

**Interview with David Murrow**  
**April 2006**

**Phil: You're married and you live in Alaska?**

Yes. We have three kids, 18, 16, and 11. We've lived in Alaska for twenty-one years.

**What do you do there?**

I'm an independent television producer, a director and a writer. There are always plenty of people who need this type of work done. That pays the bills and increasingly I'm starting to earn a bit of income from writing and speaking as well, especially for men's events. It's been exciting. I enjoy that a lot. In high school I always enjoyed being on stage, performing—I'm comfortable in front of a crowd.

**Let's talk about the book. When did it smack you that this book needed to be written?**

Well, I think the first inkling that something was wrong hit me during a worship service. My background is in anthropology and in anthropology they teach you to do something called an ethnographic survey. I was sitting in church bored with the sermon so I started to do a survey of the situation. I looked at who was there and discovered that over 60 percent of the adults in the room were women. Then I looked at the bulletin to see who was in charge and saw that most of the ministry leaders were women, most of the church staff were women. I looked at the symbols in the room and most of them were feminine. There was a lace doily on the communion table, fresh flowers, soft cushiony pews, lavender walls. And of course the walls were covered with hand-crafted, country-looking quilted banners that say "He is Risen" and "Hallelujah." It was apparent that the target audience of this church was a 40 to 50-year-old woman. Everything in this institution was targeted at that demographic. I even looked at the volunteer opportunities in the bulletin and there were a lot of things to do with children, teaching, music, family-oriented pot-luck dinners where you could cook, go down to the soup kitchen and cook—all the skill sets that were needed to be a good churchgoer were the roles that have been traditionally held by women. So I began to put it together. Any good anthropologist could walk into a situation and tell who is the particular driver in a particular society. And in the case of the church society, even though it was led by males, the primary drivers were the women.

**Is this a new phenomenon?**

Actually, no. The gender gap goes back hundreds of years. It has grown larger at certain times, smaller at others. I think it really reached its peak in the Victorian era. There was a widespread perception in the 1800s that church was something for women. Charles Spurgeon was quoted as saying, "There's gotten abroad a wide-spread notion that to follow Christ is to sink one's manliness and turn milksop." In reaction to that, in the early 1900s there was an attempt to re-balance the church. During that era you had an amazing flourishing of Christian organizations that were targeting men and boys. There was the Young Men's Christian Association, the Boy Scouts, the Men in Religion Forward Movement. The Salvation Army was formed in the late 1800s. So there was a flourishing of masculine spirituality, which was an attempt to re-balance the church which had become completely feminized toward the end of the Victorian era. The church was really the province of women and feminists and even gay men. So you had this counter-revolution in the early 1900s. Then the church began to go the other way again after the 50s and 60s and you see the rise of things like Promise Keepers in an attempt to bring it

back into balance. The natural tendency in the church is to move toward feminization and then you need a revolution. And men come back because they're interested in God. They're just not interested in being wimps.

**I'm one of the guys who sits in church every Sunday, you're making me feel a little effeminate.**

That doesn't make you effeminate; that makes you used to it. But you know what, church does attract a lot of guys like us who are verbal, we're probably a little more on the sensitive side, we appreciate music and expression and that's not a bad thing. But my heart aches for those guys who are adventurers and doers. Jesus died for them as well and we need to create an environment where those guys can connect with him, because those men are real power houses.

**Our family was down in the Dominican Republic, one of the groups we work with is Compassion, and we were in a church on a Sunday morning of about 150 people. I counted 7 men. One of them was the pastor. So this is not unique to North America.**

In many countries it's worse. I think the American church does a better job than most in attracting men. I received an email the other day from a pastor in Thailand who was asking if he could get the book translated into Thai because the average church that he works in is 70 percent women. And his particular congregation is 90 percent women. So it's really a world-wide phenomenon.

**In your book you quote an American man as saying that he went to Islam because it is a man's religion.**

I think that's one of the reasons why Islam is so popular in the African-American community. There's been such a breakdown of male role models and healthy masculinity in the African-American community because of incarceration and various other cultural factors that young black men are very drawn to masculinity. If you look at hip-hop culture it's all about muscles and jeans and guns and women are sex-objects and there's a reason for that. It's because these young men are walking around with huge gaping father wounds. And they are drawn to anything that's masculine. The black church could not be more feminine. It's all about this ecstatic experience with Jesus, long two and three-hour verbal sermons. Men are not drawn to those sorts of things. They want challenge and adventure no matter what their race. The black church is going to have to wake up and realize they're losing all their men because they insist on worshipping God in this very feminine way.

**But isn't it the same with other faiths?**

To a certain degree it is. I don't think there's any denomination out there that has really gotten it figured out. Every branch of Christianity has its weakness. Catholicism, for example. You walk into a Catholic parish and the first thing you see is two statues. You see a statue of a woman who's looking pretty healthy and happy and right next to her is a statue of a man who's been beaten to a pulp. What message does that send to men? And Catholics are legendary for their passivity in the pews. Men want to be active. They want to be participants. And then you go to the Baptists. The Baptists have a very activist doctrine, but there's an emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus and being saved and a lot of those concepts don't resonate with men. And then you go to a Pentecostal church and there's all that ecstatic expression. You can go right down the line and it seems as if the evil one has planted some purely feminine seeds in every denomination and they're causing men to become disillusioned and drop out.

### **So is this the men's fault?**

Yes, absolutely. Every man is responsible for his walk with God so in some cases it is men's fault. This book is not to lay blame. It's to help readers understand the tremendous hurdles we have unwittingly placed in front of men as they try to pursue God. If it was totally men's fault, however, then men would be less religious in every religion. They would not be seeking God the way they are in the Middle East or in Asia. Men are just as religious as women. But there's something about Christianity that is disinteresting the men. In the New Testament there was no shortage of enthusiastic men, so in the last 2000 years something has happened. Is it the men's fault? Yes, but not entirely. There are institutional barriers that we have unintentionally erected that hinder their participation.

### **Is it the pastor's fault?**

Pastors have grown up in a church system that has taught them the wrong way to minister to men. It has taught them that men are developed from the pulpit, which they are not. Men are developed through small groups when they are led by a man they trust. If you talk to the great men of God they will tell you without exception about a man who invested in them or in a small group of men that was the catalyst for their growth. You ask a man what was the greatest sermon he ever heard; he doesn't remember. If you ask him who was the greatest man who ever led you to Christ and he'll be able to tell you two or three names instantly. So pastors are perpetuating the only system they know. But Jesus' system was based on investing in a small group of men. And when pastors begin to invest in their men through small groups you see tremendous growth throughout the church. You see numerical growth, financial growth, and spiritual growth. It is amazing what happens when you invest in men. That is the formula Jesus left us with and it still works today.

### **Feminists have told us that Christianity is male-dominated and patriarchal. Are you advocating an even more male-dominated church?**

First of all, Christianity is not male-dominated. The ranks of senior leadership are dominated by males, but these generals preside over an army that is almost completely female. So there are some churches that are patriarchal, they tend to be small or rural. But the fastest growing churches are not male-dominated. Barna's study showed that women are 56 percent more likely than men to hold the leadership position in a church other than the role of senior pastor. Even churches that are led by males tend to speak with a feminine accent. When you read press releases from churches they talk like women, they use that breezy language: We express regret...we seek peace and reconciliation...relationships. It sounds like something out of a Meg Ryan movie. Even though men are leading the church they don't act like normal men. The men who lead the church are more verbal, more sensitive, more relational. They have to be because the job requires it. If you're not relational you can't do hospital visitation. If you're not verbal you can't preach sermons. So the pastorate tends to attract men who are gifted in these feminine arts. That's not a cut on pastors; God bless them, we need them. But it's not like our churches are being led by a bunch of jocks. That's just simply not the case.

### **You say you're not calling men back to church, you're calling the church back to men.**

There are all kinds of people calling men. Promise Keepers, pastors, youth ministers are all calling men back to church. Let me give you an example of how bad it is from the churches' end. I've talked to men's ministry leaders around the country and they estimate

that only about 10 percent of churches in the U.S. and Canada even have a men's ministry of any kind. You compare that to the 80 or 90 percent that have ministries for women and children and right away you have a picture of the state of men in our church today. Even the men who go are so unenthusiastic about it that they can't create a ministry. Now the problem with men's ministry is that it's often just women's ministry for men. We expect them to act like women, to hug each other and hold hands and sing Kumba Ya, have long verbal studies. That's not how men bond. Men bond over shared experience. The big point I want to make about men's ministry is this: we have tried to contain the wild spirit of men in men's ministry. We've said, ok men, if you want to go out and be masculine and wild of heart you can do that at the breakfast we're having for you on Saturday morning at 8:00. That's where men can be men. But don't you bring that masculine spirit in here on Sunday morning and mess things up. Because men get a little rowdy, men tell it like it is, they sometimes hurt people's feelings. Jesus did the same thing because he was a man. So what I'm saying with my organization *Church for Men* is men have to grow Sunday morning or they won't come to Saturday morning pancake breakfast. That's the revolution I'm trying to create. Instead of trying to create some special ministry for men, men's ministry has to be 11 am Sunday morning. Men walk into a church service. They have to sense deep in their gut that this is something for them, not just something for their grandma. That's the big challenge I'm issuing. Create an environment where the men grow on Sunday morning and they don't even need the Saturday morning breakfast. Your entire church will grow, your men will grow, your women will be blessed because the men are growing. Unfortunately so many churches leave men so cold they're just not experiencing the abundant life that Jesus promised.

**Describe what that Sunday morning would look like.**

I took a stab at it with something I put on my website, it's called the Go for the guys Sunday action plan. It's a 19-page guide for a church that wants to attempt a men-friendly worship service. It's got all the details, the service is going to be an hour long, the teaching's going to be brief, it'll be built around an object lesson they can take away with them. I'm advocating a men's huddle at the end of the service where you call the men together and the pastor calls them to the front and gives them another object lesson to reinforce the message in their minds. And then actually gives them a touchstone or object that helps them remember through the week. It's really just a kid's sermon for big boys. The churches that are doing this are getting tremendous response from the men. The men are really enthusiastic about it because it gives them a very practical way of retaining the lesson and then applying it during the week because they have this object lesson riding around with them in their pocket. And they come back the next week and say, guess what I did. I had my eraser in my pocket and I remembered to forgive that guy because Jesus forgave me. It's just Christianity 101 but we've gotten away from it in the church. It's just a lot of little things you can do in your worship service to give men a bit of extra attention. I call it kind of an affirmative action program for the church's largest minority group. You give men a little bit of extra help, a little bit of extra watering and fertilizing and they grow like mad. But most men have never had any extra attention in the church and that's why they're so passive and bored.

**But aren't you in danger of just catering to men's weaknesses, giving them what they want, not what they need?**

I would say that's true. I am catering to men's weaknesses because Jesus always catered to the weakness of the people he encountered. So did the Apostle Paul. He said when I'm among the Greeks I'm a Greek, when I'm with the Jews I'm a Jew. So if we're among men we need to speak like men. But so much of our Christian culture is based around feminine expression that men just want to throw up. I got an email from a guy in a Methodist congregation and he said he thought I was crazy when he read my book. Then he went to church on Sunday and they had a liturgical dance featuring all these 12-year-old girls in pink dresses and he was just about ready to throw up because it was all these wood nymphs singing these songs to Mother Earth and he'd never noticed it before. He said it's so unbelievably feminized and it's happening right under our noses and we don't even notice it.

**You write: "Church is one of the last places men look for God." Really?**

It's true. If you asked a man, where can you invest your life for the biggest return, he's probably not going to say church. That's going to be far down the list behind career, behind family, behind recreational pursuits. It's not the kind of place men look for God or for significance anymore.

**You recommend shorter sermons. How has that been received?**

It's the most controversial thing I say. The big thing I always hear is this: Men can sit still for a three-hour baseball game. Why can't they sit still for a forty-five teaching of God's holy Word?

**What do you say?**

I say, think about what a baseball game's got. It's got competition. It's ritual combat. Men are watching good versus evil right in front of them. Your team is good, the other team is evil. It's participatory. There are frequent breaks to get up and stretch and move around. The outcome is uncertain. There's an element of tension and risk. Does church have any of that? The answer is no. It's completely predictable. It's completely verbal. There's almost no chance for a break. It's constant listening, or standing and singing. A Christian life that's built around a series of lectures and songs and a book on the lap study experience is not going to retain men very long. A sporting event speaks to them for the rest of their lives because it speaks to the deep story that's in a man's heart, the story of good versus evil, competition, risk, adventure, tension. So we need to figure out ways to bring those things back into the Christian life. They've departed. Jesus knew how to do it and we've just got to get back to that if we're going to retain the men.

**So if David Morrow is asked to speak on a Sunday morning, what does that service look like?**

I'm not a preacher and the last time I offered the message in a church it was ten minutes long. Here are some of the elements I introduced into it. First of all I pretended to be late. That's something I always do. I add that element of uncertainty. They introduce me and I don't show up. They say, I wonder where Dave is, and I walk in about three minutes late while they're fiddling with whatever. I've got ten eggs in my hand and I get up and start talking and as I do the eggs are falling out of my hand onto the ground and smashing on the floor of the church. Then I explain to the people what happened. Finally nine eggs are on the ground and one is in my hand. And I tell them that 90 percent of the boys who are raised in the church have been lost by the time they're in their teens and twenties. The eggs on the ground represent those boys. Only one boy out of ten who's raised in the church will remain faithful to it throughout his life. Then I challenge them and ask them,

what is it about our church system that's causing this to happen? Why can Islam retain boys throughout their lives but Christianity loses them all during their bold aggressive teenage years? Then I pray and it's done and people say Whoa! Because they remember it. And at the end of the service if I have the opportunity to have a men's huddle I call the guys up and I have some more eggs and I start throwing them out into the crowd. And I say, ok guys, you know what your role is? Catch the boys. Catch them before they fall. What are you doing for the boys? That sort of message stays with guys. A long verbal treatise full of theological truth and Greek and Hebrew translations of words—maybe there are some men in the church who like that, most of them have been to seminary—but men like truth they can use and chew on through the week. Now every time a guy cracks an egg he's thinking, What am I doing for the boys?

**And then there are probably a few ladies sitting there thinking, now I've got to clean the carpet.**

Well, I'll tell you another thing about those men. What happens is, after the huddle, the guy gets into the car with the wife and kids and what's the first thing the wife says? What happened up there in the huddle? And the guy reaches into his pocket and pulls out whatever and says, Pastor gave us this and it means we're supposed to forgive. And then what does the son say? Hey, Dad, let me see it and he gives it to his son. And guess what? For the first time in his life, Dad is being a spiritual leader to his family because he's got an object lesson that he's just taught to his family. When a man has something to offer spiritually, that transforms him because he's finally able to fulfill his role. The pastor has equipped the man to lead his family. We're such hypocrites in the church because we say, be a spiritual leader, but we don't equip the man to do it.

**Would you say men are changed by what they experience, not by what they are told?**

It's true. Absolutely true. Boys are the same way.

**Has this book ticked some people off?**

I really expected to be pilloried. But there has been very widespread acceptance. When the *New York Times* writes a favorable review, you know you're on to something. I guess in evangelical circles the big criticism has been the short sermon. I do get some criticism from women who think I'm advocating a male-dominated church, because they've been taught that whenever men gather women are oppressed. So the whole idea of men being active in church frightens them. I've also received limited grumblings from older main-line pastors in their 50s and 60s who grew up in a very male-oriented church in the 1950s and would see the return of men as a threat. It would upset their apple cart. They know how to deal with women, their entire staff is women and they're quite comfortable dealing with women all the time. If there was a bunch of wild-at-heart men running around the church that would be a threat to them. But really the opposition has been far outweighed by the positive. I just get kudos from all over the world all the time from men who are saying, Thank you for finally explaining me to myself. I love God with all my heart but if I have to sit through another inductive Bible study—

**The volume of response must have surprised you.**

Oh, it has. It's exceeded my wildest prayers. I always prayed that this would become more than a book, that it would become a movement. And God is answering that prayer. So many people, different walks of life, different backgrounds are taking this to heart and beginning to move the thermostat in their churches toward challenge, adventure, risk, the

things that men like. It's not that they didn't want those things before; it's just that they didn't realize that they had become comfortable and focused the church so much on keeping people happy in the pews. But when you put it in terms of men and boys needing these things, even people who are comfortable with the status quo see the need for change and are willing to go along, even a little ways. So it's been gratifying to see how God's people are taking these things and using it to create an environment where your average garden-variety guy can encounter Jesus Christ.

**What would you like to be remembered for? What would you like on your tombstone?**

I would like to be the guy who was responsible for there being at least one church in every town where men can encounter Jesus Christ. The praise and worship movement has really changed culture. It's made God more alive to people. We need a similar revolution with men. There needs to be a church in every town where guys can walk in and instantly know that God is on their side, that they can win in church, that there's a role, a place for them, that they can be used the way God made them instead of having to be squeezed into a feminine religious role. And if that's the case, in forty or fifty years, if there are men-friendly churches all over the country I will feel very good about what God has accomplished through my life.