had to worry about a confrontation like that again." Other churches have set up modern science as a bogeyman, and they spend as much time trashing scientific theory as they do preaching the gospel.

When educated men *do* try church, they're often faced with a difficult choice. They can attend a mainline church that allows intellectual exploration but offers little in the way of the Spirit. Or they can attend a vibrant evangelical or charismatic church, but they will have to endure frequent indictments of the evils of modern science.

You don't have to abandon biblical orthodoxy to attract men. In fact, theologically conservative churches are growing the fastest. *Well-educated men want a church where God is real, but not one that treats science as an enemy.* They want a church where they can ask questions and challenge the party line. Mainline churches take note: this is one area where you can really make inroads with men. The balancing act is to allow for differences in interpretation without slipping into outright heresy. Proclaim the truth with boldness, but do not make people feel evil or dumb for disagreeing. Conservative churches: let men ask uncomfortable questions, and resist the urge to promote a science versus God sideshow.

### **MEN FEAR THEIR CHILDREN ARE BEING BRAINWASHED**

While most men welcome the moral instruction that the church provides children, some men are openly hostile to it. British pastor Michael Fanstone notes that "many unbelieving husbands have a serious fear that someone will indoctrinate their children—either their mother at home, or others at church."<sup>9</sup> Other fathers fear the church will make their boys weaklings or wimps.

The key here is openness and communication with parents. Teachers, let men know what you're teaching their kids. Invite them to sit in. Show them you have nothing to hide, and their fears will subside.

### **SINGLE MEN FEEL TARGETED FOR MARRIAGE**

The apostle Paul was clear that singleness is a noble status for a Christian, but the modern church didn't get that memo. Many a churchgoer sees singleness as a disease, and baby, we've got the cure! Carol Penner writes, "At times single people may also feel that they are seen only as objects for marriage. This experience may feel like being treated as sick persons needing care until they're well (married). 'How are you? Any special friends we should know about? No? Oh, that's too bad.'"<sup>10</sup>

Single men from ages eighteen to thirty-five are the demographic group least likely to attend church, so when such a man shows up for church, he may feel out of place. Or he may feel like a deer in the gun sights: a target of the many marriage-minded single women of the

congregation. My churchgoing, single male friends tell me there's constant, subtle pressure on them to settle down and get married. This may be one reason single men prefer large churches; they are less likely to be hounded about their marital status.

We can help single men by accepting them as they are. Please, resist the urge to play matchmaker.

### **MEN MAY FEAR THEY MUST BECOME SUPERHUSBANDS**

Christian men are supposed to be magnificent husbands. Kevin Leman observes, "Not only are men supposed to attend morning Bible studies, but they're also supposed to get home in time for dinner, spend time alone with each child, date their wives once a week, and earn enough money so that their wives can stay home with their young children. This is a heavy load, and some Christian men start to resent it."<sup>11</sup> Rather than deal with these crushing expectations, a man may just drop out of church.

### **HUSBANDS MAY BECOME JEALOUS OF CHRIST OR THE CHURCH**

Edwin Louis Cole once got a call from an angry husband. "Pastor," he said, "I don't go to your church, but I need to tell you something. My wife has left me for another man. His name is Jesus."

When a woman *falls in love with Jesus*, her husband may panic. Linda Davis writes, "All he knows is that she's in love with someone else, and he is jealous. Instead of remaining the first priority in her life . . . he has suddenly been demoted to number two after God . . . It would be easier for him to understand if she had run off with another man, but she's in love with someone he can't even compete with. He feels helpless."<sup>12</sup> Jeri Odell describes what happened in one household: "When Jill came to Christ, Rob shared that he felt replaced by someone he couldn't see, hear or understand. He admitted to bouts of jealousy and feeling unimportant and unacceptable."<sup>13</sup>

Today's American man typically has just one friend: his wife. When Jesus enters the picture, she's suddenly best friends with someone else. Men feel rejected, so they fight back the only way they know how: by

refusing to have anything to do with church. *Take that, Jesus!* It's a normal male response to a rival.

Pastors, Christian teachers, and even Christian books feed this rivalry by inviting women to imagine themselves married to Jesus. One well-known Christian author says to his female readers, "At times, Jesus will be more of a husband to you than the man of flesh that you married. And while your husband may wonderfully meet many of your needs, only the Bridegroom can and will meet all your needs."<sup>14</sup> Another asks her readers to "develop an affair with the one and only Lover who will truly satisfy your innermost desires; Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup> Another author tells women, "This Someone entered your world and revealed to you that He is your true Husband. Then He dressed you in a wedding gown whiter than the whitest linen. You felt virginal again. And alive! He kissed you with grace and vowed never to leave you or forsake you. And you longed to go and be with Him."<sup>16</sup>

Whew! How is a man supposed to compete with Jesus? He's always patient, kind, loving, and accepting. Not only does He kiss you with grace, but He never needs a breath mint. Jesus never loses His temper, never forgets an anniversary, and never goes out with the boys after work.

Woman readers, if you imagine your relationship with Jesus as a rapturous love affair, I must warn you: you are on dangerous ground for two reasons:

1. You are not the bride of Christ. According to the Bible, there is only one bride of Christ: the church (all believers collectively throughout time and throughout the world). *Individual believers are not brides of Christ.*
2. Your husband will never measure up to your fantasy. He cannot satisfy you if you harbor an image of Christ as your lover or husband.

Whereas some women are in love with Jesus and want to spend all their time at His feet (the Mary syndrome), other women just want to be busy for God (the Martha syndrome). Marthas are in love with the

church. That was the situation in my marriage some years ago. Since my wife tells this story better than I do, I'll hand the keyboard to her. Gina, take it away.

GINA: David had just started a business, which required long hours and lots of his attention. Meanwhile I threw myself into church activities with abandon. At one point I was involved in seven ministries. I was so busy in the church that I had no personal life. Correction: church *was* my personal life. It seemed like whenever David wanted to spend time with me, I was busy at church. Naturally, he was jealous.

This went on for years. He was enslaved to his career, and I was enslaved to ministry. Finally, things blew up between us. We went to counseling and found out both of us were having affairs: David with work, I with church. Our story has a happy ending. David learned to cherish me, and I learned to respect him. Now I get my affirmation from my husband, not the choir mistress.

Women, I'm speaking from personal experience: if you are pouring your heart into the church because it gives you affirmation your husband fails to provide, I feel for you. I know what you're going through. But neither church nor Jesus is meant as a substitute husband. As David said earlier, you are on dangerous ground. You are giving your husband a perfect excuse to hate the church: *it gets the time and affection that are rightfully his*. Back to you, David.

### MEN FEAR HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE CHURCH

Men are less accepting of homosexuality than women are. Women are more likely to support legalized gay marriage and legal rights for homosexual couples.<sup>17</sup> Men are threatened by homosexuality in a way that women are not. (My liberal readers may be thinking, *Men should just get over their homophobia!* I must remind you, this book is not about how men *should* be.)

We've already seen how churchgoing men are less masculine than

average. If a man walks into a church and finds himself surrounded by passive or sensitive men, he may become suspicious. Then there's hand holding. Worshipers are often asked to hold hands with a neighbor. This attempt to model Christian unity can be awkward for men, especially those seated next to other men. (I've been a churchgoer almost thirty years, and I'm still not wild about holding hands with another guy, especially one I barely know.) And certain churches are hug-rich environments. It's one thing for very close friends to embrace, but in some congregations it's customary for relative strangers to enfold. A lot of man-to-man hugging can stir up fears of homosexuality.

The news media are making things worse. When you hear a report about the church these days, it's usually about gays: "Will the church allow gay pastors?" "A denomination appoints the first gay bishop." So the words *church* and *gay* are becoming intertwined in men's minds. Men have long been wary of the church, and these headlines only confirm their fears.

Society never regarded pastors as the manliest of men. Now the Catholic priesthood, the nation's most visible pastoral group, is said to be more than 50 percent homosexual.<sup>18</sup> The upcoming generation of Catholic priests may be up to 70 percent gay.<sup>19</sup> This was a quiet little secret for years, but with the controversy over abusive priests, clergy sexual practice is front-page news. Protestant ministers tend to be painted with the same brush since non-Christians often fail to make the distinction between Catholic and Protestant clergymen.

Whether you favor gay rights or not, it's easy to see the corrosive effect that all of this attention to gay issues is having on men's church participation. Not surprisingly, the denomination at the forefront of the gay rights movement, the Episcopal Church, is the one with the worst gender gap. Catholic churches also have a difficult time attracting men, and recent sex scandals may make things worse. A report from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops admits that four out of five abuse victims were teenage boys, and "the crisis was characterized by homosexual behavior."<sup>20</sup> We've given fathers the perfect excuse to abandon Christianity: they are shielding their sons from possible sexual abuse.

### *Other Fears in the Area of Sex*

Since the Victorian era, the church has been associated with extreme prudery when it comes to sexual matters. The image of Christians is: they don't talk about sex, they don't like sex, and they probably don't get much sex. Today's unchurched men regard biblical prohibitions against premarital sex as outdated, and the celibacy rules for priests seem just plain bizarre.

There's no way to be delicate about this, so I'll just say it. Some men are reluctant to go to church because it says to the world, "I'm not getting much sex." A churchgoing single guy says to the world, "I'm celibate." In some circles a single man who's voluntarily celibate is believed to be sexually impotent or gay.

This is a huge subconscious hurdle for a lot of men. Even men who aren't sleeping around are loath to put a sign on their heads that says, "I've been sexually tamed." Church affiliation implies that you are not performing as a man. Plus Christian men mustn't engage in locker room boasting, a primary form of male communication.

The point of this argument is not to say the church should loosen its moral stands to attract more men. I'm merely noting another aspect of the subconscious battle that rages in men's minds: *church threatens their ability to fill the masculinity bank.*

## **MEN ARE AFRAID OF HEAVEN**

Let's end this chapter on a lighter note. Popular notions of heaven strike fear into men's hearts. What man wants to spend eternity wearing a white robe, floating on clouds, plucking a harp? Men fear heaven because it sounds so dull. No challenge. No uncertainty. No fun. In heaven there's nothing to do.

Excuse me, there is one thing to do: sing. As a youngster, John Ortberg sang in the youth choir under the direction of Mrs. Olson. He said, "When she became frustrated with the boys, she'd clap her hands and say, 'You children better start singing, because when we get to heaven, that's what we'll be doing.' For an 11-year-old boy, the thought of ten billion years under the enthusiastic direction of Mrs. Olson was not my idea of eternal bliss."<sup>21</sup>

An eternity singing in the choir. Contrast this with Mormon heaven, where faithful men spend eternity making celestial babies. Or consider Muslim heaven, where martyrs enjoy the everlasting ministrations of seventy-two virgins. Guys, which sounds better to you: eternal singing or eternal sex? Is it any wonder why Mormonism and Islam are growing so rapidly, and are so popular with males?

Men, regarding heaven, there's hope in the parable of the talents. Remember the words of the Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:21). This passage implies, at least, there will be something to do in heaven besides singing. As a man, let me tell you, that's really good news!