

ENDORSEMENTS

Reading this book is like watching a God-centered surgeon perform his very own ego-bypass surgery. The importance of this little book is that Pastor Ross' procedure—meticulous, brave, alternately probing and humorous, unfailingly human—applies to anyone who seeks God's will and aspires to integrity. The soul-searching begins in a mundane way. A men's ministry has to be installed. Being in a rural area, men wanted to hunt and fish. Pastor Ross was not naturally of their ilk, but tried to be, and along the way, painfully admitted to himself "I didn't have the stuff," and that a colleague might be more qualified, and being a man who cared about "what God wanted," he asked himself: "Do you love God? Let me just say, if your primary reason for wanting to lead a men's ministry isn't to serve and please God, then you are wasting everyone's time." In this incident Pastor Ross finds the world in a grain of sand and then he delivers the goods: "Pastors are men with egos, insecurities, control issues, and a strong sense of responsibility. All of which can be perverted and lead to unrighteousness." Having put his ego aside, facing his insecurities, weaknesses and fears head on, Pastor Ross finds his way by getting out of the way. In stepping aside, he finds his bearings. The lesson for us all is quietly momentous, in clear fluid prose with a fully human heartbeat and laugh-out loud moments.

If I were a young person seeking a pastorate, or one who lost his way, I would embrace this slim book and its hard-won wisdom from a seasoned shepherd who stands between his flock and the wolves, and who is savvy enough to know that there are wolves without and wolves within, and the good shepherd must be ever wary. If I aspired to be that shepherd, I would make this book my vade mecum.

—William Mastrosimone. An American Playwright
Writer of: *The Beast, With Honors, Extremities, Into the West*

As a former Men's Pastor of a large church, I recognize the fact that a Sr. Pastor has so much on his plate that listening to each of these special interest groups about their passion is simply another thing to be placed on his Sr. Pastor plate. Pastor Ross Holtz is a Sr. Pastor and is expressing this same position in his book, *Are you in the Game?* Pastor Ross has done an excellent job of describing how these special interest groups and specifically the Men's Pastor can take on responsibility to assist the Pastor with his plate already being too full. This is an excellent read with practical illustrations of this process from a Sr. Pastor in the trenches. This will also teach the men's leader value lessons to gain the trust of the Sr. Pastor in your church.

—Darrel Billups, Th.D.
NCMM, Executive Director
National Coalition of Ministries to Men

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*a question for pastors and
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Ross Holtz


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DEDICATION

For Joshua's Men at The Summit and the men who lead
and led, Jay and Brad.

And for the Clan Holtz, *Infractus Quod Invictus*.



CONTENTS

Foreword—Chuck Stecker	xi
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction.	xvii

Part I My History, My Story

1. Men's Men and Me.	21
2. Then Came Brad	27
3. Trout Bums: Or How I Got Dragged into the Outdoors.	35
4. ISI, Chuck Stecker, and an Old Blue Mercedes	41
5. Showing Up	47

Part II We Have a Problem

6. What's Wrong with the Pastor?.	55
7. What's Wrong with the Men's Ministry Leader?	67

Part III The Fix

8. Jeff and Dale	79
9. Fixing the Pastor.	83
10. Fixing the Men's Ministry Leader	93
11. Yoked Together.	101
12. Are You the Guy?	119
13. Male Spirituality.	127
14. The Right Man in the Right Place	143
Epilogue.	151



FOREWORD

When I consider a book to read, two primary factors weigh the heaviest for me. The first factor is the subject, and more specifically, the manner in which it is being addressed. The second factor is the author. The primary concern is whether or not the author has the experience to speak with firsthand knowledge. I also consider whether he has earned the right to speak on the subject.

I am very excited about the book, *Are You in the Game or in the Way?* written by Ross Holtz. Pastor Ross is a man who has the experience and has earned the right to speak on the subject of ministering to and through men.

Full disclosure and complete transparency are always good when making a recommendation. For over five years, I have encouraged Pastor Ross to write this book. Few men have

ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

the years of experience and the personal engagement in men's ministry with the passion and commitment of this man.

Ministering to and through men is not something Ross does as a ministry task because he has been told it is part of his job description. He has a God-given passion to see men remade in the image of our Father.

Experience matters! Pastor Ross has poured his life into ministry to men; and as a result, he is an avid student of God's Word and how it applies to men to be who God created us to be. He is engaged in ministering to men from the individual man one-on-one, to the church, and to area-wide, regional, national, and international arenas.

Are You in the Game or in the Way? is more than a book to educate us on the mechanics of men's ministry or on how to host a successful men's breakfast. It is one man's journey from being a skeptic to a fully engaged pastor who sees the power of a clear ministry to and through men. Pastor Ross bares his heart and is, at times, brutally honest in a manner with which many pastors and/or men's leaders will resonate. Ross speaks with clarity regarding the relationship between the pastor and men's leader.

For many years, I have had an image in my mind of Ross Holtz. In September 1944, Brigadier General Charles Canham, assistant division commander of the 8th Infantry Division, was sent to accept the surrender of Lieutenant General Ramcke,

commander of the elite German 2nd Parachute Division, after the Battle for Brest. When BG Canham arrived, accompanied by several battle-weary soldiers, the German general, upon realizing that the American general was junior to him in rank, asked, “What are your credentials?”

Without hesitating, BG Canham turned, pointing to the battle-tested soldiers with him, and responded, “These are my credentials.”

If you need to see the credentials of Pastor Ross Holtz, you need only to look at the battle-tested men he has stood with and who stand with him. Those are his credentials. I know of no man who has better credentials to write this book.

It is also important to know that Pastor Ross Holtz was selected as the “Men’s Ministries Pastor of the Year” in 2014 by the National Coalition of Ministries to Men. This award is not given without significant vetting of the man and his impact on men’s ministries.

If you have any interest in men’s ministry at any level, Ross has given you and me a very special gift. His gift is his own life journey, complete with the joy and the heartbreaks.

In the years to come when pastors and men’s ministry leaders list the foundational books in their libraries for men’s ministry, *Are You in the Game or in the Way?* will be on their lists.

ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

In conclusion, Ross Holtz is more than my friend—he is my brother-in-arms and one of my trusted battle buddies. His life has impacted and ministered to me since the first day he and I met. I am a better man because of him in my life, and I am convinced this book will help you move closer to being the man you want to be and a better leader of other men.

—Chuck Stecker, president, A Chosen Generation



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my publisher, and wife, Athena Dean Holtz, who has lovingly cajoled me into finishing the book. You are helping me write the second chapter of my life. God loves you and so do I.

To my sons, daughter, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren: I am a rich man because of y'all. Through thick and thin we've sloshed on, *Broken, but Not Defeated*. And by God's good grace, we'll stand together through whatever comes.

To my friend, brother, and confidant, Chuck Stecker, who almost every week for several years asked, "How's the book coming?" You are the kind of man every guy needs as a friend, but most never find.

To Brad and Jay, faithful leaders of Joshua's Men. Brad, you pushed me into men's ministry and designed the ministry. Jay, you successfully built on the foundation and have led the men

ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

and served the church for more than a decade. You two taught me about ministering to men and have been faithful as warriors for the kingdom. We've stood shoulder to shoulder through some trying times, and you always had my back. I am proud to be your friend and compatriot.

To the people of The Summit in Enumclaw, Washington, especially Joshua's Men, who have walked with me and supported me for thirty years. Such endurance will get you points in heaven.

To Cathy, my late wife, who always said I had a book in me but didn't live to see it published. May you rest in peace in Yeshua's loving arms.



INTRODUCTION

In the last decade or so, we've seen a great increase in ministries to men in the American church. And it is high time. But all is not as it should be. While this is great news, there is a problem that has become evident.

We've got trouble, right here in River City!
Trouble with a capital "T" that rhymes with "P"
And that stands for Pool.¹

I'll amend that to say, "We've got trouble with a capital "T"
that rhymes with "P" . . . and that stands for Pastor!"

¹ "Ya Got Trouble," Robert Preston, *The Music Man*, 1962.

ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

According to Dr. Robert Lewis and many others, the major obstacle in getting ministries to men started is—say it by name—the senior pastor. The problem is simply that the guy who should be at the forefront is often in the way of the program getting off the ground.

Ah, but that isn't the whole story, is it? There is evidence that the problem is often two-sided. There is some room to share blame with the men who would be leaders of ministries to men. So we'll take a look at the problem from both sides.

I have a simple question for both the senior pastor and the men's ministry leader or wannabe:

Are you in the game, or in the way?

Let's talk.



PART I
*My History,
My Story*



MEN'S MEN AND ME

If the senior pastor gets behind a men's movement in his church it will happen. Without him, the church will starve for godly men to make a difference.

—Dr. Robert Lewis²

I have not always believed that the pastor holds such a crucial role. When I grew up in the church, the formal leadership was always men, but we all knew if anything was to be done, the women, the real power brokers in the church, would have to be behind it.

Men were an add-on in the life of the evangelical church, and they participated at whatever level the women could get them to. It seems counterintuitive, but anyone who worked in

² Dr. Robert Lewis in a presentation to Reload 14, National Coalition of Ministries to Men.

ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

the church for any time knew it was true. There were exceptions of course, but just enough to prove the rule.

The axiom I grew up with, and experienced in the early days of pastoring, was if it were not for the women, the church would have died sometime after the Civil War. I saw enough proof to believe it wholeheartedly. So not only was I not behind a ministry to men, I wasn't sure we needed one. Hard to believe, but that's how it was. And I can name you many, many pastors who do, or did, believe that same thing.

We tried to draw men in, of course. There were always the construction projects around the church that men would get behind, but on the spiritual plane, it was pretty much the women who made the wheels go round. From time to time we'd try to start men's breakfasts and other kinds of male-oriented events to get them interested, but they were largely short-term ministries that ran for a season and then died an untimely death. As unkind as it sounds, the men who did participate on a more-than-very-casual basis were more likely to enjoy sharing conversation with women than the kind of guys who did more outdoor activities. To continue the stereotype, they were usually more cerebral, bookish, gentle kinds of guys who fit the more sedate life of the church. It seemed to me then, and it still does, that many were men who seemed as if their passion, enthusiasm, and joie de vivre had been surgically

removed. Manly was not a term usually attributed to churchmen. That's not a totally fair representation of these "churched" men, but rarely were they the kind of men considered to be a "man's man."

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There were always a few who kept our hopes alive, but then again, they were always slightly suspect. Did they have some kind of secret lives we didn't know about? And, yes, that was sometimes true. They hadn't totally bought in to the passivity the church seems to instill, and sometimes require, in its male participants.



In the early eighties, I pastored a church in a small logging town in Washington State. One Sunday on my first fall there, we began our worship service with about fifty women, an old, rather infirm man, and myself in attendance. My question as I went on the platform was, "Did hunting season just start?" The women all nodded in one accord. I quickly learned what was important to the men of the community—and it wasn't the church.

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ARE YOU IN THE GAME OR IN THE WAY?

I wasn't open to becoming one of them. The hard truth was: I didn't have the stuff.

So I tried having a ministry to hunters. Yeah, well, they weren't the types to sit around, drink coffee, and talk about hunting—they wanted to be out in the woods doing it. My study group of hunters turned out to be a contradiction in terms.

Oh, when we had to roof the church they all showed up with friends and did a great job splitting shakes and carrying them up very tall ladders and nailing them down in grand style. The new roof was a thing of beauty. But the next day they were all too worn out or too disinterested to attend the dedication of the new roof. Once again it was largely the women, a few guys, and me.

I wanted to reach out to them and draw them into the church. They were good men and many were professing believers, but the church life just didn't appeal to them. They were friendly to me and were mostly sympathetic to the church, the only one in town, but evidenced no real attraction to what I was offering.

The problem, it turned out, was not the men of the church and community; it was with me. My passion was the Scriptures and the stuff of books. I was raised in the San Francisco area and had no knowledge of outdoor life. I wanted to recruit them

into my life, to the life I saw as the church. I was, inadvertently, attempting to draw them away from their own lifestyles and community to participate in mine. I learned I wasn't open to becoming one of them. The hard truth was: I didn't have the stuff.