**Are You On The Men’s Ministry Roller Coaster?**

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*Many churches struggle with a “roller coaster” men’s ministry.  The big event attracts new men.  Four months later, the leadership team is wondering where they all went. Over the next month, we will be talking about the mistake many men’s ministries make in retaining new men, and how to move men consistently forward toward authentic discipleship by capturing the momentum you’ve already created.*

Have you every heard a story like this?

“We had an amazing men’s retreat last year. This speaker came in and really challenged the guys. He shared how his relationship with his father was pretty bad, and how that affected him as an adult. He told about his own failures and how God had restored him. He really connected with our men. Guys were tearing up; groups of men were praying together about their relationships with their own sons and hurts from their relationships with their fathers. We had guys recommitting their lives to Christ. It was great.” Pause.

“But most of the guys who went are no more involved in our church now than before the event. What happened to all those guys who were praying and crying together? Maybe they were just caught up in the emotion.  In fact, I’m wondering if some of the guys had authentic experiences at all.”

Or perhaps your story is more like this one:

“Five years ago, there was a big men’s event in town. We rented a bus and 93 guys signed up. It was awesome! Then 3 years ago, it was a little bit longer drive and kind of on a bad weekend, so we only got 50 guys to go. Last year it was local again, and we thought we’d get a bunch of guys to go.  But we struggled to get 23 guys signed up. We ended up going in a few cars and it just wasn’t the same.”

Then come the reasons:

* “The pastor didn’t really support it from the pulpit.”
* “It was a bad weekend because of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (insert sporting event here).”
* “A lot of guys feel like they’ve ‘been there, done that.’”

Why are these stories and others like them all-too-familiar for most men’s ministry leaders?

**Roller Coaster Men’s Ministry**

At a meeting of the National Coalition of Men’s Ministries, Pastor Sid Woodruff shared a great illustration about riding a roller coaster at a theme park.

Living in central Florida, we know a few things about theme park rides. Imagine climbing in the newest roller coaster with a great sense of anticipation. The shoulder harness comes down and you feel a little adrenaline surge. You look ahead at the drop that’s coming and realize you can’t embarrass yourself by climbing out at the last minute like a scared little girl—especially since there are little girls on the roller coaster too, and they don’t look all that scared.

You rumble out of the start house, go around a corner and start up a steep incline. Click, click, click. You get about a quarter of the way up, just far enough for all the cars to be suspended vertically, barely clinging to the track, and then you stop. Is it broken? Did someone read the terror on your face and decide to show you mercy? No.

Over loudspeakers you hadn’t noticed before, a countdown begins. At zero, you are catapulted up towards the sky. As you approach the top of the hill, you quickly ask God to take care of your children and wife, then try to decide if you want to die with your eyes open or shut.

The bottom drops out, or rather, you are snatched back down again. The laws of physics have been overcome! The roller coaster didn’t leave the tracks! Now, the ride really begins. You are yanked around hairpin corners, shot up inclines, dropped down into metallic ravines, and flipped upside down a few times for good measure.

What was terrifying soon turns into fun. The sights of the theme park shooting by, the sound of the others on the ride yelling and screaming with delight, your own joy as you realize, “I’m not going to die.” A few more bone-wrenching corners, and then an upside down, twisty-turny flip inspired by the double helix structure of DNA. You hear yourself shouting with glee, “Is that all you got? You can do better than that!” And then you come around the corner and…you stop.

You’re back in the little starting house again. The ride operators are looking at you with the same disinterested stares they had when you left. There’s another mass of expectant park guests waiting to take your seat on the ride. As you stand up and climb out, you look back and realize:

***You’re getting off the ride exactly where you got on.  You really haven’t gone anywhere.***

This story contains many parallels to men’s ministry. The big event, the adventure retreat, the altar call. Done correctly, these events can catapult your ministry forward.  But, too often, several months or even a year or two later, leaders look around after these events and realize their ministry is right back where they started. Instead of having a men’s ministry that grows, albeit through peaks and valleys, your men’s ministry stagnates. You are not able to capture and sustain the momentum. You have a roller coaster men’s ministry.

If you were to make a chart of this kind of men’s ministry, it might look something like this:

What about your ministry to men? Are you so frustrated that you’re ready to shout, “Stop this ride! I want to get off!” Can you identify more with the valleys than the peaks?

Does your men’s ministry feel like a series of highs—great men’s events, experiences, revivals—while there’s no real difference today in the spiritual commitment of your men? Have you seen a substantial increase in the number of men who are actively pursuing discipleship from a year ago or five years ago? **It’s time to get off the roller coaster and start taking your men towards a new destination.**