

Why Men Don't Read...

Lin Ball church@home editor talks to Carl Beech, national director of Christian Vision for Men

If you are involved in a men's group in your church, you may have been challenged by the fact that men don't read ...

Well, men do read, of course ... car manuals, newspapers, blogs, horror comics, lifestyle magazines... But the facts can't be denied. Half of all males aged 16-24 haven't read an actual book in the last 12 months. Reading *books* seems a struggle for men. Is it in the genes? Or the education policies? Boys are twice as likely as girls to have difficulties learning to read. And girls are three times as likely as boys to borrow books from their local library.

And what about reading *the* book – the Bible? Well, we know that only a quarter of all churchgoing men – and men are only 43 per cent of churchgoers anyway – read the Bible at least once a week.

Carl Beech, national director of CHRISTIAN VISION FOR MEN – in active contact with about 300 men's groups around the country – feels personally challenged about men and reading, to the point of tackling the issues head-on, writing a book for men being published later this year.

'Of course, there are some men that love classical literature. But on the whole men are looking for more with less – they want plain speaking, pithy and direct writing, a punchy style that covers the ground. Jeremy Clarkson sells sackloads of books – all with short paragraphs, exaggerated points and no punches pulled. Blunt, gritty, direct.'

Given the challenges, why does Carl think he can produce a book that actually encourages men to read the Bible?

'I understand why men struggle to read the Bible. I think there are two main hurdles. One



Carl Beech

is perhaps more easily dealt with – and that's the issue of Bible versions. I recommend men to read *The New Living Translation* or – for a refreshing change – a paraphrase like *The Message*. Versions which read the way people actually speak are going to impact more on men. Many versions just don't flow.

'But the main issue is that men generally don't understand that the Bible is supposed to relate to the real world they live in.

'For example, if you're looking for the best-ever leadership and management training aid, look no further. The Bible! What about the best guide to being a Dad? The Bible! The best book to help you handle anger, lust, money, ambition ... all the issues men wrestle with? You've got it – the Bible! Men don't turn to the Bible because they haven't been shown that it's all in there – and that's what I'm aiming to do with my book SPADEWORK. I want to show them how the Bible can speak relevantly and powerfully into their everyday experiences.'

Does Carl think men read the Bible differently to women?

'Probably. They look for the "so what" question more. "So, I've read it, so what? What am I supposed to do with it?" Men are more task-oriented, more target-focused. Now, that's not always good because men also need to use the Bible just to "be" – to be with the Father God, to meditate, to pray. But that informs my approach to writing for men. Men need the Bible broken down for them into manageable bits, with the explanation related directly to contemporary issues.

'So, for example, the story of Daniel is massively relevant. It can so easily be related to the world of work in the twenty-first century. Daniel's story is all about the struggle with compromise. Where do you set

your boundaries? Are you prepared to be unpopular with those around you? Will you sacrifice career advancement if it means abandoning your principles?

'When men see that Daniel's experience can speak directly to what they're living through on the factory floor, in the classroom, on the checkout, in the office ... then the story comes to life!'

Carl says his book SPADEWORK will 'help men unpack the Scriptures and speak in a language ordinary blokes understand'. As might be expected, it focuses on male characters in the Bible but, rather unexpectedly, draws attention to some things about them that might have been overlooked in the past. Take Adam, for example. Have you ever wondered if, when he was turned out of Paradise, he did the usual man thing of *sulking!*



Spadework – ideal for men's groups to work through together – will be published by Scripture Union in September this year, a 144-page book priced at £7.99. There will be a companion magazine, **Groundbreaker**, a slim companion magazine out the same time, priced at £2.99. **Groundbreaker** will contain some of the material from **Spadework** together with some real life stories about contemporary men. This is a great evangelistic tool for men's groups to use to draw newcomers into their group.

Feel free!

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