

ABSTRACT

IRON SHARPENS IRON: HOW EXPERIENTIAL WORK GROUPS PROMOTE TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP AMONG MEN

by

Eric A. Flood

The church is failing men. Many churches do not have a vision for generative manhood or a strategy for engaging men in transformational discipleship. As a result, there are a lot of boys running around in men's bodies who are failing to fulfill their mission in the church, their families, and society. This dissertation considered the social justice implication of men's issues touching on the works of Philip Zimbardo and Hanna Rosin.

The literature review looked at the discipleship of men from multiple perspectives. The writings of Robert Bly, Robert Moore, and Douglas Gillette provided an introduction to the mythopoetic movement alongside a look at *the New Warrior Training Adventure* of the ManKind Project. The project considered masculine spirituality from the contributions of Gordon Dalbey, John Eldredge, Robert Lewis, David Murrow, and Richard Rohr. The writing of Patrick Arnold and John Miller developed an understanding of the masculine traits of God and a Hebrew understanding of fatherhood culminating in the life and ministry of Jesus. The research reviewed five biblical texts for insights and limitations in defining manhood. The developmental psychology of Erik Erikson and E. James Wilder outlined the journey from boyhood to manhood with the goal of generativity. The transformative learning theory of Jack

Mezirow offered tools to promote deep discipleship. Initiation pulled together elements of biblical theology, developmental psychology, and transformative learning to catalyze maturity. Finally, Lyman Coleman's *Men of Iron* material was introduced as a potential way for local churches to integrate and implement the concerns presented in the literature review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church's Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. The study utilized Coleman's *Men of Iron* material in both the three day retreat and the twelve week follow-up group. Fourteen men completed responses to a pre-retreat questionnaire and participated in post-retreat semi-structured interviews. Twelve men participated in post-follow-up group semi-structured interviews. The analytical grid for the interviews was Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and planning action.

The Men of Iron curriculum was a theocentric and church-based delivery system for transformative learning. Disciple-makers who want to partner with God for transformation must be able to leverage disorienting dilemmas. Critical reflection can be taken to new levels when learners move from passive observers to active participants. Men are capable of deep and honest discourse when a safe container is created. Generative affirmation results in men taking action in line with their personal mission. Discipling men cannot be done from a pedestal but is the courageous work of grand fathers.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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by

Eric A. Flood

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter explains how and why I chose the topic of transformational discipleship of men. It begins with an autobiographical description of events that led to the choice of material used in the research intervention. It explains the problem and purpose of the project. It outlines the research questions. It explains why this study matters. And it provides a preview of the literature reviewed and the research method employed.

Autobiographical Introduction

I walk into a gym full of men most Saturday mornings. They are not there to play. They are there to do the work of Iron Men. They gather for breakfast, biblical teaching, and small group discussions. Camaraderie, vulnerability, and a strong awareness of God's presence are experienced as men apply our theme verse, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17, NIV84). Attendance has doubled in recent years, and we are asking how to keep in step with the Spirit. I am privileged to work with an amazing associate who oversees our men's ministry. And we are both asking how to deepen transformation among these men in ways that ripple out to families, churches, our city, and future generations.

These questions were on my mind as I left for my first Doctor of Ministry residency at Asbury in 2012. God seemed to pursue me relentlessly regarding ministry to men all month long. The climax came when the men in my cohort group spent an evening in Lyman Coleman's living room. I was awed by this white-haired, alpha-male, pioneer

of small group ministry. He built rapport ridiculously fast then challenged our socks off. What was it about this man that gave him such boldness with men he had never met before? He is what I would later come to know as a community elder or grand father. He led us through a hybrid of Bible study, recovery ministry, group discussion, and boot camp. He referred to it as a “work group.”

The intensity ratcheted up when Lyman started asking for volunteers to go through some of his “processes.” When he got to me, he told me to imagine that I was standing on a football field in front of the work group. The playing field became a metaphor for my life’s timeline. I described my life today. Then I walked “ten yards down the field” representing ten year increments and described what I wanted to be doing at each stage. This continued until I came to the “end zone.” It was now one day before I died, and I sat in a wheelchair that was conveniently located in Lyman’s living room at the time. I was instructed to speak wisdom to my present day self. It felt awkward at first, then the dam burst. “Show some confidence. Stop wasting energy second guessing yourself and over analyzing your decisions. Don’t miss your daily disciplines. Keep your love for Christ white hot. Speak confidence into your wife and daughters. Be bold! Trust your gut! Invest in people!” By the time I was done, I was stirred up emotionally. The work group who had been watching offered affirmation. Then other processes were demonstrated that were more physical and more emotional. As I learned later, these experiences were part of a curriculum that Lyman was refining called “Men of Iron.”

My quest to learn more about Lyman’s material culminated in a weekend spent at La Mancha Lodge in the mountains of Buena Vista, CO, July, 2014. A group of pastors, professors, and Christian leaders were invited to experience “Men of Iron.” This initiation

retreat used experiential group work with the following goal: “Pumped and dangerous men. Turbo-charged. Fully loaded” (Coleman “Launching” 8). Though health issues prevented Lyman from participating in the weekend, his influence was deeply felt. Not only had he written the curriculum used, but he had also trained the leaders who facilitated our weekend. I was taken through experiential learning activities that helped heal past wounds, deepen identity in Christ, and clarify life mission. I composed the following personal mission statement that continues to inspire me:

I am a well-loved son, a husband, a father, a pastor-teacher, and a man of reflection and action. I exist to reproduce healthy disciples, families, and churches so the next generation will know the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. I do this by listening deeply, mentoring intentionally, teaching courageously, and leading faithfully so I may hear the Father say, “Well done!”

I was marked by my experience with Lyman as well as the weekend retreat. I dreamt about what might happen if men from my home church had an opportunity to experience this. What would happen if a growing number of men were trained in the local church to embrace robust manhood and live on mission to the glory of God? What might happen if a growing number of churches could deepen transformation among men? Could a movement begin that would make a difference in the broader culture? What would this take, and what was my role?

Statement of the Problem

The church is failing men. Many churches do not have a vision for generative manhood or a strategy for engaging men in transformational discipleship. As a result, there are a lot of boys running around in men’s bodies who are failing to fulfill their mission in the church, their families, and society. How did this happen when the church

was founded by a man of such infectious energy as Jesus Christ? He recruited twelve men, and they left everything to follow him. They were transformed in the laboratory of life—riding out a storm at sea, feeding a hungry crowd of people, and engaging the enemy to set captives free. After challenging assignments, they debriefed these experiences while walking along the road or eating a meal around a campfire. If we want more men that resemble the men Jesus trained, we need to recover his methods. It is time to return to a form of discipleship that is less like a classroom and more like a boot camp. What would happen if our ministry model for male discipleship integrated a biblical vision of manhood, developmental psychology, and transformative learning theory?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church's Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. Coleman's *Men of Iron* material was followed in both the three day retreat and the twelve week follow-up group. The data collection included a questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews with participants. The interview design reflected Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action.

Research Questions

The following questions were designed to guide this study:

Research Question #1

What were some of the participants' beliefs, experiences, and longings about the discipleship of men before the weekend retreat?

Research Question #2

What were the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men after the weekend retreat?

Research Question #3

What were the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men after the twelve week follow-up group?

Rationale for the Project

The first reason this study matters is that there is an identity crisis among men in our culture. The angst has been chronicled by multiple media outlets.

- *Newsweek*: "MAN UP!" which outlines, "Why We Need to Reimagine Masculinity" (Romano).
- *The Huffington Post*: "Men Talk about Masculinity," a video that concludes, "In an ideal world, masculinity wouldn't exist" ("Men Talk").
- *CNN*: "Why Men Are in Trouble" in which Bill Bennett reports, "Increasingly, the messages to boys about what it means to be a man are confusing" (Bennett)
- *TED Talks*: "The Demise of Guys" which asks, "Why are boys struggling?" (Zimbardo).
- *The Wall Street Journal*: "Where Have All the Good Men Gone?" which provocatively asks, "Why should (men) grow up? No one needs them anyway?" (Hymowitz).
- *The Atlantic Monthly*: "The End of Men" which represents an emerging view among young women that men "are the new ball and chain" (Rosin).

Though the title of Rosin's article might incite resentment among men, her article is quite balanced. While celebrating the progress of women, she also advocates for redemptive action among men:

It is fabulous to see girls and young women poised for success in the coming years. But allowing generations of boys to grow up feeling rootless and obsolete is not a recipe for a peaceful future. Men have few natural support groups and little access to social welfare; the men's-rights groups that do exist in the U.S. are taking on an angry, antiwoman edge. Marriages fall apart or never happen at all, and children are raised with no fathers. (Rosin "The End")

The challenges that men are facing in our culture urgently need addressed.

The second reason this study matters is that helping men fulfill their role as fathers—to biological children as well as vulnerable members of society—is ground zero for ending many of our society's greatest injustices. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Children living in female-headed families with no spouse present had a poverty rate over four times that of children in married-couple families in 2011 (47.6 percent compared to 10.9 percent)" (see Fig. 1.1). Thirty-four scholars and practitioners who want to see the creation of a White House Council on Boys and Men have gathered a compelling body of data. They list a variety of studies showing drug use, violent crime rates, suicide, and ability to show empathy are all correlated to the role of a father in a child's life ("Component 3").

We spend trillions of dollars every year fighting crime and responding to social disintegration. But we often attack the symptoms instead of root causes. "The association between the contributions of fathers to childrearing and the public status of women needs more study and analysis, but the evidence available leads to the conclusion that as fatherlessness grows, women's status will drop" (Popenoe 162). Education, business, and

government could initiate a number of interventions, but the concern of this project is what churches can do.

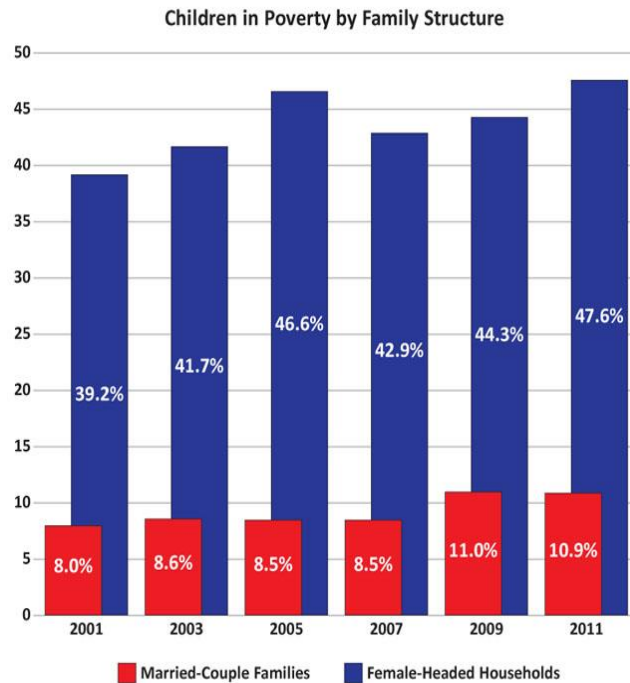


Fig. 1.1. Children in Poverty by Family Structure (“Information on Poverty”)

Kenny Luck challenges the church to promote social justice by targeting ministry to men in his book *Sleeping Giant*. He did this in a dramatic way at a conference on global activism. Two speakers preceded him addressing human trafficking and orphan care. The speakers were impassioned and compelling. Many in the audience were ready to take action. When it was his turn to speak, Luck affirmed compassionate care for the vulnerable, but he wanted to look beyond symptoms to address root problems. He

confronted a consistent factor in nearly every justice issue—the absence of mature men to care for children and vulnerable members of society.

The eight-hundred pound gorilla in the room when it comes to the church worldwide and its ability to deliver social justice will be directly related to its ability to effectively evangelize, equip, disciple, and deploy men to reach other men. You can skim the surface of an oil spill all day long, feel good about your work, and point to all the oil you have scooped up. But until you cap that well below the surface, it is fantasy to think you have made real progress toward a solution. (Loc 247)

Capping the well means delivering transformation to men who can fulfill their calling in society.

If we want to address social justice issues at the source, local churches must attract men, engage them in transformational discipleship, equip them to fulfill their job of caring for children, and empower them to be a father to the fatherless. Richard Rohr states, “The father wound is so deep and so all-pervasive in so many parts of the world that its healing could well be the most radical social reform conceivable. I am convinced that this distortion lies at the bottom of much crime, militarism, competitive greed, pathological need for leaders and family instability” (Rohr, *From Wild Man to Wise Man* 77). More than ever we need prophets in the spirit of Elijah who will “will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6, NAS). When men “have the capacity to act in the interest of others versus solely acting in the interest of themselves, the foundational infrastructures of societies and nations change” (Luck Loc 191).

But how are men transformed? This is the third reason this study is necessary. Churches need to retool with approaches that promote deep and lasting transformation. Churches miss the point when they organize large group rallies that attract men with

monster trucks, target shooting, or super star athletes then celebrate the number of men attracted. Men's ministries that present masculine-targeted, biblically-grounded teaching, that measure effectiveness by notebooks filled with outlines also fall short.

Christ didn't hand out a study guide; He demonstrated a life pleasing to God. His example, even more than His words, produced eleven men who shook the world. That is why a man who has sat in church for thirty years without much life change will be suddenly transformed after going on a mission trip. Men are changed by what they experience, not necessarily by what they are told" (Murrow, "Church as Classroom").

Church for men may be better served by feeling less like a classroom and more like a boot camp. Disciple makers may need to act less like a professor and more like a drill sergeant. Better yet, discipleship may need to look more like a family—a relationship between a father and a son. Following Jesus means following his methods. Recent adult education theory reinforces the genius of Jesus' experiential approach to the discipleship of adult men. These themes will be developed further in the literature review.

Definition of Key Terms

Four terms were especially pertinent to this project. *Generativity* is the quality of being life-giving; the ability to care for others, especially future generations. Erik Erikson used the term to describe the focus of healthy middle adulthood.

Transformative Learning is the theory of adult learning that Jack Mezirow developed. It describes the process adults go through in order to experience permanent change in their most basic perspectives.

Initiation is the deliberate process of calling of boys into manhood that involves a series of challenges guided by older men resulting in a new status in the community.

A *Work Group* is the term used by Lyman Coleman to describe the purpose of the small groups formed in the *Men of Iron* interventions. They promote transformation through experiential learning processes and debriefing.

Delimitations

This study is *male focused, church-based, experience driven, and leadership targeted*. While many insights related to both genders, the study *focused on males*. It is *church-based* because discipleship happens best in an environment where long-term relationships can be developed. Information transfer is not adequate to promote deep change. *Experience driven* learning helps engage emotions, discover new perspectives, and spark plans of action. The men selected were leaders in South Park Church's Iron Men ministry. A *leadership targeted* participant group offered mature perspectives during data collection.

Review of Relevant Literature

The literature review opened with a historical survey of forces that have influenced the journey from boyhood to manhood. Putney, Podles, and Miller summarized sweeping historical trends that touch on church history, the Industrial Revolution, and cultural forces. The writings of Robert Bly, Robert Moore, and Douglas Gillette provided an introduction to the mythopoetic movement alongside a look at *the New Warrior Training Adventure* of the ManKind Project. The Christian Men's Movement explored masculine spirituality represented by multiple authors including Gordon Dalbey, John Eldredge, Richard Rohr, and David Murrow. A trend in men's ministry from parachurch to local church was noted.

Theological foundations reflected on the character traits of God culminating in his role as loving, involved Father. The work of Patrick Arnold applied Jungian archetypes to understanding the character of God. This led to a description of human fatherhood that developed through the Hebrew Scriptures based on the work of John W. Miller. Jesus, who was the beneficiary of Hebrew fatherhood and the fatherhood of God, modeled fatherhood in his ministry. His method of discipleship was viewed through the lens of John's transformation from "Son of Thunder" to "Apostle of Love." This section culminated in a reevaluation of how to communicate the gospel to men.

Biblical foundations focused on five texts that offer both insights and limitations in defining manhood. Robert Lewis used the first two texts in the definition of manhood found in his popular men's curriculum, *The Quest for Authentic Manhood* (Genesis 2:6; 1 Corinthians 15:45-47). The next two texts used vocabulary that suggested the possibility of a gender-specific audience (1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 John 2:12-14). The final passage brought the discussion back to the basics and provided a foundation for the rest of the study (Genesis 1:27).

An overview of developmental psychology informed the journey from boyhood to manhood. The seminal work of Erik Erikson's life stage development formed the foundation for this section. His description of generativity as the goal of middle adulthood provided a goal to pursue in men's discipleship. Additional insights were considered in Levinson's seasons in a man's life as well as Wilder's passages for men. Each author offered warnings about the cumulative effects of poor resolution to developmental tasks. While developmental psychology helped diagnose the problem of stunted development, it did not chart a course for redemptive transformation.

How adults change was explored through Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. His ten stage process was summarized under four headings of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and planning action. Young contributed insightful application of transformative learning for Christian discipleship.

Initiation pulled together elements of biblical theology, developmental psychology, and transformative learning in ways that showed great potential to help boys—of any chronological age—become men. Initiation is the deliberate process of calling boys into manhood that involves a series of challenges guided by older men resulting in a new status in the community. Several authors in the realm of masculine spirituality called for the restoration of initiation practices. Lyman Coleman's *Men of Iron* material offered a way of initiating men through the local church.

Data Collection Method

Participants attended a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group to test the hunch that the *Men of Iron* materials engaged all four phases of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action. The intervention was conducted within the context of an existing men's ministry, Iron Men, in a local church context, South Park Church, Park Ridge, IL.

Participants

Those who participated included twelve Iron Men table leaders, two elders, and one pastoral staff member. The pastoral staff member consulted with me on many dimensions of the interventions but did not participate in the data collection interviews (see table 4.1. Retreat Participant Demographics).

Type of Research

This qualitative study utilized the ministry interventions of a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. Fourteen men completed responses to a pre-retreat questionnaire and participated in post-retreat semi-structured interviews. Twelve men participated in post-follow-up group semi-structured interviews. The analytical grid for the interviews was Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and planning action (see Appendix A). Interviews were video recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Data Collection

Participants completed a questionnaire on their retreat applications that provided data for research question number one (see Appendix B). Questions addressed beliefs, experiences, and longings (see table 3.1.). Men made a verbal commitment to attend the retreat before they received the application. This study included data from fourteen applications.

Semi-structured interviews following the retreat gathered data for question number two. An interview worksheet reflected the four phases of Mezirow's transformative learning theory (see Appendix C). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for deeper exploration of the examples cited utilizing spontaneous follow-up questions.

Semi-structured interviews after the follow-up group gathered data for question number three. An interview worksheet reflected the four phases of Mezirow's transformative learning theory (see Appendix D). The semi-structured nature of the

interview allowed for deeper exploration of the examples cited utilizing spontaneous follow-up questions.

Data Analysis

Nine questions on the retreat application gathered data to address Research Question number one. I summarized the data in lists and tables and analyzed them for common themes.

Post-retreat interviews gathered data for Research Question number two. I recorded handwritten notes during interviews on the interview worksheet (see Appendix C). I transcribed these notes into electronic versions. I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize and analyze data. Columns identified the four phase summary of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, and rows identified participant coding (see Appendix A). An additional tab of the spreadsheet summarized results of the Likert scale questions. I reviewed the spreadsheet for data that confirmed or refuted engagement of transformative learning practices in the retreat. Chapter four contains extensive observations summarized in tables where possible.

Post-retreat interviews gathered data for Research Question number 3. I recorded handwritten notes during interviews on the interview worksheet (see Appendix D). I transcribed these notes into electronic versions. I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize and analyze data. Columns identified the four phase summary of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, and rows identified participant coding. An additional tab of the spreadsheet summarized results of the Likert scale questions. I reviewed the spreadsheet for data that confirmed or refuted engagement of transformative learning

practices in the follow-up group. Chapter four contains extensive observations summarized in tables where possible.

Generalizability

An existing men's ministry in a local church with experienced small group leaders is a prerequisite to reproduce this study. *Men of Iron* materials are not available through retail sources at the time of writing, but a web site is in development that will distribute it. Until then, materials are available through a relational network that can provide coaching for implementation.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter two reviewed literature that informs deep discipleship of men touching on historical, theological, biblical, psychological, and educational themes. Chapter three outlined the ministry intervention including data collection method and analysis. Chapter four presents data from the questionnaire and interviews that correspond to the research questions and analytical grid. Chapter five presents the findings and recommendations for ministries that disciple men.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The literature review looked at the discipleship of men from multiple perspectives. It started with a summary of recent men's movements in both secular and Christian contexts. Then a biblical vision for manhood explored the character of God, fatherhood, and Jesus' discipleship of men. Then developmental psychology provided a framework for understanding a man's experiences throughout the entire lifespan. Then a review of transformative learning identified elements that catalyze deep change. Finally, the "Men of Iron" curriculum provided ways to reflect the multi-dimensional concerns of the literature review.

Description of Literature Surveyed

The literature review looked at the discipleship of men from multiple perspectives. The writings of Robert Bly, Robert Moore, and Douglas Gillette provided an introduction to the mythopoetic movement alongside a look at the *New Warrior Training Adventure* of the ManKind Project. The contributions of Gordon Dalbey, John Eldredge, Robert Lewis, David Murrow, and Richard Rohr provided an exploration of masculine spirituality. The writing of Patrick Arnold and John Miller developed an understanding of the masculine traits of God and a Hebrew understanding of fatherhood culminating in the life and ministry of Jesus. Five biblical texts supplied insights and limitations in defining manhood. The developmental psychology of Erik Erikson and E. James Wilder outlined the journey from boyhood to manhood with the goal of generativity. The transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow offered tools to

promote deep discipleship. Initiation pulled together elements of biblical theology, developmental psychology, and transformative learning to catalyze maturity. Finally, Lyman Coleman's *Men of Iron* material introduced a potential way for local churches to integrate and implement the concerns presented in the literature review

Historical Survey

How does a boy become a man? The reality for many boys in our society is that he never does. Boys are not maturing. "They're living off, and often with, their parents well into their 20s and even 30s, expanding their childhood into an age once reserved for starting a family and making a career" (Zimbardo and Duncan Loc 35). A brief summary of historical and cultural forces may help us understand the state of manhood in twenty-first century America.

For much of human history a father's work was intimately connected to his home. A man's children watched their father work as a farmer, artisan, or shopkeeper. They saw him interact with their mother, coworkers, and customers. They often joined him in his trade as a way to provide for the family. This environment created natural opportunities for boys to be trained in the ways of manhood. Then the era arrived when fathers left home to spend the day at the factory or office. One of the significant repercussions of the Industrial Revolution was that a father's world suddenly became inaccessible to his children. "A degree of father-deprivation unknown in many pre-industrial societies was the result" (Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering* 113).

The forces that inhibit the maturing of boys into generative members of society continue to increase. The economic recession that followed the financial crisis of 2007-2008 has had a lasting impact on the ability of men to find jobs. The economy has

continued to move away from manufacturing, which has favored men, to information and services, which often favor women. “Of the 15 job categories projected to grow the most in the next decade in the U.S., all but two are occupied primarily by women.” (Rosin “The End”). This is happening at a time when boys are falling behind in education. Drawing data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Jantz and Gurian provide the following snapshot:

- For every 100 girls suspended from public elementary and secondary school, 215 boys are suspended.
- For every 100 girls expelled from public elementary and secondary schools, 297 boys are expelled.
- For every 100 American women who earn a bachelor’s degree, 75 American men earn a bachelor’s degree.
- For every 100 American women who earn a master’s degree, 66 American men earn the same degree. (Loc 3672).

The repercussions of addiction to video games and pornography are making it ever harder for boys to succeed in traditional education.

This new kind of addictive arousal traps users into an expanded present hedonistic time zone. Past and future are distant and remote, as the present moment expands to dominate everything. And the present is totally dynamic, with images changing constantly. Boys’ brains are being digitally rewired in a totally new way to demand change, novelty, excitement and constant stimulation. And their brains are being catered to by porn on demand and by video games at a flick of the switch or a click of the mouse. That means they are becoming totally out of sync in traditional school classes, which are analog, static and interactively passive. (Zimbardo and Duncan Loc 109)

The gravitational pull to stay in boyhood is ever increasing.

Many women are fed up with self-absorbed, pleasure-seeking males. One woman speaks for her generation about the current state of extended boyhood:

Relatively affluent, free of family responsibilities, and entertained by an array of media devoted to his every pleasure, the single young man can live in pig heaven—and often does. Women put up with him for a while, but then in fear and disgust either give up on any idea of a husband and kids or just go to a sperm bank and get the DNA without the troublesome man. But these rational choices on the part of women only serve to legitimize men's attachment to the sand box. Why should they grow up? No one needs them anyway. There's nothing they have to do. (Hymowitz)

How will men respond? Will they laugh and return to video games, pornography, and ESPN?

Bill Bennett seems to understand the problem but offers little in the way of solution. “We may need to say to a number of our twenty-something men, ‘Get off the video games five hours a day, get yourself together, get a challenging job and get married.’ It's time for men to man up” (Bennett “Why Men”). It will take a lot more than criticism and guilt to motivate the next generation of boys to become men. Thankfully there are movements that have been paying attention and offer some help.

Secular Men’s Movement

As gender roles underwent a revolution in the twentieth century, a reaction movement emerged in 1985 known as the ManKind Project (MKP). The founders openly attribute its formation to the feminist movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s that left men confused about who they were and what society expected of them (Klegman). The entry point of MKP is a weekend gathering of men known as the *New Warrior Training Adventure* (NWTA). It draws from Jungian archetypes and traditional initiation rituals packaged for modern men. “It is the ‘hero's journey’ of classical literature and myth that

has nearly disappeared in modern culture. We ask men to stop living vicariously through movies, television, addictions and distractions and step up into their own adventure – in real time and surrounded by other men” (“The New Warrior Training Adventure”). The purpose is “an effort to help men to adopt a mature masculinity, live with integrity and awareness of feelings, and a sense of personal mission” (Goll 79). That 54,000 men have completed the *New Warrior Training Adventure* in its first thirty years of existence is evidence of society’s hunger for help in developing a mature and healthy masculinity (“New Warrior? New Masculinity?”).

John Goll undertook a study to measure the effectiveness of the *New Warrior Training Adventure* using the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) that assesses self-actualization. The self-actualizing person is able to maintain a positive outlook on life, live in the present, and make good use of one’s abilities. Participants took the Personal Orientation Inventory approximately one week before participation in the *New Warrior Training Adventure* then again approximately one month after. Goll concluded that the “data indicate that a substantial change toward self-actualization may be positively related to participation in the NWTA” (94). While initial results seem to be positive, long-term behavior change was beyond the scope of the study.

The ManKind Project draws from the mythopoetic stream of the contemporary men’s movement. It draws from a broad range of literature, poetry, and myth to define positive and negative dimensions of masculinity. Robert Bly is often credited with launching this movement through his adaptation of an ancient myth that is elaborated in his 1990 book, *Iron John: A Book about Men*. The tale was written down by the Grimm brothers but has roots that are thousands of years old. It is the story of a boy’s encounter

with a wild man who takes him deep into the forest where he faces hardship and learns the way of men. It is only after transformation that he returns to society ready to take up his role as a warrior, marry a wife, and be reunited with his family. This is much more than fairy tale to Bly. It is sacred text that has the power to awaken something primal in the soul of men of all ages. “Each of us needs to imagine how to bring the interior warriors back to life, and it is not physical work so much as imaginative work” (Bly 178).

Moore and Gillette build on this imaginative work through the use of Jungian archetypes in their book *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. They go into great detail describing the path from “boy psychology” to “man psychology.” The mature masculine learns how to access and balance the energies embodied by the four archetypes resulting in “a new masculine personality that is marked by calm, compassion, clarity of vision, and generativity” (Moore and Gillette 6). These are developed through the active imagination, admirable elders, and ritual initiation.

Hero tales abound and can serve as a starting point for imagining a more mature masculinity. One surprisingly well told tale is the 2013 film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* starring Ben Stiller (a modern adaptation James Thurber’s short story). To nearly everyone else, he is a mild-mannered and passive man. But in his imagination, Walter rescues dogs from burning buildings, explores arctic glaciers, and woos beautiful women. Walter works for *Life* magazine during a time of widespread downsizing. The inciting incident is the loss of a photo negative that was intended for the cover of the final issue of the magazine. Walter decides to go on a quest to find it. His journey involves jumping out of a helicopter into a frigid ocean, racing away from an erupting volcano, and scaling Mt.

Everest to encounter a modern-day counterpart to Iron John. He recovers the photo negative and returns home a changed man. He wins the heart of a woman and becomes a father figure to her son. Walter Mitty was transformed from a boy in a man's body to a courageous and generative man.

This is the stuff that makes men come alive. "The hero—the saver of worlds, the slayer of dragons, the rescuer of the needy—is an archetype, an icon so enduring and universal that most people recognize it across time and culture" (Jantz and Gurian Loc 1295). What does it mean to be a man today? And what does it mean to be a man who follows Jesus?

Christian Men's Movement

In the vibrancy of the early church, men provided strong leadership and the contributions of women were honored (Acts 16:13-15; 18:26). It seems a balance of ministry among men and women continued for several centuries.

Before the year 1200, men and women played an equal role in the life of the church (of which the clergy was a miniscule part). Christianity had indeed found a place for femininity and given it high value, but men perceived the religion itself as sufficiently masculine that they felt no need to distance themselves from it to attain a masculine identity. (Podles 101)

Various forces caused a shift in the Middle Ages. Mary was elevated to the level of veneration as co-redemptrix around the twelfth century (Finger, "Mariology" 686).

Though bridal imagery was widely used throughout church history, it increasingly repelled men (Podles 119). The clergy was professionalized undermining the contributions of the common man (Murrow, *Why Men* 55). These influences combined with several others to create a culture of passive receptivity in churches that turned men away.

The Protestant Reformation seemed to re-energize men. Yet an imbalance in church participation persisted in the following generations. Church membership registers in colonial New England show women far outnumbering men even though men outnumbered women in the general population (Podles 19). The fear that the church was losing men became elevated in America during the Victorian era. Christians responded by launching a variety of parachurch organizations in an effort to engage men.

These opponents of feminized religion were not only active in well-known organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA; they were also instrumental in forming ‘surprisingly underexploited’ bodies such as the Protestant church brotherhoods, the Student Volunteer Movement, the Knights of King Arthur, and the Men and Religion Forward movement, all of which worked hard to make Christianity a religion to which ‘he-men’ and boys might proudly belong. (Putney 7)

During the twentieth century, ministry to men continued to center around parachurch ministries such as the Navigators, Christian Businessmen’s Fellowship, and eventually Promise Keepers. Ministry to men in local churches was primarily event driven where men were often relegated to the monthly prayer breakfast, ushering, and service projects.

Some Christian authors were paying attention to the secular men’s movement, and books about masculine spirituality began appearing. One of the first was *Healing the Masculine Soul* by Gordon Dalbey in 1988. The mythopoetic movement and Jungian archetypes influenced how biblical manhood was described. Stu Weber’s *Tender Warrior* echoes Moore and Gillette when he writes: “A ‘good man’ is the balance of the four. A good warrior is also a sensitive lover. A Tender Warrior.[sic] A good friend is always a helpful mentor. The four are inseparable in a good man” (Weber 44). John Eldredge was doing parallel work when he drew on “guy movies” in *Wild at Heart*. He further developed masculine archetypes in *The Way of the Wild Heart* and *Fathered by God*.

While much of his writing is energizing, his effort to fit archetypes into life stages seems forced. Richard Rohr takes time in *Adam's Return* to unpack the core archetypes. And Patrick Arnold has the most extensive treatment of the Bible through the lens of archetypes in *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings* that culminates in a chapter on the “The Masculinity of God.”

Concurrent with the appearance of this literature was the continued specialization of church programming and staffing according to life stage and demographics. Some churches began hiring staff to focus on ministry to men. Steve Sonderman was one of the first full-time pastors devoted to men's ministry in the country. He began his role of leading men at Elmbrook Church near Milwaukee, WI, in 1992. I had the privilege of sitting down with Steve in his office to discuss ministry to men. One of his first comments was that he was glad that Promise Keepers lost momentum because it pushed men's ministry into local churches (Sonderman). A widely used curriculum that further catalyzed men's ministries in local churches was *Men's Fraternity: Quest for Authentic Manhood* by Robert Lewis produced by Lifeway Publishers in 2005. Soon groups across the country were gathering to watch these videos or adapt the material for live teaching. In spite of specialized programming, staffing, curriculum, and men's gatherings in local churches, some observers were still unsatisfied with the outcomes. The deficiency was defining discipleship as classroom education. David Murrow expressed his concerns in *The Map: The Way of All Great Men*. He called for discipleship methods that incorporated more grit, higher expectations, and challenging experiences. He began asking what might happen if discipleship resembled boot camp more than a classroom (Murrow, *The Map* 225). That would mean that a disciple-maker would be more of a drill

sergeant than a classroom instructor. Thomas Hart gets to the bottom line in his dissertation that explores *What Attracts Men to Church Programs* when he says, “I believe that Murrow’s observation that men follow men and not programs is true. Men want leaders who are decisive, tough and fair like Jesus, the most courageous masculine man ever to walk the earth” (169).

After sixteen years as a pastor, Greg Huston left local church ministry looking for better methods for catalyzing transformation (“History”). The result was *The Crucible Project* that now conducts retreats, groups, and coaching. The home page of their web site describes a weekend experience as follows: “We give men an opportunity to wrestle with God over issues in their lives where they may be stuck or are not experiencing the freedom and power they want to experience. Finally, we invite men to embrace their God-given masculinity and live at new levels of authenticity, passion and power.” John Eldredge also developed retreat experiences he called “Wild at Heart Boot Camp.” The retreats of Huston and Eldredge appear to have similarities to the *New Warrior Training Adventure* redesigned with a Christian imagination. There seems to be great potential for deep transformation through these more experiential approaches to discipleship. But the parachurch nature of the retreats makes ongoing community and application difficult. What can local church men’s ministries learn and apply? Before returning to this question, we need to address several theological and biblical issues.

Theological Foundations

David Murrow asks, “How did a religion founded by a man and his twelve male followers gain the reputation as a ‘ladies’ club’ in the minds of men” (*The Map* 43)? This is a great question, but it doesn’t go far enough. How did a religion with foundations in a

patriarchal society and a deity revealed in language that is overwhelmingly masculine lose influence among men? Does the Bible offer a vision of masculinity that remains relevant today in a world that is less and less patriarchal?

God as Father

To speak about God is to be confronted with the limitations of language and human comprehension. God is spirit. Yet he is also personal. He reveals himself in Scripture through a wide variety of metaphors. As we interpret these metaphors, should we strive for language that is gender-neutral? Should we replace “Father” with “Parent” and “King” with “Sovereign”? Or do we lose valuable meaning when we resort to these terms? Gerald Bray contends that gender does matter when talking about God.

In his personhood, God is clearly ‘masculine’, although the Bible is careful to point out that both men and women have been created in his image (Gen. 1:27). In himself, God is beyond the limitations of human gender or sexuality, but that does not mean that his masculinity is purely conventional. Female deities were common in the ancient world, and there is no *a priori* reason why the God of the Bible should not have revealed himself in a female form. Had gender been completely irrelevant, there might have been a mixture of usage in Scripture, or even a third form created specially for him. As it is, his masculinity is consistently maintained, even if he is sometimes credited with apparently ‘female’ characteristics, such as the ability to give birth (Ps. 2:7; Heb. 1:5). (514)

There are feminine metaphors for God in Scripture that should be acknowledged, explained, and celebrated (Isaiah 49:15; 66:13). Yet the overwhelming majority of references are male. We empty both the masculine and feminine references of essential meaning when we settle for gender-neutral language when referring to God.

Jesuit scholar Patrick Arnold leverages masculine archetypes to explain the significance of God’s revelation as primarily male. While he is quick to celebrate progress in the women’s movement of the past century, he expresses deep concern that

the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. The images he uses to describe God will seem irreverent to some, yet they are demonstrably biblical:

“God the Wildman” is associated with the Hebrew name *El Shaddai*, commonly translated “Almighty.” “Lurking behind a host of passages, however, is the archetype of a wildly free male who rides on the clouds, hurls lightning shafts, rumbles the thunder, waters the deserts, feeds the lions, and plays with the sea-monsters” (Arnold 204). The God of the Bible cannot be tamed, cajoled, bribed, or refashioned in any way people choose. “God the Wildman” elicits appropriate fear and awe (Job 42:1-6).

“God the Warrior” is linked to God’s personal name *Yahweh*, I AM. This is the God of the Exodus who fights for his people and delivers them. One could add “The LORD of hosts” (NIV) also translated “The LORD of Heaven’s Armies” (NLT). Given the deeply regrettable history of warfare associated with crusades and other travesties, Christians are quick to distance themselves from a warring God. Yet we do so to our own destruction. “The biblical God is a warrior who hates battle, but whose righteousness finally will not shrink from confronting forcefully the perversion of creation” (Arnold 208). He wars against all that stands in opposition to his rule. He battles with the human heart that so quickly would set itself up as god. He wars against the very things that would otherwise kill humans such as pride and idolatry (James 4:4-10). He fights for the poor, the oppressed, and the lonely (Deuteronomy 10:18). This is the God who will confront and crush evil once and for all (Revelation 19-20).

In the midst of our chaotic world comes the announcement that “God is King.” This is the central declaration of praise in the enthronement Psalms (93-100). “The King is the archetype of order, authority, and generativity; applied to God, the metaphor is

nothing less than a ringing statement of human hope that life is not purely random, accidental, or meaningless” (Arnold 212). This is the central message on the lips of Jesus as he announces, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14). It is the good news that the reign of the true King is breaking into the world through his Son.

These strong, masculine names for God climax in “God the Father.” Jesus reveals that the God of the universe is “Abba,” dear Father (Mark 14:36). And Paul reveals that this is the heart cry of all who are born of the Spirit (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). The God of the Bible is the almighty, victorious, incomparable King over all, and we are his children. Packer reinforces the centrality of this description of God when he says, “You sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator” (*Knowing God* 201). Ellen Davis deepens the definition of biblical fatherhood by providing context from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Here the crucial point is that long before Jesus and the New Testament writers took up the symbol of God the Father, the Hebrew Scriptures had already supplied images of fatherhood that make this a potent symbol of suffering love. Most obvious is Malachi’s representation of God, the Father of contemptuous children, crying out: ‘And if I am a father, then where is my honor?’ (Mal 1:6). Since, in the Christian ordering of the Old Testament, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, this pained question receives an immediate answer in the good news of Jesus Christ, the faithful Son. (Loc 471)

She goes on to list several key images of human fathers that inform the symbol:

- Abraham is torn between two loyalties on Mt. Moriah and responds with great relief when God provides the sacrifice sparing his promised son (Genesis 22).

- David mourns for his rebellious son, Absalom, in spite of the harm he had inflicted. David even wished he could have died in his son's place (2 Samuel 18:33).
- Job is concerned for the purity of his children, grieves deeply over their deaths, and finds renewed joy through more children (Job 1:5, 20-22; 42:14-17).

“Thus ‘father’ is already a highly condensed expression of love that suffers unimaginably and yet finds resources to love still more and in unexpected ways—all this before the symbol is taken up and expanded by Jesus and the evangelists!” (Davis Loc 471).

Referring to God as “Father” is deeply rooted in the biblical narrative. Pragmatic reasons can be added for retaining masculine language when speaking of God.

It is unfortunate that, at a time when millions of families so desperately need models and examples of father-involvement, religious intellectuals should argue for the annihilation of precisely the metaphor that most exemplifies and models masculine commitment and care: God the Father.... Like the poorest family in the roughest ghetto, the human family does not need less ‘Father’ energy—it needs more of it. (Arnold 214)

Hebrew Fatherhood

A fascinating cultural history of fatherhood is found in John W. Miller's book *Biblical Faith and Fathering*. Biology dictates a much stronger natural bond between mother and child than father and child. “It is in this sense that the father-involved family must be viewed as a cultural artifact, a creation of the human species—some would argue, the definitive cultural artifact that lies at the foundation of all other cultural achievements and most uniquely distinguishes what it means to be human from other forms of life on this planet” (Miller 19).

The Hebrew nation emerged out of a society where fatherhood was characterized in Ancient Near Eastern literature as weak, ineffective, passive, tyrannical, and helpless (Miller 43-52, 109).

In the Bible we read of an ancient near eastern people who broke free of the prevailing myths. And what enabled them to do so, they testify, were events and revelations (Ex 20:2) that persuaded them that the strongest, most benevolent power at work in the universe (and the one power therefore to be seriously attended to, Ex 20:3) is neither son, daughter, nor mother, but a unique father-God who is compassionately and effectively involved and concerned with the welfare of his children (Ex 34:6f; Dt 32:6; Jer 3:19; Is 63:16; Mal 2:10; Lk 11:2; Eph 3:14f). (Miller 110)

A fascinating summary follows of transformed fatherhood found in the bible. As males become acquainted with this Father-God, they become more secure and less needful of heroic ways of asserting themselves (Proverbs 14:26; Micah 6:8). With a stronger sense of identity that transcended the family or tribe, men felt greater freedom to leave father and mother to establish their own families (Genesis 2:24). In this environment, marital fidelity increased, love was exalted, and women were increasingly honored as equals (Genesis 2:18-24; Proverbs 31:10-31). Sexual conduct that disrupted marriage was increasingly opposed (Proverbs 5; Malachi 2:13-16). Fathers began to take on complementary roles to their wives in child-caretaking and discipline (Proverbs 1:1-19; 23:13f). Daily contact with the family allowed for instruction prompted by questions from children (Exodus 12:26; 13:14; Deuteronomy 6:6-9, 20f; 11:19). “The basic content and purpose of these conversations is movingly summarized in Psalm 78:4-7, where fathers declare that what they had heard from their fathers should be shared with the next generation: namely, the titles of Yahweh, his power, his mighty deeds, and the decrees and laws he has instituted in Israel” (Miller 111). Miller concludes this section by going

so far as to say that the Bible is fundamentally a body of writings by fathers for sons and younger fathers instructing them how to be loving fathers (111).

While the Bible is littered with family breakdown, it simultaneously elevates the role of the loving, father-involved family. Hebrew fathers were expected to fulfill their role as priest in the family by taking the lead role in the celebration of Passover (Exodus 12:1-28; 13:3-10), redemption of the first-born (Exodus 12:43-51; 13:1-2, 11-16), and circumcision (Genesis 17:12; Exodus 12:48-51; Leviticus 12:3). These sacred dramas repeatedly communicated to the next generation what was important. This was done in a context of daily dialog and storytelling that integrated faith, work, home, and play (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:3-8; Proverbs). The closing words of the Old Testament canon in most English Bibles warn of the breakdown of father-child relationships while extending hope for redemption of this relationship: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Malachi 4:5-6, ESV). The family codes found in the epistles reinforce the role of father as teacher and disciple-maker (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). Consistent in both Old and New Testaments is the Fatherhood of God that becomes the source and model of all good fathering (Ephesians 3:14-21; 5:1).

New Testament Christianity expanded focus on the nuclear family to focus on the spiritual family. “Undoubtedly, Christianity’s focus on spiritual family contributed significantly to its missionary success worldwide. At the same time, deemphasizing the biological family as it sometimes has may make it vulnerable to anti-family pressures in the cultures to which it has spread” (Miller 100). Great potential exists in retrieving and

renewing the traditional Hebrew ceremonies in ways that are distinctively Christian.

Miller proposes that we:

1. Examine and strengthen church rituals in ways that support parenting roles, especially the father's role. This would shift child dedication (or baptism) emphasis from focus on the child to focus on the parents' responsibilities.
2. Develop a ritual for entering teen years that takes place at home and includes extended family and friends.
3. Provide specific training and ongoing guidance to fathers that explains explicitly their responsibilities in the family (Miller 147-148).

Few fathers understand how important their role is in the development of children from the earliest age. Psychological research continues to establish a role for fathers equally important and complementary to mothers. Miller identifies three key contributions:

1. As a "second other," fathers can help children put a healthy distance between themselves and mothers in ways that prepare them for future individuality.
2. Fathers can help children learn to control their aggressive impulses so vividly displayed during the "terrible twos" and beyond.
3. The presence of both mom and dad contributes to an understanding of "body-congruent gender-identities" for both boys and girls (Miller 115).

"So urgent is a child's own felt need for a father during these first years that one researcher has termed it 'father hunger' and another likens the father role at this time of his children's lives to that of a lifeguard rescuing a child desperately trying to reach shore

while being pursued by a dragon” (Miller 116). Given the current trends of fatherlessness, it seems that father hunger has reached epidemic proportions.

Jesus: The Model of Manhood

Both biological and spiritual fatherhood were central in Jesus’ own formation. Jesus grew up under the influence of faithful Jewish parents who observed Torah. Though there is limited knowledge of Jesus’ youth, there is evidence that Joseph fulfilled his priestly role in the family beginning with redemption of the firstborn and naming of Jesus on the eighth day (Luke 2:22-24). The outcome was that Jesus grew physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (Luke 2:39-40). By the age of twelve Jesus was taking initiative to understand his identity as the Son of God (Luke 2:41-52). He showed independence even as he respected the authority of his parents. The next event recorded was his baptism. Robert Lewis reflects, “Why do I see this as the preeminent event in Jesus’ life? Because at his baptism, the two most important elements in a son’s life—the embrace of a transcendent cause and a father’s affirmation—came together in one unforgettable, breathtaking moment” (*Raising a Modern Day Knight* 140).

The masculine archetypes found throughout literature and used above to describe God are dramatically displayed in Jesus. He is the “Wildman” living among the animals and battling evil in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13). He is the heroic “Warrior” who sacrifices his life for others (Mark 10:45). And he is the King of kings who will soon establish his rule on earth (Revelation 19:11-16). This is no meek and mild Jesus but the epitome of strength, even fierceness. The New Testament reveals Jesus as a man willing to fight for purity in worship even if it means getting physical (John 2:13-22). He is not afraid to rebuke his antagonists for hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-39) or his friends for

opposition (Matthew 16:23). When he is revealed at the end of the age, we are told to expect a victorious warrior with fire blazing from his eyes and a sword coming out of his mouth (Revelation 1:9-18). And though he did not have a wife or biological children, he is “Patriarch” blessing children and fathering men (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 5:1-11). “Jesus obviously knew how to father his followers, nurture their potential, discipline their laziness, and confront their weaknesses. Like any true mentor and successful leader, Jesus held each of them in his heart and cared for each of them like a son” (Arnold 189).

David Murrow seeks to address our impoverished view of Jesus in his book *The Map: The Way of All Great Men*. The first half of the book is meant to be a page-turning thriller that will grab men’s attention. One is tempted to dismiss it as a Christianized imitation of *The Da Vinci Code*. It proposes that Matthew’s Gospel contains a hidden map to true manhood. The dubious premise is redeemed by the introduction of Gerasimos, a tough-as-nails, Greek Orthodox monk. He takes discipleship to a new (or more accurately “old”) level using sharp words, confrontation, earthy metaphors, risky adventures, and real-life situations. Murrow spins his tale for half the book then alters the format in part two explaining his concept of a map to true manhood.

The map concept emerged after Murrow read the Gospel of Matthew straight through in one sitting. By absorbing the overarching storyline, he noticed a pattern summarized as follows (*The Map* 104ff.):

- *The Journey of Submission (Matthew 1-7)*: Jesus enters the world as a helpless baby and grows up under the authority of his parents. He learns obedience, surrender, and dependence on his Father through his baptism and temptation in

the wilderness. The themes found in the Sermon on the Mount reinforce this journey focusing on qualities of humility, meekness, and submission.

- *The Journey of Strength (Matthew 8-25)*: Jesus announces the arrival of the kingdom and demonstrates it with powerful actions. He heals diseases, casts out demons, and confronts hypocrisy in ways that would make many people blush or walk away. Along the way he trains twelve men. He is bold, outspoken, and determined.
- *The Journey of Sacrifice (Matthew 26-28)*: Jesus focuses again on qualities of responsiveness and submission. He surrenders to the Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is silent before his accusers. He refuses to retaliate against his tormentors. He is willing to give up his life for others.

When Jesus calls men to "Follow me," Murrow suggests that he is calling a man to follow him on these three journeys (the "three journeys" are somewhat obscured by the five points of fig. 2.1.).

In the heart of every man is a desire to reach the summit, but few make it out of the foothills. A feminine symbol is on the left side of the mountain and a masculine symbol on the right. Murrow says that man must develop and balance both sides of his nature: the soft, responsive side (feminine) and the hard, demanding side (masculine).

The numbers correspond to the following movements:

1. Every man starts on the feminine side in the womb of his mother and is dependent upon her for the first several years.

2. At some point in his life a boy breaks free from his mother and moves to the “macho foothills” where he is enthralled with manliness. If he stays there, he will remain self-centered, indulgent, and power-hungry.
3. When Jesus calls a man, he calls him to surrender. He must learn to humbly submit to his Lord and live in constant dependence on God. Murrow calls this is a movement toward the “feminine”.
4. Once a man has learned submission, God calls him to accomplish a mission. A man is called to muster his gifts, experience, and resources to advance God’s Kingdom. This is a movement back towards the “masculine” and is where a man should spend most of his life.
5. The final journey is one of sacrifice. It involves investing in others, passing on the baton, and loving others sacrificially.

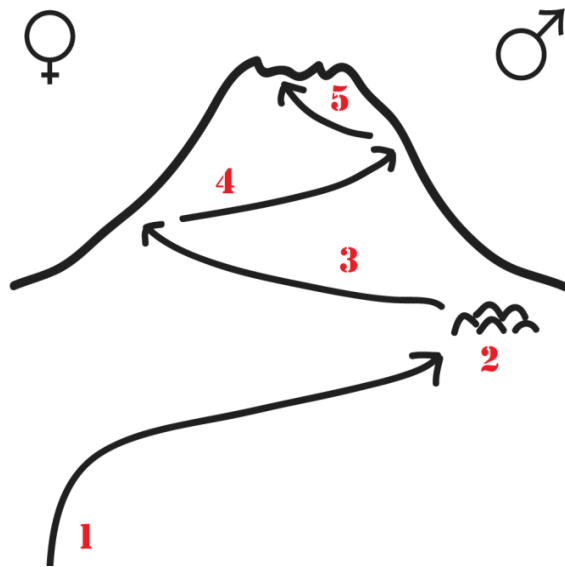


Fig. 2.1. Murrow’s “map” to manhood (Murrow, *The Map* 82).

There is more than ample evidence in Scripture, literature, and history to undermine Murrow’s designation of some virtues like submission as primarily feminine and other virtues like courage as primarily masculine. If this unfortunate obstacle can be overlooked, there is value in mapping the overarching storyline of Jesus’ life. The basic movements of the three journeys show up in the lives of many of the great men of the Bible.

Table 2.1 Examples of Murrow’s “Three Journeys”

Name	Macho Foothills	Journey 1: Submission	Journey 2: Strength	Journey 3: Sacrifice
Moses	Begins overzealous to liberate his people	Shepherd in the desert	Liberator, Leader, Law-Giver	Delegates to judges, trains Joshua, but fails to enter Promised Land
David	Defends sheep and fights Goliath	Submits to God and even to treacherous King Saul	Warrior, King	Legacy of Psalms and wholehearted worship, but struggles to finish well
Paul	Begins over-zealous to defend Judaism becoming violent in his crusade	Damascus Road and time in Arabian desert	Missionary Journeys	Multiplication of churches and leaders, finishes his race well

Source: Murrow, *The Map*, 113-119

From a practical standpoint, the map works well for men because it is visual, goal-oriented, and engages experiential learning from real life. “Think what would

happen in your church if every man were being personally disciplined by another. I suspect many of the problems we deal with in our churches and families would quickly evaporate” (Murrow, *The Map* 221).

Discipleship Case Study: From “Son of Thunder” to “Apostle of Love”

Exploring the firsthand experience of the Apostle John may be a helpful way of learning what it means to be a man who follows Jesus. The following observations operate from the perspective that the Johannine corpus was written by a single author, i.e. John the Apostle (Carson, Moo, and Morris 157, 450, 572). Those who insist on multiple authors for these five books may yet observe within them a rich and varied description of masculine spirituality.

John’s life presents several unique perspectives from which to draw insight. First, he is often considered the youngest disciple among the Twelve (Thomas 14). And his lifespan far outstretched the others. This means that observations can be made from multiple life stages. Second, he was among the three who were closest to Christ. He was privileged to witness private miracles (Mark 5:37), the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2), and his Lord’s grief in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37-40). “In these special associations the three Apostles, and John in particular, would find their convictions deepened and strengthened” (Thomas 39). Third, John experienced radical transformation. The one ready to call fire down from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village in his early days of discipleship (Luke 9:54), later in life comes to be known as the Apostle of love (Tasker).

Somewhere along the way, a deep transformation took place. Walking with Jesus on the back roads of Palestine, leaning in close at the Last Supper (John 13:23), showing up at the cross to care for Mary (John 19:26-27), being the first of the Twelve to reach the

empty tomb (John 20:1-8), and recognizing the resurrected Jesus on the beach (John 21:7)—these experiences created an environment for deep change.

The great argument which is used against identifying the apostle John with the Beloved Disciple is the difference in their characters. John is the ambitious, angry, intolerant character; the Beloved Disciple is the figure of love. But I believe that the traditional view is correct—that the apostle John and the Beloved Disciple are one and the same, and that the very point of John's whole life is the change which Jesus Christ wrought in him, whereby the son of thunder did become the apostle of love. (Barclay 32)

It is unfortunate that John is often portrayed as effeminate in art and literature because the biblical record shows quite a different picture. It is a categorical mistake to equate love with being soft. In the same letter that John unpacks the glorious nature of God's love (1 John 4:7-21) he identifies people as liars and even the antichrist. The following line would not go over well in most churches today: "Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:22, NIV). "Thus, John shows the most perfect congruity between devoted love to Christ and genuine hostility to those who did not follow the truth." (Thomas 103).

This former fisherman had come a long way since the days of mending nets in the family business on the beaches of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus' choice of John as a member of the inner circle of Apostles might have surprised some of his contemporaries given John's elitism (Luke 9:49-50) and ambition (Matthew 20:20-28). "To understand this, it must be remembered that Jesus, unlike most men, could love a disciple not merely for what he was, but for what he should become" (Bruce 243). Every leader who sets out to disciple men must be able to do the same.

Even John's critics took note of his transformation recognizing "that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). No wonder John built a reputation as a pillar in the church (Galatians 2:9). Bruce summarizes John's character well:

To the last, John was what he was at the first, an intense hater as well as an intense lover. But in his later years he knew better what to hate--the object of his abhorrence being hypocrisy, apostasy, and Laodicean insincerity; not, as of old, mere ignorant rudeness and clownish incivility. He could distinguish then between wickedness and weakness, malice and prejudice; and while cherishing strong antipathy towards the one, he felt only compassion towards the other. (243)

This love is not soft and mushy but bold and sacrificial. It is rooted in loyalty to Christ and results in care for others, especially the next generation of spiritual children (1 John 2:12-14).

John's life serves as strong encouragement to every man. When Jesus says, "Follow me," he does not intend to force his follower into a restrictive mold. Rather discipleship is about redeeming the unique qualities of a man so he can contribute to the kingdom of God. John shows us that radical transformation is possible. And that transformation is consistent with mature, robust masculinity.

Good News for Men

Rediscovering the robust masculinity of Jesus and his followers leads to a reexamination of the way the gospel is proclaimed. The predominant language used among evangelical churches today is that of a "personal relationship with Jesus." This imagery can be a barrier to some men, "Because it frames the gospel in terms of a woman's deepest desire—a personal relationship with a man who loves her unconditionally." (Murrow, *Why Men* 99). Murrow suggests that more attention be given to what is already embedded in the heart of every man—the desire to associate with and

be a hero. Men flock to see movies where a solitary man takes on an impossible mission. Along the way he faces betrayal, physical hardship, and a murderous enemy, yet never loses his cool. Just when you think he's down for the count, he pulls off a series of miraculous exploits to save the world and win the girl. Though few men realize it, this story is borrowed from the life of Christ found in the Gospels. "We have to get the big story right. The gospel is about a courageous man whose mission is to save the world—a man who is currently recruiting agents to assist him in this work" (Murrow *Why* 165). The way Jesus recruited men was with the challenge, "Follow me." He calls men to follow him into risky situations and sacrificial service. "The truth is, the gospel is equal parts demanding mission and personal relationship. But these days we stress the relationship, because we need women to keep the ministry machine going. When we present the gospel as if it's a chick flick, is it any wonder more women stick around to see the movie?" (Murrow *Why Men* 171).

Biblical Foundations

A review of five Biblical texts often associated with defining manhood offer both insights and limitations. The first two texts reviewed are foundational in Robert Lewis's definition of manhood found in his popular men's curriculum. The next two texts, in at least some translations, suggest that the audience addressed is gender-specific. The final passage brings the discussion back to the basics and provides the foundation for what follows.

Robert Lewis popularized a definition for manhood in the *Quest for Authentic Manhood* curriculum that is found in his book *Raising a Modern Day Knight*.

A real man is one who:

- Rejects passivity
- Accepts responsibility
- Leads courageously
- Expects the greater reward... God's reward (*Raising* 60).

Using this definition in our local church's men's ministry over the past decade resonated with many men. It gives them a compass for understanding who they are and who they can become. It is short and action oriented. Lewis builds this definition on Genesis 2:6 and 1 Corinthians 14:45-47.

Genesis 2:6

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (NIV)

When God gave instructions not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he directed the command at the man, Adam (2:16-17). Evidence suggests that Adam relayed the information to Eve after they were introduced. But when the tempter engaged Eve in conversation, it appears that Adam was passive. The scriptures do not mention Adam confronting the serpent or persuading Eve to reject the forbidden fruit. It could be said that the first transgression of Adam was not when he took the fruit but when he stood by passively letting Eve eat. This is reinforced when the LORD rebuked Adam as follows, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it’” (Genesis 3:17, NIV).

Lewis uses Adam as the prototype of manhood and makes this the starting point for his definition: “A real man rejects passivity.” He continues, “Men have been imitating

Adam's example ever since. Have you ever wondered why the Bible constantly calls men to love their wives, spiritually instruct their children, and responsibly lead their home?

The reason is because men have a fallen nature that actually bends away from these responsibilities. It comes with maleness. It comes from Adam" (R. Lewis, *Raising* 52-53). Every man knows the implications of passivity all too well from experience. The call to reject passivity is a powerful starting point for a manhood vision.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47

"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven" (NIV)

This is the second text Lewis uses to build his definition. "The first Adam represents a failed manhood that seeks to draw life from others; it is manhood devoid of transcendent meaning. By contrast, the second Adam (Christ) represents life *in union with God*.... This elevated masculinity, as 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, is life-giving, not life-taking" (R. Lewis, *Raising* 50-51). Adam and Christ are representatives of the human race. They embody specific traits that men should either avoid or follow. But Lewis is overreaching in his application of this text. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's concern is not the formation of a healthy vision of manhood. In fact, his concern has little to do with the present age. Paul is addressing the over-realized eschatology of the Corinthians. The point of describing Jesus' heavenly body is to define what believers can look forward to after the resurrection. The only support for Lewis's manhood definition to be found in this passage comes from the NIV's alternate reading of verse 49. If one reads the final verb as hortatory subjunctive instead of a future indicative, one reads, "so

let us bear the image of the heavenly man” (Fee 880). This would be a call to live in congruence with our redeemed identity in Christ. Even if this alternative reading is granted, there’s nothing uniquely masculine about this passage. While Lewis’s definition of manhood has great practical value, there is not sufficient ground to base it on this text. Other passages that highlight the generative power of Christ and his ability to form generative disciples would better suit the purpose.

1 Corinthians 16:13

“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (NAS)

This verse reads like the speech from a general to his troops as they are about to engage the enemy in battle. It features the word *andrizomai*, a hapax, meaning “conduct oneself in a manly or courageous way” (Arndt 64). Some modern translations have retained the etymological significance of the word related to *anēr*, “man” (NASB, ESV). But most translate it as “be courageous” (NIV, NLT, NRSV, even NKJV). The word appears frequently in Septuagint and is often paired with the passive form of *krataioō*, “become strong,” as it is here. It is commonly found in reverse order in the well-known admonition to “be strong and courageous” (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18; Psalm 27:14; 31:24). While sorting out its meaning in this context, it is important to note that the word can carry two semantic contrasts: masculine vs. feminine qualities and mature vs. childish qualities. “In this verse as well the women in the church are undoubtedly expected to act courageously without abandoning their female identities. It seems likely that these terms are not being used to refer to being men as opposed to women, but of acting like mature (brave) adults rather than fearful children” (Ciampa and Rosner 855). That is indeed what

is found earlier in the epistle when Paul writes, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” (1 Corinthians 13:11, NIV). So again, there does not seem to be an explicitly male application to this passage. Rather there is a vision for mature development using language that can apply to both men and women. The metaphors in this verse that stir the inner warrior are matched with a loving “concern for the good of ‘the other’ which embodies respect and seeks to build them up in the long term (cf. 8:7-13; 13:1-13)” (Thiselton 1337).

1 John 2:12-14

*I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.
I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one” (NIV).*

Three distinct life stages are addressed here. While the term *teknia*, “children,” is inclusive of all church members, the terms *neaniskoi*, “young men,” and *patēr*, “father,” are words that are not gender inclusive. John seems to be capitalizing on developmental phases in Greek culture and literature to promote spiritual growth. He affirms those who have developed from children into young men. “The idea that John is alluding to stages in life, whether physical or spiritual, is suggested by the use of *neaniskos* in Greek literature

to describe the stage of a man's life when his growth was completed and he was in his prime strength, from twenty-two to twenty-eight years old (e.g., Philo, *Opif.* 105)" (Jobes 105). Strength to overcome the enemy is celebrated, but it is clear this is not the final stage of growth. Young men are called to become fathers whose faithful walk with God over time qualifies them to care for and instruct others. "Fatherhood may be a beleaguered institution in the postmodern West, but in antiquity 'father' could serve as 'a title of respect or honour' [sic] (MM 498) even outside the quasi-sacred bound of family. To appeal to Christians as fathers was to evoke their sense of responsibility and their humble yet lofty privilege under the Father par excellence" (Yarbrough 117). Due to the terms used in this passage, it seems wise to retain gender-specific language. Yet applications can be made for both genders since the characteristics ascribed to young men and fathers in this passage are applied to both genders elsewhere in Scripture. The vision for growth through phases anticipates the discussion of developmental psychology below.

Genesis 1:27

*So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them" (NIV)*

When God created humanity, he declared both male and female "very good" (Genesis 1:31). He designed and celebrated gender differences. This is why Michael Gurian coined the phrase "nurture the nature." He counsels parents and educators to give boys what they need to thrive.

Male and female natures (gender) begin in our genetics, before birth, and we carry those natural gender proclivities (what are called, in developmental science, 'biological tendencies') with us throughout our lives. So while each boy and each girl, each woman and each man is influenced significantly by nurture and culture, each gender comes into the

world with some profound gender differences in tow. (Jantz and Gurian Loc 139)

Caution is warranted when ascribing qualities to each gender. Yet when distinctions are observed, the Genesis account invites us to celebrate them. Tim and Kathy Keller strike a balance of honesty and humility as they write about gender differences. They have a unique way of communicating biblical truth with cultural sensitivity:

It is my experience that it is nearly impossible to come up with a single, detailed, and very specific set of ‘manly’ or ‘womanly’ characteristics that fits every temperament and culture. Rather than defining ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ (a traditional approach) or denying or suppressing them (a secular approach), I propose that within each Christian community you watch for and appreciate the inevitable differences that will appear between male and female in your particular generation, culture, people, and place.

Wait for them to appear, and know them. Talk about them among yourselves. Notice the distinct idols women have and men have in your generation, culture, and place. Notice the strengths women have and men have in your generation, culture, and place. Notice communication modes, decision-making skills, leadership styles, life priorities, and the balance of work and family. Once you see them, respect and appreciate them. Without the gospel, people often turn temperamental, cultural and gender differences into moral virtues. This is one of the ways we bolster our self-esteem—a form of ‘works-righteousness,’ a way to earn our superior status. And so men and women scorn and mock the other gender’s distinctive traits. But the gospel should remove that kind of attitude. (Keller Loc 2577)

The following observations indicate what they notice in contemporary American manhood.

Using all the qualifiers in the world, in general, as a whole and across the spectrum, men have a gift of independence, a ‘sending’ gift. They look outward. They initiate. Under sin, these traits can become either alpha male individualism, if this capacity is turned into an idol, or dependence, if the calling is utterly rejected and the opposite embraced in rebellion.

The first sin is hypermasculinity, while the second sin is a rejection of masculinity. (Keller Loc 2305)

If true masculinity is neither hyper-masculinity nor rejection of masculinity, then what is it? Fig. 2.2. is an effort to visualize a path toward redeemed masculinity.

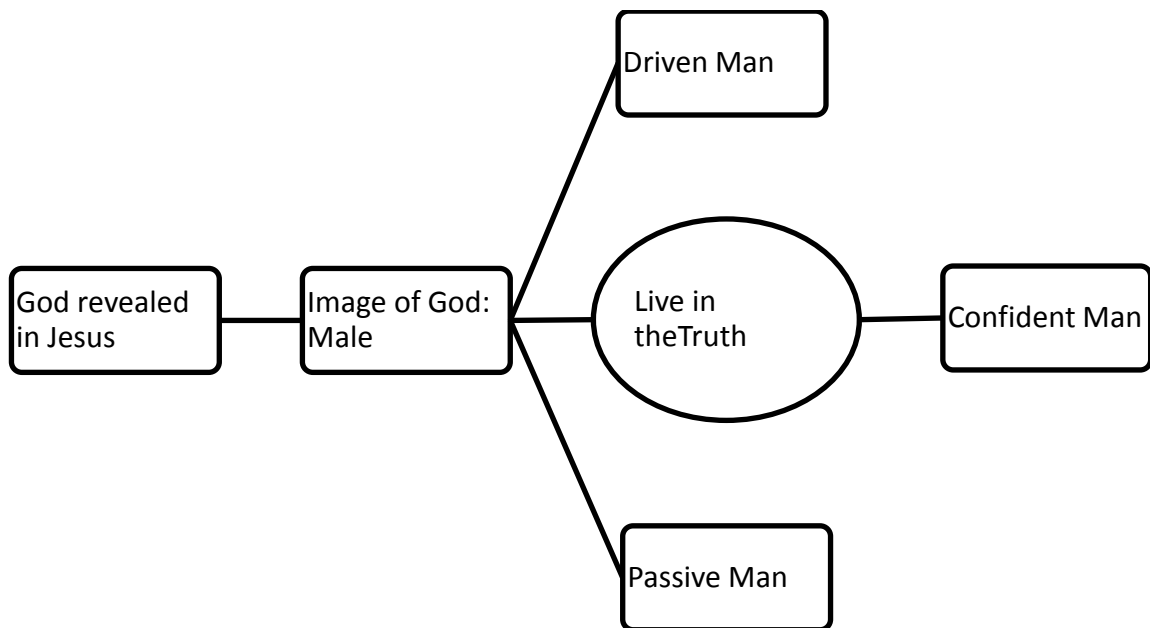


Fig. 2.2. Becoming a confident man

God revealed in Jesus: Defining masculinity starts with defining God (see above “God as Father”). While He is a loving, involved Father, he is also fierce and untamable. This recalls the description of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. The first time the Pevensie children hear his name, the hair on the back of their necks stands up. They are not sure they are ready to meet a lion. One of them asks, “Is he quite safe? I shall be rather nervous about meeting a lion.” Mr. Beaver’s response is classic: “Who

said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He’s the King, I tell you” (C. S. Lewis 86). This is our God—not tame or safe but thoroughly good. Richard Rohr concurs, “I love to remind people that the word ‘nice’ is never found in the whole Bible. God is not nice, it seems; God is wild” (*From Wild* 4). When this untamable God chose to reveal himself, he did so through the man, Jesus, who embodies robust manhood.

Image of God: Male: Men are made in the image of this wild yet loving God. When God made man, he said it was good (Genesis 1:27-31). Being male is to be celebrated, but it also needs redeemed. The image men bear is marred by sin (Genesis 3:1-19). After his transgression, Adam hides. “I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself” (Genesis 3:10). Eldredge concludes, “Understand that verse, let its implications sink in, and the men around you will suddenly come into focus. We are hiding, every last one of us” (*Field Manual* 72). Every man has inherited Adam’s nature. And every man is haunted by the question: “Am I really a man? Have I got what it takes when it counts?” This question often leads a man to one of two extremes.

Driven Man: The driven man is afraid that he does not have what it takes, so he keeps trying to prove himself. It is manifested in a myriad of ways. He’s the workaholic, the ultimate competitor, the perfectionist, the bully, the macho man, the driver of the biggest truck or fastest car. This man can never rest because he must prove himself over and over again. Such an approach to life is destined for failure. Sooner or later, he will encounter someone stronger, faster, or smarter. As he loses his edge with age, he is set up for implosion.

Passive Man: The passive man is also afraid that he does not have what it takes so he plays it safe. He avoids risks. He is the people-pleaser who keeps his mouth shut

during conflict. He is the ultimate nice guy. If faced with conflict, he is duplicitous. The passive man is destined for a life of regret. He would do well to reflect on the immortal words of Teddy Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly... who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who have never known neither victory nor defeat. (quoted in Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* xiii)

The passive man never enters the arena. And those around him never experience his generative strength because it is dormant and undeveloped.

Live in the Truth: At the heart of biblical masculinity is the power to live the truth. This truth is available in the Scriptures. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12-13). God will strike fear into the heart of any man who wants to hide from the truth about himself. But what he fears the most has the power to set him free (John 8:32). The man who is fully known and fully loved has nothing left to fear (1 John 4:7-19). God can accomplish great things in and through a man who is eager to hear the truth about himself. Many men fear being with other men because together the uncomfortable truths are revealed. Hiding betrays fear. Speaking and hearing the truth requires courage.

Examples abound in Scripture that illustrate the flowchart in fig. 2.2. Jacob is the prototypical passive man. He lives in the shadow of his macho brother, Esau, and does whatever his mother tells him. He is on the giving and receiving side of deception throughout his life until he wrestles with God at the Jabbok River and encounters transforming truth. He is forced to confess his name, Jacob, heel-grabber, supplanter, deceiver. He is given a new name, Israel, one who contends with God. He becomes the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Peter is the prototypical driven man. He is action oriented jumping out of the boat to walk on water, making boasts he cannot always live up to, and is arrogant enough to correct Jesus. When he fails miserably by denying Jesus, he is forced to face the truth in a private talk with the resurrected Lord on the beach. He goes on to fulfill his calling as leader of the early church.

Confident Man: Confident men have internalized the love of the Father (Ephesians 1:5; 3:14-19; 5:1-2). The confident man's identity is not based on what he does, what he has, or what people say about him. He knows in his gut that he is God's well-loved Son. This new identity makes it possible to "Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him" (Colossians 3:10, NLT). The more this happens, the more the confident man becomes generative, life-giving. He is able to look beyond himself to care for the needs of others. He is able to use his strength, experience, insight, and resources for the benefit of the next generation. The description of a confident man anticipates the next section that addresses developmental psychology.

Developmental Psychology

What it means to be a man evolves through the seasons of life. A person needs wisdom to navigate developmental tasks. Most Christian education majors have a working knowledge of these phases and stages. But many senior church leaders have never been introduced to developmental psychology. “All too often, the Christian authors simply exhorted men to higher behavior standards, ignoring not only our wounds and psychological insights, but biblically authenticated spiritual experience as well” (Dalbey XV). As a senior pastor, I am interested in cradle to grave discipleship. That means helping people navigate the transitions or milestones in their lives so that they can walk with God faithfully to the finish line. When it comes to understanding the phases of healthy development, Erik Erikson’s work is seminal.

Erikson’s Stages

Erik Erikson’s work on life stage development continues to carry significant influence. At a time when most research was focused on the development of children, he expanded the scope to the entire life span (Slater 53). Erikson’s stages are conceived as a crisis that is resolved either positively or negatively at each stage. When the crisis is resolved positively, the result is a corresponding virtue (see Table 2.2.).

Erikson’s stages are cumulative and integrated. Negative resolutions at earlier stages resurface and inhibit future development. Failure to create environments where children thrive can haunt them for the rest of their lives. “Part of the operation of healing grace is the mending of previous identity wounds; remediation of previous trauma is always possible. Nevertheless, adult identity transformations become increasingly layered

and complex because of the accumulation of psychosocial issues at play” (Kiesling and Colwell 2).

Table 2.2. Erikson’s stages of development

Birth – 1	2 – 3	4 – 5	6 - Puberty	Adolescence	Young Adulthood	Middle Adulthood	Late Adulthood
							Integrity v. Despair
						Generativity v. Stagnation	
					Intimacy v. Isolation		
				Identity v. Diffusion			
			Industry v. Inferiority				
		Initiative v. Guilt					
	Autonomy v. Shame						
Trust v. Mistrust							
Hope	Will	Purpose	Competence	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom

Source: Adapted from Erikson 273 and Kiesling and Colwell 3

Of special note in this study is the way Erikson describes middle adulthood:

generativity v. stagnation. It describes an adult in the prime of life.

Generativity, then, is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation, although there are individuals who, through misfortune or because of special and genuine gifts in other directions, do not apply this drive to their own offspring. And indeed, the concept generativity is meant to include such more popular synonyms as *productivity* and *creativity*, which, however, cannot replace it.” (Erikson 267)

Men typically grasp this concept when cast in heroic terms of sacrificing one's life on a battlefield to protect the lives of others. But due to unresolved crises in earlier stages of development, many struggle to be generative in the daily grind of raising children and training future generations of disciples. Generativity is also the quality needed among prevailing organizations where leaders are needed who care for both the mission and employees (Slater 57). "Erikson's vision is prophetic and religious in its clear suggestion that fulfillment in life derives from caring for the conditions that enable present and future generations to develop the full range of human virtues" (J. Fowler 29). Yet a critical question remains unanswered. How can negative resolutions from early stages be healed and transformed? This issue will be revisited below under the heading "Transformative Learning"

Levinson's Seasons

Daniel Levinson studied the lives of men in the 1960's and 1970's discerning patterns he called seasons. His work reinforced adult development through these seasons. "Each period takes on the flavor of its 'developmental tasks.' A period begins when a man's main concern is accomplishing that task; it ends when completing the task loses its priority" (White 42). Table 2.3. is a simplified outline of Levinson's seasons highlighting the key developmental tasks.

"A unifying theme in the masculine pattern is a concern with doing, making, having. A man is supposed to get out there and do something: perform, accomplish, produce, bring home the bacon" (Levinson 233). The drive to produce is consistent with God's command to be fruitful and multiply and to care for the earth (Genesis 1:28; 2:15).

While many men define themselves by what they do, this is an unstable source of identity overlooking the value that is bestowed to him by his Creator and redeemed by Jesus.

Table 2.3. Levinson's Seasons and Developmental Tasks

Age	Season	Developmental Task
17-22	Early Adult Transition	Search for identity Separation from family of origin Form and modify a dream
22-40	Early Adulthood	Form and modify an occupation Marriage Fatherhood
40-60	Middle Adulthood	Re-evaluation of priorities and values in light of one's mortality Interest in helping others succeed, mentoring
60 and Beyond	Late Adulthood	Leaving a legacy Coming to grips with limitations and death

Source: Summary of Levinson found in White 41-46

Levinson reinforces Erikson's concern about unfinished tasks that hinder future development. "In every period we suffer because of the undone developmental work of previous periods... but we also have an opportunity to do further developmental work and to create a life more suitable to the self" (Levinson 62-63). Levinson's work appears dated and would require continual revision due to changes in contemporary culture that delay marriage and family formation.

Wilder's Passages

In his book *Life Passages for Men: Understanding the Stages of a Man's Life*, E. James Wilder brings together several streams of thought discussed above. Like Erikson and Levinson, he divides the masculine journey into phases with a task to master at each stage. He incorporates biblical theology while maintaining a remarkably simple rubric.

Table 2.4. Wilder's Life Passages for Men

Phase	Task to Master	Purpose
Becoming a Boy (ages 0 – 12)	“By the time boyhood is over at age twelve, every boy should have mastered expressing his needs and feelings and receiving what he asks for without shame” (21).	A boy experiences grace and learns that he has intrinsic value (27).
Becoming a Man (ages 13 – early 20's)	“A man makes things fair for himself and others. Rather than just receive and think about his own needs and feelings, a man thinks equally about his needs or feelings and those of others” (28).	A man comes to know that he is part of history and his life has an impact on others (28-29). By the end of this stage he should have a job.
Becoming a Father	A father gives without getting anything in return thus expressing intrinsic value to his child (29).	A father imitates God, <i>the</i> Father, in his family (30).
Becoming a Grand Father / Community Elder	“A truly <i>Grand Father</i> is one who is able to treat children who are not biologically his own with the same unselfish giving he learned to give his own. An elder is a father to his community” (30).	An elder cares for the fatherless and says to men who never heard it from their father, “You are now a man” (31).

Source: Wilder 21-31

In spite of the sparse descriptions of Jesus' childhood and early adulthood, the Gospels supply sufficient material to see this pattern modeled. Jesus enters the world as a dependent baby (Luke 2:6-7). He is raised by devout Jewish parents who care for his needs so that he can "become a boy" (Luke 2:21-40). At age twelve his journey to "become a man" begins as he asserts himself, yet he continues to obey his earthly parents (Luke 2:41-52). After thirty years of involvement in his family, he steps out to accomplish his mission (Luke 3:21-23). Throughout his earthly ministry he functions as a father (Mark 10:16) and a grand father or elder (Luke 6:12-16; 10:1-24; Acts 1:1-8). Through it all he depends on the voice of his Father who affirms and encourages him (Luke 3:22; 5:16; 9:35). Christ had the perfect Father, and through faith in Christ, so do his followers.

It is unexpected yet remarkably insightful to say that "becoming a boy" is a developmental phase. It takes the right environment to learn to express what one needs and feels without shame. "Boys and men need to know that the foundation of life is to receive what you have not earned without shame. This is part of why to enter the kingdom of God one must become like a little child—in our case, a boy" (Wilder 20). There are consequences later in life for men who never learned how to be a boy. Someone who did not become a boy will live uncertain of his intrinsic value. He will continue to search for it through what he achieves, acquires, or what people say about him.

"Becoming a man" happens as a boy discovers that he has a role to play in God's unfolding of redemptive history. A large part of that role is finding a job that contributes to society in helpful ways. As he becomes productive, "a man should be able to bargain

hard, get a fair deal, not be intimidated by other men, and get fair exchange and fair value” (Wilder 29). Wilder further develops the concept of “becoming a man” by describing the following masculine archetypes: brother, friend, priest, lover, warrior, king, husband, and servant. The theme of generativity runs throughout his description and is prominent in his summary. “The different roles a man uses to give life can blend together at times. They harmonize well with roles for women and children. Picking the right one for the occasion really satisfies a man and gives him a sense of style. By now we know how important that satisfaction is to a man and how life-giving his repertoire of roles can be to others” (Wilder 119).

The call to fatherhood is not restricted to those with biological children. Every man is called to fatherhood, and every child needs more fatherly influence. Fatherhood can be expressed as an uncle, coach, scout leader, small group leader, or mentor. “A father is one who helps his children find their true identity in spite of cultural distortions and his own injuries” (Wilder 165). Fathers give life to their children when they help them find their true identity through focused time, physical affection, loving discipline, and encouragement. “(S)eeing into someone’s heart is perhaps the greatest gift a man can give. Fathers give this gift when they help others to see themselves correctly” (Wilder 166).

Mature manhood leads to the formation of grand fathers also referred to as community elders. They have an abundance of father energy to share with others who missed out on what they should have received from their biological fathers. “There is a great lack in our churches and communities of elders. There are many men who have grown into their sixties still waiting to meet someone who is a father capable of telling

them, ‘You are now a man’” (Wilder 31). The book climaxes with a rich understanding of the church as family. “Who can say what would happen if there were a group of elder men in each church eager for larger families—elders who were waiting, able, and happy to raise more children?” (211).

Wilder reiterates the concerns that Erikson and Levinson express above, and he articulates the impact on generations. “A parent, in this case a dad, will likely stay bonded with his children up until the age when they are recapitulating the highest level of his own growth” (Wilder 135). While developmental psychology helps diagnose the problem of stunted development, it does not go far enough to chart a course for redemptive transformation. The following section concerning transformative learning introduces lessons from educational theory that provides tools that can help churches promote deep discipleship among men.

Transformative Learning

In 1975, Jack Mezirow’s wife entered graduate school at mid-life. He noticed changes in her that made him curious. So he conducted research among women who were returning to college in the late 1970’s. The outcome was a paradigm shifting theory of adult learning known as transformative learning. It has sparked widespread debate and reform among educators but is still gaining traction in other disciplines. “Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, “Learning to Think” 76).

The theory provides a framework for understanding the process of how adults learn and change. Mezirow outlined this process using the following ten phases:

1. A disorienting dilemma,
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame,
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions,
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change,
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions,
6. Planning of a course of action,
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans,
8. Provisional trying of new roles,
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions* 169)

The purpose of this theory is to help educators better understand how deep change happens in adults resulting in more effective facilitation of learning.

While the theory was groundbreaking, Mezirow's way of describing it was complex. The language is technical and awkward. Phases may overlap, be repeated, or even skipped. And the process will vary from one learner to another. Yet a general pattern does exist, and simpler ways of describing the process emerged in subsequent years. Mezirow himself summarized the process as helping learners become:

1. More aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs (a disorienting dilemma),

2. More critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others,
3. More fully and freely engaged in discourse, and
4. More effective in taking action on their reflective judgments. (Mezirow, “Learning to Think” 93)

The bottom line is that people can experience deep change when they respond to disorienting dilemmas with critical reflection in a supportive environment. What follows is a closer look at the process through Mezirow’s four phase summary.

Disorienting Dilemma

The way people learned to understand the world throughout childhood may remain largely unexamined into adulthood. “Our values and sense of self are anchored in our frames of reference. They provide us with a sense of stability, coherence, community, and identity. Consequently they are often emotionally charged and strongly defended” (Mezirow “Learning to Think” 84). Therefore we may need to unlearn something before we can learn something new (Marmon 425). Disorienting dilemmas launch the process.

When life doesn’t make sense, we can try to pretend all is well or begin to re-examine our assumptions. We are dealing with a true disorienting dilemma when the issue can no longer be avoided. Something has occurred that triggers questions or discomfort that demands attention. There are countless sources of disorienting dilemmas including deliberate educational interventions as well as challenging life experiences. Crisis events such as loss of a job, death of a loved one, children leaving home, and retirement can all trigger transformative learning. It can also be triggered by reading a challenging book, a classroom learning activity, or an encounter with a different culture. Disorienting dilemmas can also come from the accumulation of life experiences that are

just waiting for the right environment to be accessed for learning. “Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation. These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self” (Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions* 168). Those who want to promote change learn to leverage pain for beneficial purposes. Transformative learning begins when someone seeks new understanding sparked by an experience of something that did not make sense.

Critical Reflection

The process of transformative learning stalls after a disorienting dilemma unless critical reflection takes place. This is typically a three part process of becoming aware of one’s assumptions, questioning those assumptions, and evaluating the validity of those assumptions (Cranton *Understanding and Promoting* 83-84). By definition, it can be difficult to be aware of assumptions. We can begin by asking what one believes, why it is believed, where it was learned, and where it will lead. But it typically takes being questioned and challenged by someone outside oneself to be aware of assumptions and examine them deeply enough to reevaluate them.

Engaging Discourse

Insightful and challenging questions can help someone become more aware of assumptions leading to being more self-critical. “It is difficult for learners caught up in their perspective to even see the questions that should be asked.... Questioning and challenging should become the norm of a learning setting where critical reflection is a goal” (Cranton, *Understanding and Promting* 87). Therefore critical reflection and discourse go hand in hand.

Challenging discourse can trigger deep emotions of guilt, shame, anger, and fear. That's why discourse must also accomplish the goal of expressing affirmation. Learners must feel safe to go on the journey of perspective transformation. "Effective participation in discourse and in transformative learning requires emotional maturity—awareness, empathy, and control—what Goleman (1998) calls 'emotional intelligence'—knowing and managing one's emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships—as well as clear thinking" (Mezirow "Learning to Think" 79). It would be irresponsible for educators to introduce disorienting dilemmas and challenging discourse without providing an emotionally safe environment.

Discourse also happens when people listen to others share their perspectives and wrestle with their own questions. When other people share issues that parallel our own, we are encouraged to find out that we are not alone. This can give us what we need to continue the painful process of transformation. When someone shares a new perspective, this also helps us begin to imagine new ways of relating to the world.

Taking Action

It is important to note that behavior change is not a byproduct of transformative learning; it is an essential part of the process. "If it begins with a disorienting dilemma that calls for reflective thinking, then it leads to a 'transformative insight' that permanently alters how the individual views life" (Young, *Deep Change*, 24). It is a dialectic of imagination and experimentation illustrated by a series of questions:

- What are my options?
- What knowledge and skills do I need to acquire?
- Who can help?

- What's my next step?
- What happened when I tried out my new perspective?
- What can I learn from this experience?
- How will I integrate my new perspective with the rest of my life?

The outcome of transformative learning is a new way of understanding the world—a perspective change. Because there is a new way of understanding the world, behavior change can often be natural and even unavoidable.

Teacher as Collaborator

For the process to work, learners must be empowered to take ownership for their own learning. That happens as the teacher shifts from “teller” to collaborative learner (Mezirow, “Learning to Think” 81). “In order to foster learner empowerment, the educator gives up position power but maintains and uses personal power” (Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting* 165). It also demands that teachers have a strong personal identity, emotional intelligence, continual curiosity, and an ability to live with tension. Change may be frightening or threatening, and educators must be able to navigate this with wisdom.

A person's life can be described as a succession of disorienting dilemmas over time, suggesting there is much potential for deep learning in whomever the educator or minister is mentoring. Educators or ministers who recognize this and have the courage to affirm a person's sense of crisis and its significance, rather than to try and alleviate it, serve the goal of deep learning (Young “Transformational Learning” 329).

Learners need challenged as well as affirmed—that is an art not a science.

Responses to the same process will vary greatly based on many factors including an individual's current capacity to endure discomfort. “There can be no standard recipe—no

way to say, ‘hand out one critical incident exercise, carefully add small group discussion, and simmer for one hour’ (Cranton *Understanding and Promoting* 77-78). Therefore some degree of experimentation will need to take place. Extroverted learners may enjoy role plays, family histories, and games. Introverted learners will welcome a pause in challenging questioning and experiences to reflect in silence or write in a journal. Transformative learning can be advanced by helping individuals articulate their life mission that answers identity and purpose questions. “The findings in this study suggest that the stronger and more focused a person’s life mission, the stronger and more focused the learner’s self-direction; a person’s mission provides a source of meaning to learning activities” (Kroth and Boverie). A variety of approaches should be used not only for differences in learning styles but to create a rhythm of doing and reflecting.

It is far too common for educators and pastors to express concerns about a lack of transformation in spite of efforts to teach great lessons and preach great sermons. Transformative learning theorists express a divergent concern—that too much change may take place. The process of transformative learning has so much potential that it is accompanied with a warning: “Is it ethical to encourage people to engage in transformative learning when this process may upset people’s lives? Teaching for transformation is a political and value-laden act” (Cranton and Hoggan 532). How refreshing to read a warning about the risks of life change instead of bemoaning the lack of it!

Transformative Learning in the Church

Mezirow did not work from a biblical worldview, but his theory has the potential to reawaken a vision for biblical transformation. What passes for discipleship in many

churches is nothing more than information transfer. If our definition of a disciple is someone who knows more Bible, our method will be teaching more Bible. This can result in multiplying notebooks full of sermon and conference notes. But if discipleship means actually becoming like Jesus, then there is an entirely different challenge on our hands that classroom instruction alone will never address.

Can people be transformed? The Bible offers an enthusiastic and repeated “Yes!” After reflection on God’s nature and activity described in Romans 1-11, an expectation for transformation is announced in Romans 12:1-2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (NIV). “Be transformed” is the translation of *metamorphoō* meaning to change the essential form or nature of something; become completely different (Louw and Nida). How does transformation happen? New habits of mind are mentioned, but the process is not articulated. It is noteworthy that “be transformed” is in the imperative mood and the passive voice. The imperative emphasizes human responsibility and the passive implies divine intervention. The intersection of human and supernatural involvement is a good starting point for exploring the application of transformative learning in the church.

A fuller answer to the process of transformation takes us into a study of the nature of Scripture itself. “The Bible by its nature creates dilemmas, compels spiritual journeying, conflicts with new perspectives, infuses new vitality, and fosters growth. That is, the Bible fosters transformational learning” (Young, “Transformational

Learning” 335). Every encounter with the Word of God carries the potential for transformation.

The most thorough demonstration of transformative learning is found in Jesus’ discipleship of the Twelve. Following Jesus meant living with daily disorientation. Jesus repeatedly demolished assumptions about what it meant to be the Messiah as well as to be the people of God. He asked pointed questions like “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Even as Peter seems to get the answer right, Jesus stretches him to the breaking point by describing his coming suffering and death. Peter reacts with anger unable to accept this new perspective. Jesus counters with a rebuke that leads to a new teaching about self-denial (Matthew 16:16-24). Jesus is willing to push Peter and others to the brink, but he also builds trust over time and provides an intimate community for discourse. The disciples hit their lowest point as Jesus is betrayed and crucified. “Now even their inflated view of themselves is shattered as they desert him. Nothing they expected has come to pass” (Young, “Transformational Learning” 337). The disorienting dilemmas keep coming in the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. But Jesus offers time for critical reflection and discourse. And the process culminates with the most ambitious plan of action known to man to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus thoroughly models transformative learning, and we should consider ways of following his example.

This will require a radical reevaluation of goals and methods among pastors. “The focus of discipleship is not on teaching per se, but on learning. It is as important for teachers to understand how people learn as it is to understand the material they teach. When transformation is the goal in teaching, the teacher’s role is not to transmit

information, but to use content to engage students in the learning process” (Young, *Deep Change*, 224). This cannot be done in large groups. It must begin with a few and spread to others. It will foster deep relationships among small groups and on-to-one mentoring. It will combine challenging teaching with time for reflection and discourse. “Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can offer grown-ups is time to reflect” (Marmon 428).

Once pastors become conversant with the process of transformative learning, they will begin to recognize opportunities all over the place that can be leveraged for growth. Churches that want to be proactive can capitalize on the challenges associated with life stage development. “If little attention is paid to the developmental crises of life, few objections are likely to be raised by the church. Yet in fostering transformational learning through these typical life situations, pastors may find their greatest satisfaction because they have their greatest impact in fostering growth” (Young, *Deep Change*, 228).

Young makes a convincing case that transformative learning should inform and can empower discipleship practices. But he also offers an insightful critique. “Apart from the Spirit, however, the process of transformation breaks down under the weight of ego-centeredness” (Young, “Transformational Learning”, 327). This is where pastors have a unique advantage over many educators. The grand story of God is the transformation of people who want to be gods (Genesis 3:5) into worshipers who delight to glorify the one and only God (Revelation 5:13).

Initiation

Initiation pulls together elements of developmental psychology, transformative learning, and biblical themes in ways that have great potential to help boys—of any chronological age—become men. Initiation is the deliberate process of calling of boys

into manhood through a series of challenges guided by older men that result in a new status in the community.

The work of initiation and other men's healing is physically, emotionally and spiritually energetic, which requires a substantial container. Initiation of men, as used here, means a process used to transmit and model a healthy understanding of what it means to be a man. It includes rituals, activities and ceremonies designed to create a meaningful sense of inclusion and identity as a man. (Klegman)

Many Christian authors agree that formal initiation rites need to be restored (Arnold 73, Dalbey 40, Eldredge *Wild at Heart* 101, Miller 148, Podles 197). But too much of the discussion was vague and theoretical lacking tools for action. If a fraction of the ink spilled on this topic is valid, a way forward needs to be pioneered so that others can follow.

Most cultures throughout history understood the importance of training boys to become men. "At one time, primal societies ensured that this crucial achievement occurred; it was unthinkable that such an important event in the life of a man and his people could be left to chance, or that a boy could be left with the unimaginable task of having to initiate himself into manhood" (Arnold 42). With few exceptions, our culture has lost the concept of male initiation, and we are reaping the consequences. "If we do not initiate the boys, they will burn the village down" (African proverb quoted by Zimbardo and Duncan Loc 324).

As our culture extends adolescence and delays adulthood, the potential value of initiation increases. Combining biblical wisdom with brain science, Jantz and Gurian say, "Boys are designed to need certain powerful and profound elements of developmental growth that connect with their HEROIC impulses. They are designed also to need

programs that involve male-kinship gatherings--men and boys getting together” (*Raising Boys by Design* loc 3360).

Robert Lewis combined his teaching in *The Quest for Authentic Manhood* with the ceremony of knighthood to develop guidelines for initiating boys in *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father’s Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood*. The four key manhood ceremonies he identified include:

1. **Puberty: The “Page” Stage:** This is when a father helps his son understand the physical changes taking place in his body as testosterone begins flowing. The definition of manhood is also introduced.
2. **High School Graduation: The Squire Stage:** A father shares his own successes and failures of young adulthood inviting his son to live in wisdom. From this point on, fathers are called to treat their sons no longer as boys but as men, even peers.
3. **College Graduation: The Knight Stage:** A son now is launched into his quest of contributing to the world and joins the company of fellow knights.
4. **Marriage: The Promise/Oath Stage:** Counsel and encouragement help a man love his wife and be a man of his word. (R. Lewis, *Raising* 114)

Lewis encourages the use of ceremony for each stage. He suggests that memorable ceremonies are costly, ascribe value, employ symbols, and empower a life with vision (*Raising a Modern-Day Knight* 103). What Lewis describes also includes a company of men, meals, outdoor activities, and experiential learning.

Chapter nine of Lewis’s book, “Other Manhood Ceremonies to Consider,” recounts experiences customized by fathers to leverage their unique resources. One father

drove his son to his uncle's lake house at night. On the way there, he pulled the truck to a stop on a bridge and asked, "John Snider, do you want to become a man?" (Lewis 132) When he said yes, he told his son to get out of the truck and walk through the dark on his own to the destination. As the boy hiked the 4 miles, he was met by guides who each repeated, "John Snider, do you want to become a man?" After answering, he received new challenges, instructions, and gifts. Before the night was over the boy's strength had been tested and his soul had been marked for life with godly messages.

Another pastor, Tim Wright, created his own rite of passage material for boys (and comparable material for girls). It is called "Following Jesus: A Heroic Quest for Boys." It uses the acronym "HEROIC" to outline six qualities:

1. **Honor:** A man does what is right.
2. **Enterprise:** A man works hard at useful work.
3. **Responsibility.** A man takes responsibility.
4. **Originality.** A man is an individual within a whole.
5. **Intimacy.** A man learns how to love.
6. **Creativity.** A man is committed to changing the world. (Jantz and Gurian Loc 3325)

The lessons include the following elements:

1. Involvement by dad (or a father figure) plus two other men (mentors),
2. Movement, games, action,
3. Mission and service activity,
4. Reading the gospel of Mark with reflection,
5. Candid discussion at a heart level,

6. The keeping of a journal by the father that would be given to his son, and
7. A retreat.

Participation transformed fathers as well as sons. “We felt even more whole for having helped our boys feel more whole. Over the course of the program, many of us found our own gaps as men begin to fill” (Jantz and Gurian Loc 3358). But how can men initiate boys into something they’ve never experienced? “If the fathers have not gone through significant spiritual passages themselves, they really have nothing to say to the young men. It will descend into mere parody, nervous male humor, or strained symbolization” (Rohr “Boys to Men”).

Initiation is reality therapy and a dramatic encounter with truth on the way to confident manhood (see fig. 2.2). Richard Rohr describes initiation in *Adam’s Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation*. It is theologically rich and confrontational. Here are the five promises:

- 1. Life is hard (Psalm 90:10).** Growing up is hard. Work is hard. Relationships are hard. Disappointments are hard. A boy responds by asking “How can I avoid or escape this pain?” A man asks, “What can I learn from this pain?” If a boy wants to grow up, he cannot run from pain or difficulty. Pain is the greatest motivator for change.
- 2. You are going to die (Psalm 90:12).** Our days are numbered. Until we are ready to die, we are not truly ready to live. An initiated man lives with the end in mind so that when he reaches his last day he has minimized regrets. He does not leave messes for others to clean up when he is gone. And he invests in relationships so that he can leave a positive legacy.

3. You are not that important (John 3:26-30). This is the lesson modeled by John the Baptist. He had started a renewal movement with a great following.

When his disciples left him to follow Jesus, how would he respond? Would he use his power for himself or the kingdom of God? John's response was, "He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." (John 3:30, NLT).

Someone who really knows who they are does not need to make a big deal about himself. A man who has been initiated is living for something bigger than himself.

4. You are not in control (Galatians 2:20). Success or failure is not the biggest concern. The central issue is growing one's relationship with God. That involves living in the truth, facing reality, caring for others, and taking risks to advance the Kingdom. This happens by crucifying the old self and giving preeminence in one's life.

5. Your life is not about you (Mark 1:17). Jesus said, "Come, follow me." The Twelve were faced with a choice. Would they accept Jesus' invitation to an adventure or walk away? Would they trust him or recoil from the risk of the unknown? They chose to follow and discovered more than they ever dreamed possible.

These are lessons that cannot be learned by sitting in a classroom passively receiving information. These lessons are learned through experience. What if tough assignments were given that forced men to learn by experience? What if discipleship involved not only loving support but also loving rebuke? What if there was an initiation process for becoming a confident, godly man? Without initiation a man continues to be

haunted by the question, “Do I have what it takes?” An initiated man can answer with a strong, “YES! I have what it takes to live courageously for the sake of others because of who God says I am.” This is backed up with weighty words spoken by a company of men he respects and ceremonies etched in his memory.

People who have let life initiate them tend to be creative individuals, grounded and solid. You can feel it when you are in their presence. You feel safe and you feel energized. They do not take your energy; they give you energy. You know they have an excess of life, and maybe some for you, so you seek them out, as the crowds did with Jesus and still do with wise men and women (Rohr, *Adam’s Return* 81).

What Rohr describes as an initiated man is what Erikson calls a generative adult and Jesus would call a disciple maker (Matthew 28:19-20).

New Horizons: Men of Iron

The widely used *Men’s Fraternity* curriculum has launched many local church men’s ministries with great results. But it relies primarily on classroom techniques of information transfer. The *New Warrior Training Adventure* of the Mankind Project succeeds in experiential learning but lacks grounding in biblical spirituality. Retreats like *The Crucible Project* and *The Wild at Heart Boot Camp* combine soul stirring learning experiences with biblical Christianity but are short-term, artificial communities often removed from a man’s home life and local church. David Murrow’s *Men’s League* material makes an effort to move out of the classroom into experiential learning, but the experiences conceived lack depth. Best practices need to be identified from several sources then assimilated into a unified strategy for discipling men that can be reproduced through local churches. The *Men of Iron* material integrates several of these concerns in an initiation retreat and follow-up group material.

The author of *Men of Iron*, Lyman Coleman, traces his roots to his days with the Navigators at Baylor University where he became the spiritual son of Dawson Trotman. When Trotman drowned, Coleman committed to carry on the work of this strong and loving man (Coleman, Personal Interview). That led to a career of writing and training church leaders in pioneering small group ministry through the Serendipity movement. After decades of fruitful ministry, the death of his dear wife left him struggling emotionally and spiritually. His pastor recommended that Coleman attend the Mankind Project's *New Warrior Training Adventure*. Though he found parts of it crude, he was profoundly helped. Filtering the experience through a biblical worldview and his extensive knowledge of group dynamics, Coleman created a unique retreat and group material for men. The first iteration was called *Marked Men for Christ* that initially had a Catholic affiliation. Following iterations were called *One Year to Live* for Lutheran Men in Mission (ELCA) and *Men of Iron* (Non-denominational).

The name *Men of Iron* comes from Proverbs 27:17, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (NASB). It is designed to be church-based "where men can build deep, lasting relationships over a long period of time." (Coleman, *Launching* 7). The goal is the formation of mature men who live out the Great Commandment to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30). Jesus command is explored through the "four domains" (see fig. 2.3.)

Men of Iron Summary of the Four Domains (Coleman, *Launching* 8)

A more detailed summary of each domain can be found in the follow-up material that covers character traits, wounds from childhood, dysfunctional adult behaviors, and

redeemed qualities (Coleman, *12 Week* 38, 50, 80, 114). The development of the four domains resembles the Jungian archetypes discussed above through the literature of Moore and Gillette, Rohr, Arnold, Eldredge, and Weber.

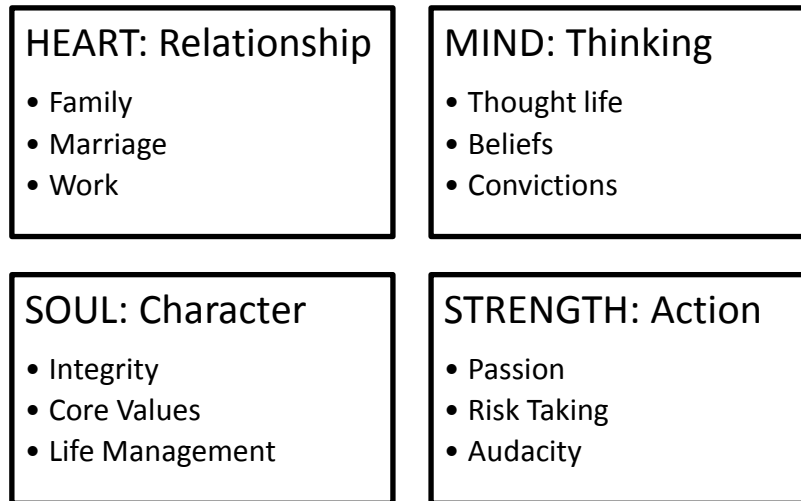


Fig. 2.3. Summary of the four domains

The primary methodology utilized in *Men of Iron* is experiential work groups composed of an initiated leader, an assistant leader, and four participants. “The group is put through tough, uncomfortable, down and dirty self-disclosure exercises that are emotionally, spiritually and sometimes physically challenging” (Coleman, *12 Week* 9). Men get introduced to these experiential work groups at a retreat. The retreat follows a downward journey followed by an upward journey designed to answer seven questions (see fig. 2.4.)

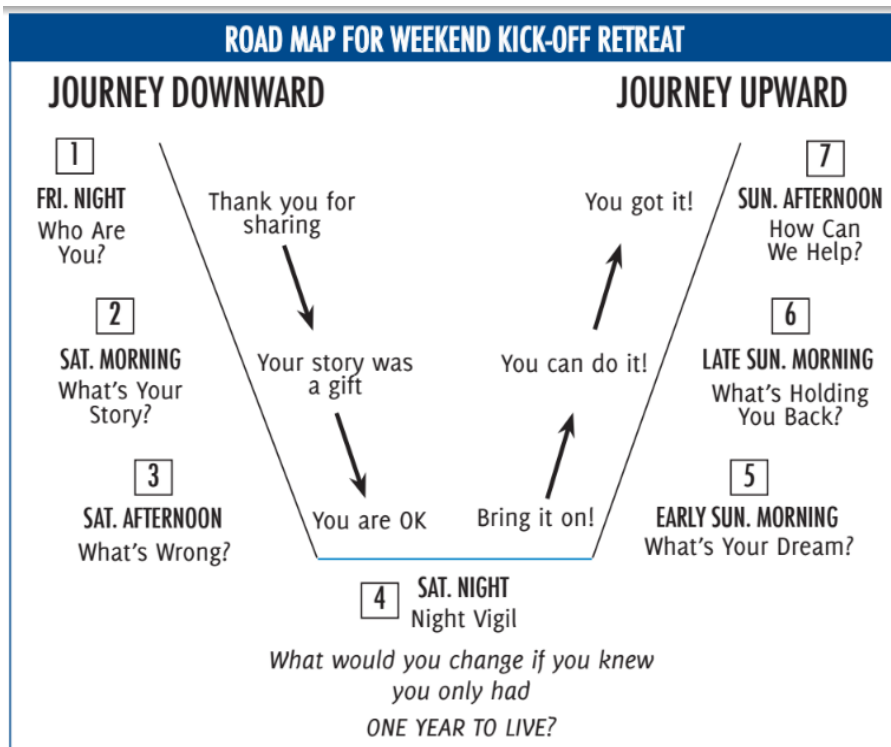


Fig. 2.4. Road Map for Men of Iron Retreat (Coleman, *Launching* 11).

The weekend retreat is followed by a twelve week follow-up group. Group work includes three sessions on each of the four domains of the Great Commandment. Group work combines with Bible study with experiential processes. Homework called the “Solo Workout” is assigned between meetings to help men debrief the group session and integrate experience with Scripture (Coleman, *Launching* 12). The goal of the twelve weeks is the formation of strong bonds between the men that results in ongoing transformation. Coleman illustrates the process with his classic baseball diamond that was popularized during the Serendipity movement (see fig. 2.5.). “First base” facilitates history giving by group participants. “Second base” provides positive affirmation from group members that help an individual recognize their strengths and potential. “Third

base” incorporates Scripture and facilitates goal setting. “Home plate” represents an ongoing experience of deep and supportive community directed by the Spirit of God (F. Fowler 91-29).

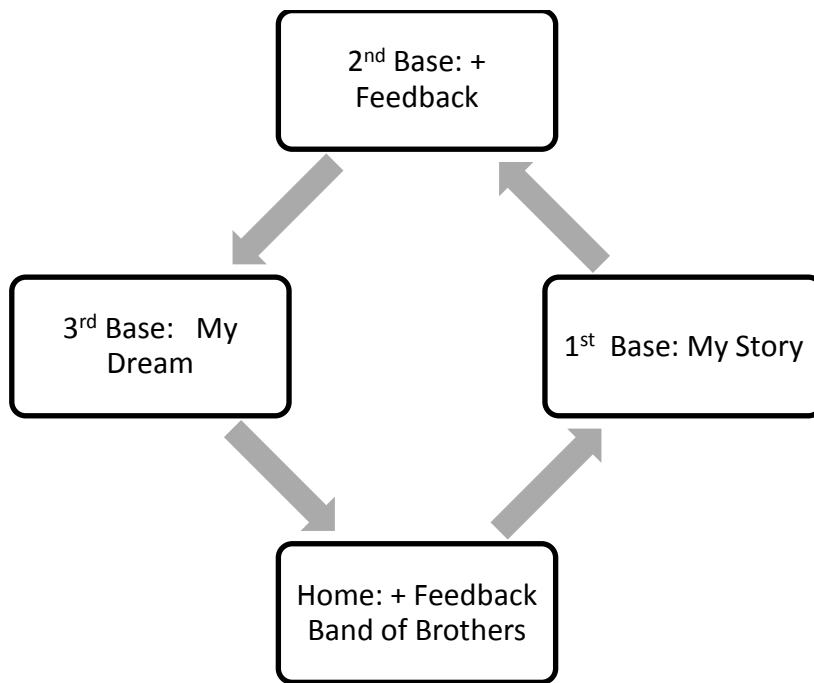


Figure 2.5. Coleman’s Baseball Diamond (Coleman, *12 Week 33*)

Advanced courses are also available. There is a ten week course for each of the four domains. Group processes continue to be introduced that help men deepen their work. Flexibility is introduced into these sessions allowing leaders to customize for the needs of their group. The session focused on the strength domain functions as a training course for running a weekend retreat for a new generation of men.

While there are not explicit references to Erikson’s stages of development or Mezirow’s phases of transformative learning, Coleman’s *Men of Iron* seems to address

many of the themes of the literature review. This is consistent with Coleman's earlier work as reviewed in the dissertation, *Lyman Coleman and the Serendipity Movement in Christian Education: 1954-1980*. "While in the course of his writing he regularly referred to his work as being 'based on the latest ideas in self-discovery, process learning and group dynamics' he never credited or mentioned specific academic references" (F. Fowler 84-85). A cursory review of *Men of Iron* reveals the following links to Mezirow's summary of transformative learning:

1. The value disorienting dilemmas is sounded here: "A great variety of crises have often been the occasions for spiritual growth and identity formation.... During these crises, their fundamental beliefs, developing identities, and connections with God and God's people are challenged and most often redefined" (Coleman, *Launching* 5).
2. Critical reflection is promoted through journaling, contemplative silence, and homework.
3. The group dynamics outlined in the "Covenant: 10 Commitments" and the "Guard Rails: 10 Deadly Sins" (Coleman, *12 Weeks* 20, 22) promote the kind of safe container that supports engaging discourse.
4. The creation of a personal mission statement on the retreat and the repeated emphasis on dreams and goals throughout the follow-up material promotes planning action.

Chapter four provides extensive evaluation of *Men of Iron* using Mezirow's four phases of transformative learning as an analytical grid for evaluating data collected through interviews of participants in the retreat and twelve week follow-up group.

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church's Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. Both the three day retreat and the twelve week follow-up group used Coleman's *Men of Iron* material. Fourteen men completed responses to a pre-retreat questionnaire and participated in post-retreat semi-structured interviews. Twelve men participated in post-follow-up group semi-structured interviews. The analytical grid for the interviews was Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and planning action.

Review of Chapter

The literature review looked at the discipleship of men from multiple perspectives. It started with a summary of recent men's movements in both secular and Christian contexts. Then a biblical vision for manhood was explored touching on the character of God, fatherhood, and Jesus' discipleship of men. Developmental psychology was consulted as a framework for understanding a man's experiences throughout the entire lifespan. A review of transformative learning identified elements that catalyze deep change. Finally, the *Men of Iron* curriculum was reviewed noting the ways it reflects the multi-dimensional concerns of the literature review.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

The men who led the “Men of Iron” retreat in Colorado offered to send a team to host a retreat in our hometowns. After much preparation, a retreat was conducted in Chicago for men’s ministry leaders of South Park church in the July of 2015. Data was collected from fourteen men who completed responses to a pre-retreat questionnaire and participated in post-retreat semi-structured interviews. Twelve men participated in post-follow-up group semi-structured interviews. The analytical grid for the interviews was Mezirow’s four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and planning action.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church’s Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What were some of the participants’ beliefs, experiences, and longings about the discipleship of men before the weekend retreat?

This information was gathered through a questionnaire on the retreat application. It included personal contact information, nine questions, directions to the retreat site, payment information, and a signature of commitment (see Appendix B). Questions addressed beliefs, experiences, and longings (see Table 3.1.). The men received the

application after they made a verbal commitment to attend, and they returned it prior to the retreat. The men turned in fourteen applications that are included in this study.

Table 3.1. Retreat Application Questions Categorized

Beliefs	Experiences	Longings
1. How would you describe your relationship with God right now? (1 = ice cold, 10 = red hot)	2. Personal Growth / Spiritual Weekends previously attended?	6. What are your current personal growth goals?
3. Complete the following sentences: a. Real men..., b. Real men don't...	4. Can you recall a time that signified you moving from boyhood to manhood? Describe what happened.	7. Name three things that you would like to get rid of.
5. What are the three greatest fears in your life?	9. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about you?	8. What would you like to have happen on this retreat?

RQ #2. What were the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men after the weekend?

After receiving retreat applications, I sent an invitation by email inviting participants to be interviewed in the two weeks following the retreat. I created a semi-structured interview worksheet to guide the interviews (see Appendix C).

Interviews opened by asking participants to give one word that described how they were feeling at the beginning of the interview. Following that I led in a brief prayer. Then I asked a "grand tour" question allowing participants to describe their experience in their own terms (Sensing 86). The next section reflected Mezirow's four phase summary

of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action. Participants rated each phase on a Likert Scale (0-4). Follow-up questions asked for description with concrete examples. Because examples flowed from open-ended questions rather than a guided inventory, participants discussed what stood out most in their memory at the time. These would often be the most and least helpful, though that would not always be the case. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for deeper exploration of the examples cited utilizing spontaneous follow-up questions.

The last section of the interview asked open-ended questions intended to gather information that did not fit into the previous questions. I asked about interviewees plans to participate in the follow-up group. I gave an invitation to share more or ask questions after the interview. I asked participants to give one word to describe how they were feeling at the end of the interview. I offered a brief prayer to end our time together.

RQ #3. What were the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men after the twelve week follow-up group?

The twelve week follow up group met from September through December. I sent an invitation by email in mid-December inviting participants to participate in interviews in January. I created semi-structured interview worksheet (see Appendix D). I added a question asking participants to evaluate their experience of the group using the baseball diamond analogy (see fig. 2.5.)

I video recorded the interviews with permission. I stored the recordings on a memory card and kept it in a locked fire-safe and water-safe box. Interviews opened by asking participants to give one word that described how they were feeling at the

beginning of the interview. I offered a brief prayer. Then I asked a “grand tour” question allowing participants to describe their experience in their own terms (Sensing 86). The next section reflected Mezirow’s four phase summary of Transformative Learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action. I asked participants to rate each phase on a Likert Scale (0-4). Follow-up questions asked for description with concrete examples. Because examples flowed from open-ended questions rather than a guided inventory, participants discussed what stood out most in their memory at the time. These would often be the most and least helpful, though that would not always be the case. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for deeper exploration of the examples cited utilizing spontaneous follow-up questions.

The last section of the interview asked open-ended questions intended to gather information that did not fit into the previous questions. I invited interviewees to share more or ask questions after the interview. I asked participants to give one word to describe how they were feeling at the end of the interview. I offered a brief prayer to end the interview.

Ministry Context for Observing the Phenomenon

Iron Men is a Saturday morning gathering of men at South Park Church in Park Ridge, IL. The church has a seventy year history as a suburban, evangelical, independent congregation. I serve as the senior pastor. Iron Men gathers about 45 weeks per year from 7:00 - 8:30 am in the church multi-purpose room. The theme verse is Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (NIV84). This ministry was launched over 12 years ago then gained momentum with the *Men’s Fraternity* material authored by Robert Lewis. Though this curriculum has been used multiple times, other materials and

original series have been utilized. The format includes: breakfast, opening prayer, announcements, lesson, and table discussion. Through the leadership of the church's Director of Adult Ministry and strong lay leadership, the ministry has been gaining momentum. In the past 5 years, attendance doubled resulting in a gathering that ranges from seventy-five to one hundred men with multiple churches represented.

I conducted ethnographic observations on May 31 and June 7, 2014. After identifying themes, I emailed a list of questions to four table leaders. I received written feedback from three of them. Then I followed up with two of those leaders with one-on-one conversations on June 14 to get more specific feedback on the themes.

The first theme identified was vulnerability. In most settings including church, men work hard to appear strong and invulnerable. Yet this group showed evidence of sharing openly and deeply. There was high energy in the room throughout 45 minutes of table discussion evidenced by a high volume of conversational buzz and occasional laughter. Men were also observed leaning towards each other with sustained eye contact and in some cases reassuring physical touch. While groups dismissed at 8:30, several men stayed for further conversation with smaller groups or one-on-one. On June 7, a few men stayed an hour after the meeting catching up on a personal level.

The level of vulnerability in the room was on display before and after the meeting on both weeks that I conducted observations. Conversations in which I was personally involved on June 7, included the following: new believer discipleship, job loss, a battle with cancer, handling relationships after a divorce, pre-marital counseling, and arrest for D.U.I. Various men in the room responded to these issues by offering encouragement, laying on of hands for healing prayer, and scheduling follow-up meetings.

The vulnerability expressed in Iron Men relates to a church-wide journey. *The Cure* by Lynch, McNicol, and Thrall has promoted this culture. The authors ask, “What if there was a place so safe that the worst of me could be known, and I would be loved more, not less, in the telling of it?” (38). R.A., the staff leader of Iron Men, reinforced this when he said, “If you can’t be honest here, where can you be?”

The second theme identified was the priesthood of all believers. From start to finish, there is partnership between paid staff and volunteer leaders. There are two staff members who attend weekly. The ministry is overseen by R.A. Atanus, Executive Director and Adult Ministry Director of South Park Church. R.A. schedules teachers, teaches on average two to three times per month, recruits and trains table leaders, oversees a tremendous amount of logistics, plans an annual retreat, and works hard to make every person in the room feel loved and valued. I attend as the Senior Pastor. I teach on average once per month and interact with as many men as possible before and after meetings. Both of us are participants in a consistent table group each week.

Lay leaders are involved in a variety of roles weekly. Two men share hosting duties greeting men at the door and sharing announcements. A new man each week is asked to lead in opening prayer—for some men, this is the first time they have prayed out loud in front of a group. It is scary but affirming. Sixteen men lead a table group facilitating discussion, leading in prayer, and promoting relationships throughout the week. Tables take turns providing breakfast each week ranging from continental to meals prepared on-site. A few laymen are involved in the teaching rotation.

May 31, 2014, my first week of observation, was a major demonstration of volunteer leadership. The ministry director was out of the country. As the senior pastor, I

was present to offer support with some minor audio/visual needs and provide encouragement. But volunteer leaders ran the entire meeting including: opening the building, setting up and tearing down, providing breakfast, giving announcements, teaching the lesson, and assimilating guests.

The Executive Director has a passion to see men grow as disciples and leaders. Volunteer leaders long to be used by God to establish His Kingdom. As one leader emailed me, “The invitation and the acceptance of the Holy Spirit to attend Iron Men meetings is the reason Iron Men is strong. We hear the Word and speak together about the Word’s application in our lives. We interact with men who care for each other; remember our names, our victories, defeats and challenges. We gather as a team; each of us looking for the very best in one another. (We have) lecture and lab in one class; accountability to each other and prayer for each other.”

Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon

Criteria for Selection

R.A. and I chose the participants in this study from among leaders actively involved in ministry to men at South Park Church. The parameters of the retreat set a limit of 15 men—12 retreat participants plus 3 who filled a dual role of assistant work group leaders and retreat participant.

The best way to influence the many is to invest in a few who will reproduce. Jesus modeled this with the Twelve. Transformed table leaders will lead to transformed men’s ministry participants. Selecting current leaders of the ministry allowed them to be part of the evaluation process for potential future use of *Men of Iron* materials. It was a

limitation of this study that it did not provide data from a spiritually younger or chronologically younger audience.

Description of Participants

Those who participated included twelve Iron Men table leaders, two elders, and one pastoral staff member. The pastoral staff member consulted with me on many dimensions of the interventions but did not participate in the data collection interviews (see Table 4.1. for Retreat Participant Demographics).

Ethical Considerations

Although it is beyond the scope of my study, it seems prudent to mention that focusing on a gender-specific topic is not easily achieved. Issues such as male-privileged vernacular (“mankind”), male-privileged social policies (unequal pay), and male-dominated leadership in many churches call for re-evaluation and policy change. I am grateful to serve on the staff of a church that celebrates the role of women as elders, pastors, and preachers. However, censoring a gender-specific learning conversation as set forth in this study would be counter-productive. I echo the sentiments of Wilder who says, “Sometimes people hear every positive statement about men as a denial of the damage men can do, or as a negative statement about women. This is not my intent. When I say that to be a man is good, I don’t mean as compared to being a woman. Instead it is a reminder that when God looked at his creation, he said that it was good just as it stood” (12). Voices outside the church also acknowledge the need for male-focused initiatives. After extensive treatment of challenges faced by boys and men in our society, psychologist Philip Zimbardo concludes, “Places where men and boys can gather together are more necessary than ever before. Older guys should become mentors to

younger guys in their family, school or workplace” (Loc 1111). Therefore, the following study explores the discipleship of men in search of generative outcomes that benefit entire families, churches, and societies.

The power dynamics of my role as senior pastor could have made it hard for a man who wanted to participate in the retreat to decline participation in the study for fear of disappointing me. It might also have been a challenge for some to fully disclose negative feelings about their experiences. I kept this in mind in all communications when scheduling and conducting interviews. If I sensed any reluctance, I assured the participant that I would fully support their choice to participate or not participate in the study. And at the beginning of the interviews I stated, “I’d rather hear what you really think than what you think I want to hear.”

I handled the invitation to the retreat and the request to participate in the study separately. After agreeing to be part of the retreat, I asked men to consider participating in the study. The email invitation to participate in the study stated that participating in the study was not a requirement to attend the retreat. After men registered for the retreat, I invited them to participate in an interview and sent them a consent form (see Appendix E). Applications and consent forms were kept in a fire-safe and water-safe box with a keyed lock. I scheduled all interviews directly with the participants to protect confidentiality. Interviews took place in a classroom at South Park Church and were video recorded. The recordings were stored on an SD card and kept in a fire-safe and water-safe box with a keyed lock. I coded all names of interview participants by number to protect confidentiality in the reporting of information. I kept all interview notes on my laptop that was password protected.

Pilot Test or Expert Review

I sent an early draft of the interview questions to a South Park Church member who is a licensed clinical psychologist who would not be participating in the study. All the questions in that draft were open ended. He recommended more objective measurements using a Likert Scale. That was incorporated into four questions that served as major headings of the interview.

A final draft of the interview was reviewed with Doug Haugen, Executive Director of Lutheran Men in Mission. The Lutheran version of “Men of Iron” is called “One Year to Live” and has been used by the ELCA for eight years with approximately 1,000 men completing a weekend retreat. The ELCA offices are only one mile from my home, and Doug was very encouraging of this study. I asked him the interview questions over lunch. He affirmed that the questions were fitting and reinforced this by recounting several concrete examples from retreats he had led.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

The concept for this project materialized when I was invited to attend an “Iron Weekend” in Colorado in July of 2014. Communities were already established in Memphis and Cincinnati that were conducting retreats and follow-up groups. Leaders of those communities staffed a weekend at La Mancha Lodge in Buena Vista, CO, to introduce more men to the material. Staff of that weekend offered to bring a team to our communities to launch new *Men of Iron* movements. I expressed interest and returned home to consult with R.A., the leader of our church’s men’s ministry.

Preparation

Discussions took place in the fall of 2014 with R.A. about the purposes of an “Iron Weekend” and how it might fit into the big picture of our current ministry. The South Park Church Iron Men ministry already hosted an annual adventure retreat every summer. Men in our ministry were also heavily involved every spring and fall in the lay renewal Cursillo Movement known as the Great Banquet. There had been a growing desire to take our leaders deeper in their understanding of their identity in Christ, unite them as leaders, and equip them with new resources for leading their table groups. We decided to suspend the Iron Men Adventure Retreat for one year in order to experiment with an Iron Men Leader’s Retreat using the *Men of Iron* curriculum.

We scheduled the retreat for July 10-12, 2015. After an extensive search for an appropriate site, we chose the conference center of the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL. The location combined a short travel time for participants (45 minutes) with comfortable accommodations and access to nature (900 wooded acres, a large lake, a seminary campus, and extensive sacred art). Our host provided double occupancy dorm-style rooms with private bathrooms. We had a conference room for all of our meetings plus freedom to roam the grounds. All meals were included in the package provided by the campus cafeteria. Participants contributed \$150. The remainder of the cost of the retreat was subsidized by South Park Church.

Jeff Fortenbery of Cincinnati, OH, who led the Colorado retreat, served as consultant and team leader for our retreat. Three conference calls and multiple emails with Jeff took place in the months leading up to the retreat. He built a team of eight men—six from Cincinnati and two from Memphis—who had experience facilitating

weekends. They travelled at their own expense to share what they had previously received. Their room and board at the retreat center was covered by South Park Church. The team assembled included the following: one retreat leader, one elder, three work group leaders, and three logistics team members. In addition, there were four members of South Park Church who served on the leadership team. I served as Bible teacher and was a retreat leader-in-training. R.A. and two Iron Men table leaders served dual roles as retreat participants and assistant work group leaders. This resulted in a leadership team of 12.

In April, I consulted with R.A. to finalize the participant invitation list. Because of the leadership focus and limited spots available, participation was by invitation only. We asked those who accepted the invitations to complete the application (see Appendix B). Once I received the application, I sent an email invitation to participate in this study. Those who agreed received a follow-up email with an invitation to participate in the post-retreat interviews. If they expressed interest in participating in the interview, I sent the consent form (see Appendix E).

In May, R.A. and I visited the retreat site. We toured the rooms and took photographs to share with the out-of-state retreat staff. We prayed on site asking God to accomplish his purposes. In the days that followed R.A. consulted with the retreat center to finalize the contract.

In June, my administrative assistant, Renee Gerstmayr, began gathering everything on the materials list. She also made copies of the “Retreat Portfolio” for participants and the “Retreat Small Group Leader Manual” for the leadership team. We exchanged multiple emails with Tom Lang, the logistics team leader.

Retreat

The members of the leadership team traveled from Park Ridge, Cincinnati, and Memphis on Thursday, July 9. They converged at the retreat center to meet each other, unpack supplies, and do an initial spiritual and emotional check-in. Then they shared a meal at a local restaurant. After dinner they conducted team building exercises. Friday provided an hour for intentional solitude for centering one's heart and mind. The rest of the day was spent walking through the master schedule, adapting to the setting, and clarifying roles and expectations.

Retreat participants supplied their own transportation to the retreat center and arrived by 6:00 pm on Friday. Everyone arrived on time, an impressive accomplishment in Friday night Chicago traffic. There were warm greetings yet some anxiety due to questions about what was about to happen. After checking into their rooms, men went through an elaborate registration and check-in procedure. This included challenging questions for personal reflection. Due to the proprietary nature of the processes used throughout the weekend, they are not described in detail in this project. But they can be found in *Men of Iron: Weekend Kick-off Retreat*.

The weekend is built around "work groups" that consist of a leader, an assistant leader, and four retreat participants. Group lecture is limited. Individual and group work is maximized. Work group leaders set the example for in a series of experiential learning activities. These experiences are "physically, emotionally and spiritually challenging. You are going to take a look at the things that hold you back from living your dream.

And every time you share something, your teammates are going to reward you with positive feedback.” (Coleman, *Weekend 5*).

My role as Bible teacher/storyteller involved five brief segments (5 – 15 minutes each) that incrementally recounted the transformation of Jacob found in Genesis. I utilized first-person narrative and role-playing to bring the story alive. I spent the remainder of my time and focus shadowing the retreat leader, recording field notes, and engaging men personally. The three men who filled dual roles of assistant work group leaders and participants had the most challenging jobs. When other participants had free time, they attended leadership team meetings.

The retreat ended on Sunday afternoon. A formal sendoff allowed the retreat participants to leave first. After packing up, there was a quick debriefing with the leadership team then everyone headed home.

Lyman Coleman called me first thing on the Monday morning following the retreat for a report. He celebrated what took place and offered affirmation. Jeff also followed up with an email providing encouragement and ideas for supporting the participants. Jeff followed up with two more phone calls through the fall to check-in about progress with the follow-up group asking how he could help.

I invited all fourteen men to participate in a post-retreat interview, and each said yes. I conducted interviews within two weeks following the retreat in a classroom at South Park Church. One interview had to be scheduled in August, one month after the retreat.

I invited all fourteen men to participate in the 12 Week Follow-Up Group. All showed interest, but two declined due to family commitments. Twelve men participated

in the follow-up group that R.A. and I led. The group met on Wednesdays from 7:00 – 8:30 at South Park Church beginning September 16 and running through December 9, 2015. We did not meet the week of Thanksgiving. *Men of Iron: 12 Week Follow-Up* served as the curriculum. All fourteen participants met together for the first session to establish a group covenant and set expectations. The following weeks opened with a large group check-in then divided into two sub groups. R.A. and I each led one of the sub groups and consulted with each other periodically to adapt the material to our setting. The last week of the series suspended the curriculum and convened at a local restaurant to share a meal.

An invitation to participate in interviews at the end of the follow-up group was sent in mid-December. All twelve men who participated in the follow-up group said yes. Those interviews followed the same format as the post-retreat interviews and were conducted in January 2016.

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

I transcribed the data from retreat applications and summarized it in lists and tables. I analyzed this information for themes. Conclusions were drawn and included in chapter four in response to Research Question #1.

I gathered data for Research Question #2 through post-retreat interviews. I recorded handwritten notes during interviews on the interview worksheet (see Appendix C). I transcribed these handwritten notes into electronic versions of the interview worksheet. I viewed the video recordings of the interviews and transcribed key quotes and observations to the electronic interview worksheets. I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize and analyze data. Columns identified the four phase summary of Mezirow's

transformative learning theory, and rows identified participant coding. An additional tab of the spreadsheet summarized results of the Likert scale questions. I added tabs for most challenging processes, mentions of God's activity, metaphors used, and lessons learned. I reviewed the spreadsheet for data that confirmed or refuted engagement of transformative learning practices in the retreat. I included observations in chapter four. I summarized data in tables where possible.

I gathered data for Research Question #3 through post-retreat interviews. I recorded handwritten notes during interviews on the interview worksheet (see Appendix D). I transcribed these handwritten notes into electronic versions of the interview worksheet. I viewed the video recordings of the interviews and transcribed key quotes and observations to the electronic interview worksheets. I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize and analyze data. Columns identified the four phase summary of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, and rows identified participant coding. An additional tab of the spreadsheet summarized results of the Likert scale questions. I added tabs for most challenging processes, mentions of God's activity, metaphors used, and lessons learned. I reviewed the spreadsheet for data that confirmed or refuted engagement of transformative learning practices in the follow-up group. I included observations in chapter four. I summarized data in tables where possible.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

I chose semi-structured interviews so that I could evaluate predetermined themes associated with transformative learning while allowing some freedom to follow new lines of inquiry as they developed (Sensing 107). This format aligned with standards among transformative learning researchers. "Currently a standard approach to research on

transformative learning is to conduct retrospective interviews with participants about their experiences and to search for themes related to the transformative process” (Cranton and Hoggan 532). I explored concrete examples with each participant whenever possible. “Interview material that is skimpy and that lacks sufficient concreteness—in the form of stories, anecdotes, examples of experiences—may be quite useless, tempting the researcher to indulge in overinterpretations, speculations, or an overreliance on personal opinions” (Van Manen Loc. 7789). The interviews resulted in robust engagement with all four phases of transformative learning theory with many concrete examples shared.

Review of the Chapter

This chapter described how I planned and conducted the interventions of a Men of Iron retreat and follow-group. It explained how a questionnaire was used to gather data for Research Question #1. It explained how I conducted interviews to gather data for Research Questions #2 and #3. It described the analytical grid that utilized Mezirow’s four phase summary of transformative learning. It explained the procedure for analyzing data with comments on the reliability and validity the research.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church's Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. The data collection included a written questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews with participants. Interviews reflected Mezirow's four phase summary of Transformative Learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

Research Question #1 explored some of the participants' beliefs, experiences, and longings about the discipleship of men before the weekend retreat.

Participants

The participants in data collection were men who serve in a leadership position among men at South Park Church in the ministry of Iron Men.

Table 4.1. Retreat Participant Demographics

Average Age	53
Age Range	43 – 64
Marital Status	Married: 12 Single: 2

The nine application questions are categorized under the headings of beliefs, experiences, and longings (see Table 3.1 “Application Questions.”)

Beliefs

When asked, “How would you describe your relationship with God right now? (1 = ice cold, 10 = red hot),” answers ranged from four to eight with an average of 6.75.

When asked to complete the following sentences, “a. Real men..., b. Real men don’t...” all fourteen respondents made some reference to at least one component of the definition of manhood found in Robert Lewis’s *Quest for Authentic Manhood*. (see Table 4.2.). Three men included all four components of the definition. The definition includes the following four components with the number of times each was cited by respondents.

Table 4.2 Occurrences of Robert Lewis’s Definition of Manhood

Reject passivity	8
Accept responsibility	4
Lead courageously	4
Expects the greater reward	4

Six respondents identified that real men are either honest or don’t hide. Three respondents cited the importance of developing loving relationships. And two respondents referenced understanding one’s identity in Christ.

While many fears touched on overlapping topics, eighteen separate fears were identified. The following fears had multiple occurrences.

Table 4.3 Fears Identified

Fear	Occurrences
Disappointing God	6
Family not knowing God	5
Fear of rejection	3
My health	3
Unable to provide for my family	3
Failing at work	3
Failure (general)	2
Loneliness	2
Family health	2
Concern about next life stage	2
Insignificance	2

M8 said, “I can honestly say fear is not part of my operating system,” but went on to cite two fears that he could identify when he reflected further.

Experiences

All but one participant cited at least one retreat previously attended. The responses included: Great Banquet (9), Iron Men summer retreat (3), church retreats (2), marriage retreat (2), church camps (2), and Promise Keepers (1).

The questionnaire asked, “Can you recall a time that signified you moving from boyhood to manhood? Describe what happened.” Responses are summarized in the following five categories:

Table 4.4. Movement from Boyhood to Manhood

Category	Occurrences
Life Stage	9
Spiritual Milestone	5
Interaction with Father	3
Family Crisis	3
Workplace	2

The questionnaire did not ask men for their age, but several did. The youngest age cited for movement from boyhood to manhood was eleven and the oldest was fifty-one.

Life stage issues included going to college, moving out to be independent, marriage, parenting, remarriage, and owning a house. Spiritual milestones included salvation, baptism, participating in the Great Banquet, and leading a men's group. Two of the three father references described a specific challenge given. M4 was on a hike at age sixteen when his father confronted him about slacking, and he recounted, "I stood up to him and marched on ahead of him and the group. I earned his respect for standing up to him, for my physical stamina, and for taking the challenge head on." Family crises included death of a father, death of a mother, and parent's divorce. The father of one man died when he was eleven, and from that point on his outlook was, "If it was to be, it was up to me." Workplace references included one man joining the military and another man learning to produce work "I could be proud of."

Longings

When asked, “What are your current personal growth goals?” answers fell into five categories:

Table 4.5. Growth Goals

Growth Goal Category	Occurrences
Personal Faith	10
Leading Others	4
Family	4
Character	3
Physical Health	1

Two respondents said they didn’t have any current growth goals. By contrast, M12 listed ten specific goals for the current year.

Issues identified under the heading, “Name three things that you would like to get rid of,” were extremely varied. A pattern did not emerge that could be summarized easily.

It was hard for men to answer “What would you like to have happen on this retreat?” because few details about the retreat were revealed in advance. Longings expressed in responses included the following:

Table 4.6. Longings Identified

Longing	Occurrences
Deepen relationships with other participants	5
Increase spiritual passion	5
Insights into God's character	4
Don't know	4
General excitement	3
Strengthen leadership	2
Time for quiet reflection	1
Fun	1

Openness to “whatever” was expressed multiple times. M2 said, “I am open to whatever God shows me.” M12 said, “I’m open to whatever I need to learn and grow in this weekend—even areas I’m not aware of.”

Four respondents used deliberate humor in a total of seven answers on the application. I did not interpret the humor as a deflection or defense mechanism. Its use was in line with good-natured interaction that revealed a comfort level with those who would be reading the applications.

The survey questions started a reflection process for men before they arrived at the retreat. There was no formal debrief of participants answers on the application, and some men requested that this be done in the future.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

Research Question #2 explored the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men through an interview after the weekend retreat. The majority of the interview questions reflected Mezirow's four phase summary of Transformative Learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action. Feedback on each of those four phases is summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Post-Retreat Interview Summary

Question	Average	Range
1. How challenging was your experience? (1 = not at all, 4 = deeply challenging)	3.1	1, 4
2. How important was time for critical reflection? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)	3.4	2, 4
3. How important was your interaction with others? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)	3.9	3, 4
4. How applicable to your life was the work you did? (1 = not applicable, 4 = very applicable)	3.6	3, 4

The four phases of transformative learning reflected in the interview questions often overlap in the experience of the learner. Progression through the phases is not always linear. Therefore the following observations required several judgment calls. Feedback from interviews could often fit into several categories depending on which aspect of the feedback was emphasized. Given the proprietary nature of the weekend, the importance of confidentiality, and the desire to retain a strong element of surprise for men who will later experience it, there is much about the weekend that cannot be described.

Disorienting Dilemma

I chose to replace the term “disorienting dilemma” with the more common term “challenge” in the interviews. The level of challenge experienced by participants received an overall score of 3.1 out of 4. Multiple participants mentioned that the first challenge was having so little information about the activities of the weekend. Since many participants had already attended and served at local Great Banquet weekends, comparisons were made. M10 said, “I’ve had intensive challenging times, but not a prolonged period of time like two days. The only thing that would have come close is the Great Banquet.” M13 said, “I’ve never been that challenged,” and described his retreat experience as “the Banquet on steroids, human growth hormones, and testosterone.” Metaphors used to describe the challenge of the weekend included a wrestling match, graduate school, and ranger school.

Each participant cited at least one experiential learning process as the most challenging.

Table 4.8 Retreat Most Challenging Processes

Most Challenging	Mentions
Shame	4
Mission Statement	3
Family Table	2
Hot Seat	2
Foot Washing	1
Grave	1
Eulogy	1

The process that received the most mentions as “most challenging” dealt with shame. M2 described it as taking the mask off and said, “There’s one thing that I shared in particular on Saturday that I’ve never shared with anyone before in my life.” Some of the dynamics of the shame process are discussed below under “Critical Reflection.”

M1 felt minimal challenge throughout the weekend because “I’ve unpacked all this stuff before in my life multiple times.” But he stated that writing a mission statement was challenging knowing there was a limited amount of time to live up to it. M8 clarified that the challenge was not in writing or verbalizing the mission statement. “The challenge is in finishing the mission statement and putting it into practice. How is that going to affect my decision making and where I’m going?”

While only two participants identified the Family Table exercise as the most challenging, several referenced it. Some learned things about their families of origin that they had never realized before. M10 said, “It helped me see some of the missing gaps in my own growing up; probably some of the things I carried into my marriage.” Others saw relevance for the family table they were creating for their children while they are still at home. M14 said, “When my kids look back, do I want them to say we were on our phones and Dad didn’t say much, he was just kind of tuned out. I just need to step up.... This gave me the energy to do this.”

M7 and M9 described the power of the “Hot Seat.” They both learned that others see positive qualities in them that they don’t always see in themselves. It was an emotional experience to receive this affirmation that challenged their assumptions about themselves.

Referring to the power of foot washing, M4 shared how emotional it was. “I was crying like a baby. I was the first so I didn’t have time to prepare or rationalize it. It was raw. I was a wreck.”

M6 described the eulogy as very challenging because it helped strip away what was unimportant in order to focus on what was important—relationship with God and loved ones. M3 said the grave was the most challenging because it felt so final and his time for leaving a legacy would be over at that point.

Six participants identified “most challenging” processes that occurred in the first half of the weekend that focus on first base: one’s story (see fig. 2.5.). These processes focus on learning how the past affects the present. These participants were on average 3 years younger than the average age of the group. Eight participants identified “most challenging” processes that occurred in the second half of the weekend that focus on third base: one’s dream (see fig. 2.5.). The focus is learning how a preferable future can affect the present. These participants were on average 2 years older than the average age of the group. A larger sample with more diverse ages would need to be interviewed to know if this trend might become more statistically significant. If this trend did become more statistically significant, it would indicate a need to help younger men reconcile the hurts, disappointments, and experiences of their past that affects their present. And it would indicate a need to help older men face the ultimate disorienting dilemma—death—and assist him to prepare to live on mission with the days he has left.

The following correlations come from examining the answers of the outliers on Likert scale questions. One man opened his interview by describing multiple disorienting dilemmas that were converging just before the retreat that included a life-altering injury,

an impending career change, and desire to see change in his family. He said he was “discouraged, demoralized, and slogging through life.” Yet he was one of two participants who scored every category with a four and wanted to exceed the scale answering “four plus” for three of the categories. He felt that his challenges had given him an open mind and heart to receive from God on the weekend. A different man gave the lowest scores overall including a score of “one” for challenge. This was the only “one” given by any participant in any category in the retreat interviews. The reason for the low score was his evaluation of the opening experience that was designed to set the tone for the weekend as a challenging encounter with God. It involved direct eye contact, in this case, with a man the participant had never met before in a setting he had never been in before. He said, “You’ve got to earn the right to look a man in the eye.” The outcome for him on the first night was, “I probably left four times in my mind.” Yet the interview indicated that he persevered, trusting the leaders who had invited him and trusting the process of the weekend. Though he scored the challenge low, the rest of the interview indicated that he was deeply engaged at multiple points throughout the rest of the weekend.

Critical Reflection

For transformation to occur, people need an environment where they can reflect on their assumptions and those of others. The importance of time for critical reflection received an overall score of 3.4 out of 4. One of the practices that promoted critical reflection was group check-ins. The unpublished notes used by retreat staff says that the purpose of the check-in is “to get men used to speaking to each other, to give them a chance to share their feelings and wisdom, to give them a chance to hear other men’s

experiences (which often brings up things the listener may not have thought about himself). The check-in is one of the most useful tools for use during and after the weekend” (“Iron on Iron – LEADER” 5). Men were given clear instructions about reporting what was going on inside of them. The practice was also modeled which set the tone for depth and length of sharing. The unpublished notes described a total of eight group check-ins that covered a range of length and depth. The first check-in was a simple repetition of the confidentiality commitment. A later check-in used a fill-in-the-blank sentence to identify feelings. And other check-ins allowed for more extended, narrative responses. A man’s answer was accepted without criticism, and the group always responded in unison, “Bless you.” The check-ins were fast-paced without being rushed, and they were a way to keep everyone involved. M6 valued the regular check-ins as a way of getting in touch with what was going on inside at any time and saw it as something to continue practicing in other settings.

Critical reflection took place throughout the weekend. It started right away for M11. He said that he had not been experiencing much joy in the days leading up to the retreat, and this became clear right away when faced with the direct questions asked at registration. His internal response was, “OK, I’ve got to get rid of that.” He said he had been looking forward to the weekend, but when he identified what had unconsciously been dragging him down, there was a nice bump up in his anticipation. M12 said he needed space and time throughout the weekend to review or he would have been missing things that he was gaining. He did this by journaling during the time set aside for silent reflection called the “Emmaus Walk.” This led to a very vivid and personal dialog with God. M12 recounted at the next check-in that he heard God say, “It’s easier for you to

take risks than other people... and I love that about you. Will you let me lead you in this?" It was an affirmation and invitation that was shared with much emotion. It was so impactful that other men mentioned this moment during the post-retreat interviews. M13 also saw value in journaling because he was overflowing with insights that he did not want to forget. He said, "I journaled five pages at one time, and that's five more pages than I've journaled in my life."

One other opportunity for profound critical reflection that was noted came during the grave process that confronted men with their mortality. When asked about breakthroughs, M3 said, "If I were to pick one, (the grave process) was a moment when scattered thinking became focused. It was appropriately set up. Felt alone, no distractions. I was thinking about my plight. Here I am in the ground and it's over." (3)

Transformative learning states that when someone has time to reflect on their assumptions, it often triggers feelings of guilt or shame. That is consistent with M2's observation that the retreat forces you to reach inward into areas you normally do not enter. Feelings of guilt and shame were addressed throughout the weekend, and there was a specific experiential learning process that focused on it. The shame process received the highest frequency of mentions when asked about the most challenging part of the weekend. (4 times, see Table 4.8.). M12 noted a rigor to the questions about shame that took things deeper even than a longstanding accountability relationship. His work group leader also modeled real and deep sharing. M12's response was, "I'm going for it. I'm writing down whatever comes to mind. I don't care how people respond." This parallels the experience of M2 who shared something that he had never shared with anyone ever before, and he acknowledged that it might have been shame that kept it hidden in the

background. After sharing it, he felt relief. M2 also used the metaphor of an onion—some men peel back one layer, others three layers, and some cut right down the middle.

Throughout the weekend participants addressed encounters with feelings of guilt and shame. M4 had a breakthrough moment when he saw that the family table he created paralleled the one he inherited. His response was reflected in statements like “That rocked my world,” and “Oh no, what have I done?” There seemed to be guilt or shame behind the words of M9 when he expressed, “Would I join a club that would have me as a member? As soon as someone says something good about me I say, ‘Yeah, but you really don’t know me.’” Factors that promoted sharing at this level are explored in the next section.

Engaging Discourse

Transformative learning creates an environment for people to more fully and freely engage in discourse. The importance of interaction with others received a score of 3.9 out of 4. The observation of M2 was that the normal posture of men is to “hold their shields up” representing reluctance to engage in full and free discourse. He went on to say that the retreat encouraged men “to put down their shields.” The metaphor used by the staff on the *Men of Iron* retreat was the creation of a “safe container.” This was addressed very early on in the retreat with a one page list of “10 Agreements.” Special emphasis was given to number four: “4. Confidentiality: I will keep anything that is said in this group in absolute confidence” (“Weekend Retreat Portfolio” 3). The first check-in asked men to verbally repeat this agreement and commit to following it. After everyone responded, the retreat leader asked them to sign their name to the bottom of the page and

have another man sign as a witness. Men were reminded of this commitment throughout the weekend.

What followed was discourse of uncommon depth. M9 used the metaphor of playing cards. He observed that most men's groups "throw fours and fives. Here guys were throwing jacks and aces. Maybe it was because of the safety of the environment." M10 added, "People really shared their heart and got down to the real nitty gritty, their pain in a very short time."

A majority of time on the weekend was spent in work groups that consisted of six men each. In contrast to the other discipleship environments where men sit around tables, here there was no physical barrier. It was just a circle of six chairs. M4 said "We often moved our chairs closer and leaned in listening and engaging. There was no sense of checking-out. For this reason people were sharing more and deeper than they would have done with tables, posters and skits." It was remembered by M5 that their group leaned in so close, their noses were almost touching. The physical closeness was reinforced by active listening. M8 said, "Eye to eye in the group was really powerful for me. I really connected to whoever I was speaking to. I could see that what I was saying was sinking in. I was connecting."

A common response to deep sharing was the conclusion that men were not alone. M11 made the spiritual application that "One of the devil's techniques is to corner us and make us think we're alone. Then when we get with a bunch of other Christians guys and realize you're not alone." Because many men were sharing deep hurts, men who had relatively healthy childhoods feared that their story would not resonate. But the groups were able to find common ground even when their experiences were very disparate. M14

recounted sharing that his family table was a pretty happy experience, and men responded by saying they “wish they had been at my table.” This showed him that everyone in his group could relate to each other even though their experiences were different. They could show compassion for difficult experiences and celebrate good ones. In short, M14 said, “We’re all there pulling for each other.” It should be added that not all sharing was emotionally heavy. M3 noted, “There were times of humor and guys bonded. There’s a little bit of the three stooges in every guy. There were times when we laughed well. And it pulled us together.”

In addition to the repeated emphasis on confidentiality and the courage of the men to open up, the work group leaders exercised skills that promoted meaningful discourse. A leader modeled in some way every learning experience. This set the tone. M10 highlighted this, “The thing that really made a difference for me is the guy who was leading our group went first. He was very transparent. He could have had a pat thing, but he shared something that was very recent in his family dynamics. He entered in as one of the guys. He really set the pace of transparency by how he opened discussion.” This was a common experience among groups promoting reciprocal sharing. This impacted M10 deeply, and he made several observations about group dynamics that promoted deep sharing. He mentioned the absence of interruption, judgment, or nonverbal disapproval. He highlighted the power of listening without offering fixes. “It forms a confidence in the person that is speaking. If someone interjects a comment or makes a correction, that person can easily be intimidated. That’s one of the keys why men went so deep.” M10 then concluded that good listening skills result in receiving what he called a “passport.”

“You can’t travel into someone’s country unless you have a passport. In other words someone gives you permission to go.”

On occasion, facilitators probed for deeper responses. M13 recalled that he shared a painful memory then made a joke and laughed it off. One of the leaders of his group commented, “When you shared that you were laughing a little bit, and it wasn’t funny.” M13 said he had numbed himself to the hurt, and when he was called on it, it made him think. That led to feeling the weight of it. “And there were times I kind of teared up a little bit. And I never cry about anything.” M10 provided a metaphor to describe this encounter. “It’s like the leader pried open the jar, but didn’t empty the contents. The man realized there was a bunch of stuff in that jar that needed dumped out.” This is a good example of the principle identified by the retreat leader who said, “God is working in a man, and it is my job to support that man in his work” (Flood 1).

Throughout the weekend, work group members offer positive feedback as a man completes a process. Receiving positive affirmation was an emotional experience for several men. M6 teared up in the interview as he described how powerful it was to hear men affirm him. M14 got emotional and grabbed his chest as he recounted, “One man said I was strong. I thought that’s not a word I normally associate with myself. It affects me a lot when someone else affirms me when it’s positive and not something I saw. It is very powerful.” M13 said he rarely gets emotional, but he teared up during the affirmation he received on the “Hot Seat” saying, “You don’t think you’ve having an effect on people until they tell you.” M7 was also surprised by what he was told. “Strength came up several times, and I don’t see myself that way.” This led to further critical reflection at home and dialog with God. M7 recounted that at home on Monday,

“the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, ‘It’s great that all these people think all these wonderful things about you but all that really matters is what I think about you.’” M10 kept a written record of the affirmation he received and reread it, honoring it as something the Lord gave his work group to say to him. M3 added that the words meant more because of the relationships built throughout the weekend. He admitted, “I suffer from shame. I don’t know that I see myself as others do. I thought that this group set the right tone and the right environment for people to say things about others so I took them as truth. And I’m not so sure I would have done that in a different setting.” Men told M8 how much God is using him. They said that M8 was a strong leader, a spiritual entrepreneur, and that he had qualities that attract men. This strong affirmation led to new questions about stewardship as he asked himself, “Am I using my gifting for myself and the world instead of using it for the kingdom?”

Taking Action

Transformative learning leads to being more effective in taking action on one’s reflective judgments. This was addressed in interviews by asking how applicable the retreat was to one’s life. This received a score of 3.6 out of 4.

Writing a personal mission statement was one of the most prominent ways that promoted action. Thirteen of the fourteen interviewees gave meaningful and positive feedback about their mission statement. (The one man who did not talk about his mission statement after the retreat talked enthusiastically about a breakthrough in refining his mission statement during the follow-up group). The goal of the process was not a finished product but a solid draft of a mission statement that could be refined later. M3 concluded that the “crux of the weekend was the mission statement.” M2 affirmed the importance of

this component when he said, “I wish we had more time for the mission statement stuff.” M4 went into the segment pessimistic having worked on mission statements in the marketplace that rarely were used. By the end of the process he said his opinion was turned upside down. “I wrote my whole mission statement in like two minutes and I memorized it in like half that time because it is basically just who I am. So there’s no memorizing necessary. It’s who I am and who I want to be.” M1 was energized by the process stating “I want this to be internalized so that when I’m waking up in the morning and going through my day... it takes me to wherever I need to go.” After stating his mission, he said enthusiastically, “I want to be obsessed with that!”

While many elements of the weekend cannot be shared due to confidentiality and the proprietary nature of the processes, men were encouraged to share their mission statements. Several men shared them with their wives and families. Others put it on their phone or in other prominent places to be reminded of it. M10 said that he had been reviewing it in his daily devotions. M13 said that “reading through it again makes me excited. I should memorize it.” M8 integrated his experiences on the weekend by stating that he felt challenged to create a mission statement and live it out in a way that affects his eulogy saying, “Those two are definitely interconnected.” M4 compared his mission statement to a top-of-the-line power tool. “If you go to Home Depot and you dropped a couple hundred bucks on this really cool chainsaw or power tool and say, ‘Look at this power tool. It is the Ferrari of power tools!’ You can’t just leave it sit on the shelf and say, ‘Look at that really cool power tool. I haven’t used it in five years.’ Having this mission statement that... was so meaningful, I feel like I have to use it.”

Transformation moves from planning a course of action to acquiring knowledge and skills to implement that plan of action. One skill one man walked away with was replaying vivid images and experiences from the weekend in real life situations. M11 referred to the Grave Process when he said, “if stuff comes back to burden me, I can walk back to the grave with the old clothes, lay it there, and walk away. As things have come in, I’ve replayed that image.”

A skill that several men indicated they had gained was active listening. They learned to let a man finish without interrupting or trying to fix them. M10 said, “It forms a confidence in the person that is speaking. If someone interjects a comment or makes a correction, that person can easily be intimidated. That’s one of the keys why men went so deep.” Another skill gained was increased self-awareness practiced through repeated check-ins described under “Critical Reflection” above.

Change is reinforced by building confidence and competence in new roles and relationships. M3 identified the need for the right people in one’s life to connect with multiple times per week and wanted more opportunities to be honest with other men like what he experienced on the retreat. M10 was encouraged to know that he now had men he felt close to that he can consult adding, “a bus load of people came back and the fellowship and bond created will be revisited at Iron Men.” M5 said it felt good to talk to other guys and should do more of that. M5 added, “What hit me hard was when they asked, ‘Do you have 4 guys you can trust?’ I may have had 2. Now I have more.” The 12 Week Follow-Up Group was offered to continue relationships that had been developed. But some men took initiative to stay connected on their own. M7 said, “I intentionally

reached out to all the guys in my group this week.” M1 and M14 both mentioned texting each other and staying in touch.

Transformation requires reintegration into life on the basis of one’s new perspective. Given that the interviews took place within two weeks after the retreat, there were limited opportunities to track this. Yet interviews yielded multiple examples of initial action steps. The Family Table exercise served as a wake-up call for several men about the table they were creating in their homes. M1 admitted that his family had not eaten together much lately. He asked, “How do I make dinner time a rich experience for my kids? One of the guys said they go around the table sharing highs and lows.” M12 desired to lead a table that was more relaxed than the one where he grew up. He said, “I played out the story. If my kids remember the family table as a place of love and grace, who cares if they are messy eaters.” For M14 expanded on his vision for his current family table. He wanted to eliminate electronic devices and interruptions. He also took responsibility saying, “I want to be more engaged at the dinner table.” He saw this as a starting point to build on in other areas. “Maybe if I become more active at my family table that will translate to my Iron Men table.” He was happy to report that his family had enjoyed a meal without electronic devices on the day he got home from the retreat, but activities during the week presented new challenges. M10 expressed a desire to ask his adult children what it was like around their table growing up. He added, “If I compare what I did with what my family did, it was great. But maybe my kids didn’t see it that way.”

Reintegration of one’s new perspective for several men meant direct application to marriage. M13 quoted his wife who celebrated positive changes she noticed by saying,

“I like it when you come home from these weekends.” When he told her that he had “even teared up once or twice,” her response was “No way!” M2 spent two hours unpacking the weekend with his wife when he got home. Realizations continued to emerge in this conversation that had not occurred on the weekend. He celebrated that his wife was able to be part of this discovery process that was getting to the heart of why he does what he does. M9 was direct about his plans, “I’m going to totally pour myself into cherishing my wife.”

A variety of actions were described that related to personal habits. M12 wanted to make a habit of processing his day with God that might include meaningful journaling. M5 set an initial goal of Scripture study five days a week. His work group encouraged him to start small, so he reset his goal to three days a week. At the time of the interview he reported he had done four days a week. M4 wanted to stop binge watching TV shows and had started to replace that with a study of Romans connected to a small group. M2 was tackling a work project that he had been procrastinating about. M9 referred to his pursuit of purity that had been strengthened by the retreat. M11 discussed a new approach to relationships. And M7 described an action plan to get healthier physically supported by other men from his group.

A few men came back eager to step back into leadership roles at the church and beyond. M13 expressed a desire to be more prepared for the groups he leads. Referring to what he experienced on the weekend and his role in other men’s retreats, M8 said, “This is what I was made for.” Questions about next steps were stirring about his calling and future.

God Zone

Fig. 4.1 “God Zone” was used throughout the weekend to invite men to step out of their comfort zone. Reassurance was given that the goal was not to move them to the panic zone because those who go there try to get back to the comfort zone as fast as possible. Rather, they were encouraged to enter the God zone where real change can take place.

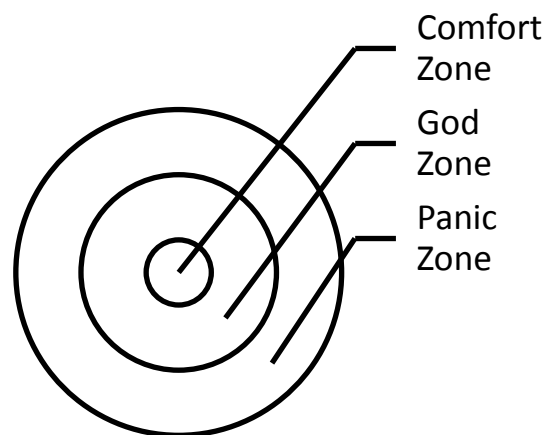


Figure 4.1. God Zone (Flood)

M8 said, “I’ve never seen that comfort zone, God zone, panic zone.... I always think it’s going to be something huge that would send me to the panic zone making it obvious that it’s God. That was interesting to see, to start thinking about what little movements can I make to maybe move into the God Zone without going to the panic zone.”

Multiple approaches at the retreat helped men become aware of God’s invitation out of the comfort zone into the God Zone where change could happen. The most obvious

approach was a shift away from lecture format to experiential learning processes. That changed a man's role from passive listener to active participant.

The biblical teaching that took place involved five vignettes from Genesis that recounted the story of Jacob. Each teaching segment lasted ten to fifteen minutes. I used first person storytelling three segments and third person in two segments. Learning how God initiated Jacob served as previews of the next phase of the weekend the men would experience. M2 felt that Jacob's story was very fitting because we're all deceivers. He added, "Jacob's story has been front and center in my life. Jacob dealt with his deceit and running from God culminating in a wrestling match. This was a bit of a wrestling match for me."

A direct encounter with God was reinforced by guided centering prayer meant to get human voices out of the way and get a man in tune with God. M6 described the weekend as "a taste of the church as it was meant to be." M14 said, "Anytime you see someone wanting to change a behavior, there's something going on there.... It's easy to talk, but people committed to change is really what matters."

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

Research Question #3 explored the participants' beliefs, experiences, and practices about the discipleship of men through an interview after the twelve week follow-up group. The majority of the interview questions reflected Mezirow's four phase summary of Transformative Learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, discourse, and taking action (see Table 4.9.)

Table 4.9. Follow-up Group Interview Summary

Question	Average	Range
1. How challenging was your experience? (1 = not at all, 4 = deeply challenging)	3.1	2, 4
2. How important was the solo work? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)	1.8	1, 3
3. How important was your interaction with others? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)	4	4, 4
4. How applicable to your life was the work you did? (1 = not applicable, 4 = very applicable)	3.7	2.8, 4

Disorienting Dilemma

I replaced the term “disorienting dilemma” with the more common term “challenge” for interviews. The average score for the challenge of the follow-up group was 3.1. This is the same score given for the challenge of the retreat. Several men observed that the follow-up group felt consistent with the retreat experiences and built on the work that was started there. There was also agreement that some weeks were stronger than others. M12 said the lessons were a “mixed bag—certain weeks were really great and other weeks did not hit a sweet spot.” The reasons for this are explored more under “Facilitating” found below. While a majority of the participants made the follow-up group a priority, business travel, vacations, and other life experiences impacted men’s ability to attend sessions.

The level of weekly challenge was hit or miss for most men, but every man felt challenged at some point during the twelve weeks. And some men felt intensely challenged. M11 described his experience as “an awful workout—it really hurt at the time, but then it feels good.” The most intense imagery came from M13 who said he remembered at the retreat they described what was coming as surgery, “but it was more

like climb on the table and be skinned alive. It was like touching raw nerves in the cold. It just continued for the twelve weeks.”

The goal of the curriculum is to help a man love God in every domain of his life including all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. There are three lessons on each of the four domains. When asked to describe the most challenging part of the twelve weeks, the following results were shared.

Table 4.10. Follow-Up Group Most Challenging Processes

Most Challenging	Mentions	Domain
Legacy Walk	5	Heart
Torn Between	3	Mind
The Shadow	2	Strength
Good Mourning	1	Heart
Life Circumstances	1	NA

When asked about the most challenging part of the group, half of the responses (6) related to the lessons that focused on the heart domain. The other half were split between mind (3), strength (2), and life circumstances (1). There were no mentions of the soul domain. M11 did not refer to any of the experiential learning processes but rather focused on his life circumstances that he brought with him into all the lessons as the most challenging.

Regarding the learning processes used throughout the retreat and follow-up group, M3 appreciated that they were multi-sensory and experiential. He described them as

“spontaneous but it was deep.” M4 also appreciated the visualization and role-playing exercises. “There is value to acting out some of these things because as guys we’re sort of like tell me what 3 things I need to do.... I’m a busy guy and gotta get out of here... acting out the shadow voices, etc. makes it more real. And it vividly sticks with you.”

The week that was mentioned most frequently as challenging was titled “Legacy Walk.” It confronted men with the reality that they have a finite time in which to build and leave a legacy. For M3 this was a “very personal thing. That is not a bonding thing with someone else. It makes you look at yourself. There is no hiding there.” M7 admitted that it stirred up grief over loss yet also produced joy “because I know that during the exercise, every step along the way, Jesus was with me.” While each man stood alone during the process, there was positive feedback shared afterward that was described as raw, deep, and profound. M12 appreciated the way this process “pushed me down the road further from hypothetical to more concrete.”

When asked about the most challenging part of the follow-up group, three men discussed the process titled “Torn Between.” Even though he gave the overall experience of the follow-up group a relatively low challenge score of “two,” M9 said of this lesson, “That was challenging because there are certain things I don’t want to give up. And I realize that instead of worrying about what I need to give up I need to give Christ more. And it’s been incredibly valuable in several areas.” M4 noted that his internal reaction was very different when he shifted from observer to the man in the center of the experience. He said he shifted from pontificating to looking in a mirror. He then described the process in detail. “Literally it rocked me. With the previous person I had in my mind 10 ways for that person to respond to the negative voice. And now here I am

and suddenly, wow, I had never realized how negative my attitude was, and how ungodly my attitude was, and how I could defeat it.... I went back to work during the week and literally it was like I had M10 sitting on my shoulder. Even now months later, literally, when I start thinking like that way I start getting reminded and convicted from the words that M10 said to me. It opened my eyes and I saw it in a way that God sees it not in the way I see it from my micro-vision.” M10 also brought up that encounter and commented on the privilege of playing a role that was helpful to another man. M13 appreciated this learning process the most because it unveiled feelings of anger, jealousy, and hurt that surprised him. He didn’t realize all that was going on inside until he shared in this setting.

Week four, “The Shadow,” was the earliest lesson of the twelve to get mentioned when discussing the most challenging parts of the follow-up group. M2 recalled that those twelve weeks as ridiculously busy, and he even used the words, “I felt under attack.” He continued, “Keeping in mind the whole shadow thing is something that has come to my mind quite often.” Speaking for the group, M12 said, “It became more obvious to everyone that there are these voices in our head. That was brand new to me. I knew there were voices in my head, but I didn’t realize there were voices in other peoples’ heads.... It was helpful for me to articulate what those voices are. That allowed me to put up the guard.” Some men also found themselves reacting strongly to “The Shadow” in other men. M12 was ready to confront another man’s shadow saying, “Don’t talk to my friend that way.”

For M10, the biggest challenge the process called Good Mourning that helped him realize he had not taken much time to grieve a significant loss in his life. Although

he didn't link it to a specific process, M11 highlighted the challenge associated with being transparent and honest. He said, "At different points each individual shared something that they normally would not have shared whether it was marital struggles, temptations, workplace issues—you just don't share that kind of stuff in a normal environment. But in that environment, knowing that it was with a bigger purpose to get closer not only to each other but to God that fostered that."

Critical Reflection

For transformation to occur, people need an environment where they can reflect on their assumptions and those of others. The scope of interview question number two changed for the post follow-up group interviews resulting in dissimilar data from the retreat scores. It focused on the solo workout that consisted of individual homework following each group meeting. The importance of the solo workout consistently scored low resulting in an average of 1.8. There were various reasons for a low score. M3 and M5 both commented that the individual work did not compare to the group work in content or power. Other men felt that the impact of the homework was lessened because men were not held accountable for it in group meetings.

Yet a low score for the solo workout does not mean that critical reflection was absent. M2 said, "Self-examination, especially for a guy, is wise. As men we don't take time to reflect." M4 disclosed, "Just as I was surprised by the weekend, I was surprised here (by the follow-up group) a couple times." His surprise was that there was so much under the surface in his life left to share even after he had dug deep previously in other ministry environments. M13 revealed some anxiety associated with critical reflection when he said, "Now that I'm going through my story, questions are coming up that never

did before.” M6 reflected deeply as he listened to other men share about deep hurts who received grace to forgive and overcome. He concluded, “That’s what it’s all about. And that challenges you. What would I have done in his shoes?” The reflection of M11 was in watching the “wheels turning” in other men that gave him a visual to keep in his mind as he goes through his own ongoing emotional and spiritual processes in life. M11 took his reflection further when he said, “I’m not alone—another Christian man has experienced this too, it’s not just me that is faulty in this regard.”

M3 shared the most extensive thoughts about critical reflection that was tied most closely to the “This I Believe” week of the Mind domain. He articulated the following about his growing understanding of the Trinity. “I need a Father. I need to know my legacy. I need to know I’m an heir. I need to know where I came from what my purpose is. That he equipped me, that I’m good enough, and that I can make a difference. I need Jesus because I need that role model. I need that friend. He’s been through life. He suffered the same things. He was angry, fatigued, impatient. I clearly need that. But I need the Holy Spirit inside of me on a daily basis to remind me of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I need to love the Father with my whole heart, soul, mind and strength and love one another as He loved me.” He concluded, “There’s a lot that came from the 12 weeks that gave me a foundation.”

Transformative learning states that when someone has time to reflect on their assumptions, it often triggers feelings of guilt or shame. M8 shared that during the Legacy Walk he experienced feelings of disappointment and inadequacy about not planning ahead. He described it as a “slap in the face.” M12 was referring to week four when he said, “At that particular moment I was feeling shame at work which is

interesting because I don't always feel that. But during that stretch I was feeling it every day." He was given a place and a way to process those feelings through "The Shadow" work. For M13, feeling guilt or shame was relatively new territory. "I don't do that emotional stuff. It's not that I don't think it is valuable. I just don't gravitate toward it. I just move on." That changed during the twelve weeks. He added, "I'm not one to be emotional and share emotions. But I can, I guess. And it's good, in the right environment." M10 reflected that God's personal interest in him referring to "how full God's work is with me." This included "all the things I've been through good, bad, and indifferent—He's willing to go through those things with me. It's like you have an entire closet I didn't realize I had. There are certain patterns of thinking that aren't from Him. It was kind of refreshing to me that there's a whole lot more to me that God's working with but that there's a whole lot I have to look forward to because God's got a long way to go. So it was kind of refreshing."

Engaging Discourse

Transformative learning creates an environment for people to more fully and freely engage in discourse. Interview question number three addressing discourse went up one tenth of a point resulting in a perfect score of 4. It is noteworthy that all twelve participants in the follow-up group interviews gave the highest score possible to the importance of their interaction with others. M4 and M6 concluded that the common ground of being brothers in Christ and sharing experiences on the retreat laid a foundation that the twelve weeks built on. M3 said, "I didn't expect us to go into the depth that we did. I appreciated that. I felt safe. I could tell my story. And that's hard for me even now. Guys were really listening and understood." For some men like M9, this

level of sharing came more naturally. “I really enjoy getting into the lab work. And hearing from men I respect and want to learn from and hear their stories.” For others it was harder. M5 described his experience as lifting a weight off his chest. M4 dramatized his experience by acting as if he was pulling something out of his chest pocket saying, “Ok, I’m going to put this on the table.” Then he winced, bracing for the worst, paused, and said, “Oh, wow, that went well, nobody is going to mock me.” Then he gave a sigh of relief. Over the course of the twelve weeks, different men shared intimately. M12’s vivid analogy was that “Everybody at one point took off all their clothes. One way or another we all saw each other naked.” He was speaking metaphorically.

M6 said he shared things he would not have shared six months earlier. M4 expanded on the openness saying, “There were instances with individuals sharing things that they have never shared with another living human being including their spouse or anyone. When someone shares something like that with you, it makes you realize what a sacred moment, what a privilege it is for you to be in that place and at that time and a responsibility... they are trusting you with something very, very valuable.” M12 said, “I think there are profound relationships developed. I would be shocked if you can find seven guys in almost any church that have discussed things like that. I mean how rare is that—one in a million? It is extremely rare.”

A variety of factors contributed to a deep level of sharing. A commitment to confidentiality was outlined in a group covenant, and that expectation was repeated throughout the twelve weeks. (M8 and M12 both mentioned that the approach to reinforcing confidentiality became too formal and overdone in later weeks of the follow-up group.) M11 appreciated the check-in process that helped him leave the work week at

the door and helped him focus on the group work. M6 felt that both the caliber of the men in the group and the carryover from work done on the retreat allowed the follow-up group to go deep. M3 attributed the depth to reciprocal sharing. M2 built on this concept saying, “Hearing someone else open up always helps deliver a level of credibility in a group that makes you want to open up. That’s where the beauty of the twelve weeks is. Even a guy who holds his cards close to his chest, you can get away with that for four to five weeks. But by week twelve, if guys are really sharing their heart, and if the Spirit is truly moving, how can you squash the Spirit for that long?” Reflecting on the reason for depth of sharing, M9 said, “I think the reason they did that was because of the trust they have in the leaders of this—that they had sanctioned this. (My leader’s) complete honesty and manner... was incredibly refreshing.” That trust came from the group leaders modeling open and honest sharing from their own lives. M13 added, “I think that’s what I loved the most. No one was trying to be macho. Nobody was trying to be anything but themselves. There was no pretense whatsoever. That was rare, especially among a group of men.”

Another factor that may have contributed to deep levels of discourse and moved men toward taking action was the practice of giving specific and generous affirmation. M9 discussed the difficulty men have receiving it yet noted that many men crave it. M7 said, “It’s very rare for men to give compliments to each other or to praise one another. It’s in our DNA to do that through cut downs and through joking. Even though you know what the person means typically, it’s not the same as hearing positive feedback.” Words used to describe receiving affirmation included humbling, eye-opening, validating, love-filled, kingdom-focused, impactful, powerful, and magic.

It is interesting what the regular practice of mutual affirmation generated. M11 noted that men focused on listening well knowing that they would be asked to share affirmation by completing the sentence, “The gift your story gave me was...” M8 observed, “God has given me the gift to be able to see things from a different level than some guys do and be able to speak to somebody or just be with somebody in a way that they receive something from that interaction. And that’s not me.” This was an acknowledgement that he has the gift of encouragement, and he felt the “challenge to continue to try to use that gift more aggressively.” M3 noted that most men are asking some form of the question, “Am I good enough?” or “Do I have what it takes?” His observation was that men who participated in the follow-up group were “coming to the realization that, you know what, I think I am okay. That is a huge step, and then from there who knows what the possibilities are because now they feel it. Now they experience it. Now they can start focusing on someone else.” That conclusion was affirmed by M7 saying, “Words of affirmation helped my confidence to grow as a leader.”

Taking Action

Transformative learning leads to being more effective in taking action on one’s reflective judgments. When asked how applicable to your life was the work you did, the average score was 3.7. This was one tenth of a point higher than the retreat.

Taking action begins by planning. One of the most prominent ways this was done on the retreat was through writing a mission statement. Thirteen out of the fourteen men interviewed after the retreat shared positive feedback about his initial writing of a mission statement. But responses to the mission statement after the follow-up group were mixed. M4 remained enthusiastic saying he had “totally nailed it” at the retreat observing that it

described who he was but challenged him to live up to it simultaneously. M12 noted that it clicked after he simplified his mission statement by getting rid of the “should’s” and focusing on where his heart was at. “And for me, when I finally settled on it, it just clicked. It’s in my head. I go over it regularly in my head.” Others gave little attention to it since the retreat. Interviews did not focus on this topic long enough to determine the core issue among those who were ambivalent about their mission statements.

Making plans for action was the focus of week six, “Walking on Water.”

Responses to that specific lesson revealed a contrast between the two sub-groups that met for the twelve weeks. M6 recounted, “Being held accountable was very helpful. We checked in with each other each week.” M7, who was a member of the other sub-group was disappointed that the leader did not follow-up on goals that had been identified in week six.

Transformation moves from planning a course of action to acquiring knowledge and skills to implement that plan of action. Parallel to the retreat, the power of listening was highlighted by several men. M10 said, “One of the biggest takeaways was just the ability to listen when someone speaks. So often I’m trying to sort things out in my mind. I’m trying to think of a response. And just let someone really share, not rush them, not press them to finish but to really listen and trying to see where is that person coming from? What are they trying to tell me? That unrushed ability to really connect is something I’ve struggled with in the past. Go with them on their journey and ask questions for clarification.” This is reinforced in the “Guard Rails” found in the first lesson (Coleman, *12 Week 22*). It is a list of “10 Deadly Sins” such as giving advice, judging, fixing, interrupting, and shaming along with solutions. M10 observed that when

the art of listening is practiced, it draws someone out and encourages them to share more deeply.

The change the men experienced led to action and experiments in a variety of settings. M9 and M13 talked about using the check-in procedure with the couples' small groups that they each lead. M9 said, "I absolutely saw it work. Not just in an icebreaker kind of a bridal shower thing but an opportunity for someone to decompress from their day and set their mind on the things of the Lord. That is a valuable thing. Plus it gets their blood working they don't just observe they participate." This is a way for people to take ownership.

M4 made application of "The Shadow" to a ministry he leads. M10 applied lessons from "The Shadow" with his sons. He asked, "Are you hearing a dad or mom you could never please? Are you hearing a teacher that you could never quite measure up? Are you hearing your own perfectionist voice—nothing is ever good enough and you're always trying harder? That voice you're hearing is it your own voice or is it the enemy saying, 'You loser, you're never gonna amount to anything. Look what you just did.' I don't think we look at it in an objective way. If it reoccurs and if it is something that is very specific, where did it come from? Usually a lot of things we believe like that, to discourage, us are lies—either lies that are told to us or lies that we believe. And so where do we insert the truth?"

Change is reinforced by building confidence and competence in new roles and relationships. Several men celebrated that they have arrived at a new level of relationship with others who had shared this journey. Some called out specific men that they forged a deep bond with. The circle of men grew that they can approach to share burdens with or

appeal to for counsel and encouragement. M3 noted that this outcome is not static; it must be maintained. While there is a shared mission of leading tables in South Park Church's Iron Men ministry, there are limited opportunities for these men to connect in an ongoing way. M5 noted ongoing texting and effort to meet periodically with M7 and M12.

A variety of ideas were generated about possible application of lessons to the ongoing ministry of Iron Men. M6, M7, M8, M9, and M11 all recommended leadership development meetings for Iron Men table leaders that would meet regularly in the range of monthly to quarterly. M6 saw this as a time for "Continuing to keep a dialog of what's working in that environment and challenges." M3 saw value in one-on-one check-ups to learn what men are dealing with and what principles they are using to deal with it. M2 suggested introducing a check-in to Iron Men at both a macro and micro level suggesting that this would be especially beneficial for a new attendee. M10 recommended converting the four domains into an Iron Men teaching series. Each domain has a summary page in the curriculum that contains a list of character traits, wounds from childhood, dysfunctional adult behaviors, and redeemed qualities ("12 Week" 38, 50, 80, 102). M12 called out the value of leaders going first and modeling the depth and length of sharing they want to experience in their groups. M7 reported that increased confidence in his leadership skills has led to taking more risks with his Iron Men table. This includes arranging "text buddies" that are held accountable for making contact with an assigned man during the week between meetings. M12 expressed a desire to incorporate sharing affirmation at his Iron Men table using the prompt, "The gift your story gave me was..." He added that some of the affirmations spoken to him "still resonate with me."

Facilitating

The two leaders of the follow-up groups adapted the material from week to week. They previewed the lessons to identify the main point then streamlined where necessary. The experiential learning process for week five, “Testosterone,” was not implemented. At least four men—M2, M7, M10, and M12—read through the material for week five on their own and commented that they all felt that it was a good choice not to implement “Testosterone.” M10 added that it “might have put off some guys who are less athletic and more reflective.” M4 suggested that if the material is used again, the workbook could be streamlined so that it only contained the elements that would be used. He also suggested reviewing to see if there was anything that was skipped that should be included next time. It was also suggested that if homework is utilized, it should more closely reflect the content and experiences of the group work. M12 said of the homework that it “didn’t always parallel what we were talking about, felt like busy work. I appreciate that they were trying to go to the bible, but it felt surface.” M6 felt that at times the curriculum had an over emphasis on past wounds, and “at times guys were straining to relate it.”

Summary of Major Findings

Data collected from the men who participated in the experiential work groups resulted in the following findings.

1. The Men of Iron curriculum is a delivery system for transformative learning that is theocentric and church-based. It demonstrated robust engagement with all four phases of transformative learning while acknowledging a loving God as the source and goal of transformation.

2. God uses the disorienting dilemmas of our lives as the starting point of transformation. If the right conditions are not in place, disorienting dilemmas can stunt our growth. If the right conditions are in place, they can catapult our growth. Disciple makers would benefit from learning how to leverage the tension created by disorienting dilemmas for growth.
3. Critical reflection is taken to new levels when learners move from passive observers to active participants. The retreat and follow-up group utilized a variety of experiential processes that illustrated this. They included role-playing, interviews, visual art, and creative writing among others. The danger of the experiential processes is making them an end in themselves. The power of the experiential process is finding ways to integrate them with the rough and tumble of daily challenges.
4. Men are capable of deep and honest discourse when a safe container is created. Leaders expected men to maintain the safe container through the signing of a document titled “10 Agreements.” A safe container was modeled by leaders. Skill training in active listening strengthened the safety.
5. Men carry deep questions that hold them back from taking action. Meaningful affirmation from men they trust can squelch those questions and set men free to take action that blesses others. Most men know what they need to do, what they lack is the confidence and encouragement to do it. Generative affirmation leads to men taking action in line with one’s personal mission.
6. Discipling men is the courageous work of trusted Grand Fathers. Discipling men cannot be done from a distance or a pedestal. Grand Fathers are ready to engage

in personal work that will reveal their own ongoing struggles. They are willing to leverage tension, show affection, and discern needs. And they know when to stay out of the way so that a man can deal with God directly.

Review of the Chapter

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected through the pre-retreat questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews. Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning served as the grid for analyzing data.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Biblical teaching in men's ministry environments is good, but Jesus' model of discipleship promises deeper transformation than lecture style teaching can produce. Men's small groups are good, but what is discussed rarely touches the depth of concerns men carry privately in their hearts. Volunteering in church ministries is good, but that is only the beginning of what it means to find one's mission in the kingdom of God or finish one's life well. Discipleship of men that is transformational calls integrates a biblical vision for manhood, cradle to grave development, and methods that facilitate deep change.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate how experiential work groups influence discipleship of men among group leaders of South Park Church's Iron Men ministry in suburban Chicago through a weekend retreat and a twelve week follow-up group. The data collection included a written questionnaire and two semi-structured interviews with participants. Interviews were designed to reflect Mezirow's four phase summary of transformative learning: disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, engaging discourse, and taking action.

Major Findings

The discipleship of men is not about finding the right curriculum. It is about learning how God shapes men's lives. The following dimensions featured prominently in this study:

Theocentric and Church-based Transformative Learning

If men's ministry leaders wanted to see deeper change among men, transformative learning theory could offer insight. Change is often unavoidable when someone begins to see the world in a new way. But change without direction can be dangerous. As Young warns, "Apart from the Spirit, however, the process of transformation breaks down under the weight of ego-centeredness" (Young, "Transformational Learning," 327). In other words, transformative learning is an educational theory not a discipleship method. It is potentially dangerous to engage transformative learning without a clearly stated value system and parameters for outcomes. The *Men of Iron* retreat and the twelve week follow-up group demonstrated robust engagement with all four phases of transformative learning while acknowledging a loving God as the guide for meaningful transformation.

The Apostle's Creed is featured prominently as the theological foundation of the retreat (Coleman, *Launching* 3) and follow-up material (Coleman, *12 Week* 3). And a Trinitarian understanding of transformation is articulated in "Theological Presuppositions" (Coleman, *Launching* 27-32). This is more than jargon. The check-in process at the retreat confronts men with challenging questions about willingness to let God work in their lives. The streamlined biblical teaching about God initiating Jacob helps men see themselves in the story. It also functions as an iterative introduction to each new phase of the retreat. A central metaphor for the retreat was the God-zone graphic (see Fig. 4.1). M8 said, "I've never seen that comfort zone, God zone, panic zone.... I always think it's going to be something huge that would send me to the panic zone making it obvious that it's God. That was interesting to see—to start thinking about what little movements can I make to maybe move into the God zone without going to the

panic zone." Retreat staff learned to stay out of God's way. "God is working in a man, and it is my job to support that man in his work" (Flood 1).

In the follow-up group, the God-focus was featured most prominently in the repetition of the Great Commandment to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30, NIV). Three weeks were spent on each of the four domains of heart, soul, mind, and strength. Reflecting on the four domains, M10 said, "It made me so much more conscious that he wants to be a part of all those parts of my life." He continued, "It was kind of refreshing to me that there's a whole lot more to me that God's working with but that there's a whole lot I have to look forward to because God's got a long way to go. So it was kind of refreshing."

A foundation stone of Men of Iron is being church-based so that "men can build deep, lasting relationships over a long period of time" (Coleman, *Launching* 7). The men in this study represent core leaders in an established church. They would have previously experienced much of what is available in the realm of male discipleship, yet many commented on the unique nature of what was experienced. M11 said, "I don't think you get that kind of group of people with those kinds of hearts talking and listening without God." If a church was looking for a way to deepen discipleship of men in a church-based context, the Men of Iron curriculum is a delivery system that could help.

The retreat and follow-up group assumed that men already had a relationship with God and a framework for understanding Scripture. M9 conceptualized spiritual growth as a progression through five stages: 1) Seekers, 2) Believers, 3) Disciples, 4) Followers, and 5) Apostles. Based on his definition, Men of Iron targeted disciples and followers.

Then he concluded, “This is not undergraduate work. There was a lot assumed that you knew about following Christ.” Due to the limitations of the study, it collected no data collected to reflect the experience of seekers or new believers in the weekend retreat or follow-up group.

Biblical principles were often implicit rather than explicit. Opportunities existed to link processes with Scripture in dynamic ways. For instance, a timely reading of James 5:16 during the shame experience could have enhanced the experience. While the rubric of the Great Commandment was strong during the twelve weeks, many of the Bible passages used in group lessons ended up in the background. This could be enhanced by reviewing and deepening reflection on those same passages through the solo workout.

Leveraging Disorienting Dilemmas

God uses the disorienting dilemmas of our lives as opportunities for transformation. If the right conditions for leveraging challenges are not in place, growth can be stunted. If the right conditions are in place, growth can be catapulted. The genius of the *Men of Iron* curriculum is that it helped men access their own reservoir of disorienting dilemmas in a safe environment. It also introduced interventions that created new disorienting dilemmas that helped men anticipate future challenges.

Erikson’s life-stage development theory is cumulative and integrated. That means that negative resolutions at earlier stages resurface and can inhibit future development. Failure to create environments where children thrive can haunt them the rest of their lives. “Part of the operation of healing grace is the mending of previous identity wounds; remediation of previous trauma is always possible. Nevertheless, adult identity transformations become increasingly layered and complex because of the accumulation

of psychosocial issues at play” (Kiesling and Colwell 2). Therefore prematurely or artificially alleviating pain without facilitating transformation can keep a person stuck in immaturity. Accessing some of the deepest challenges of one’s life can be the starting point for deep discipleship.

A quick survey of the learning processes mentioned most frequently in the interviews reveals that they address past, present, and future disorienting dilemmas (see Table 5.1.).

Table 5.1. Time Focus of Experiential Learning Processes

Time Focus of Disorienting Dilemma	Experiential Learning Process
Past	Family Table, Shame
Present	Mission Statement, The Shadow, Dilemma
Future	Eulogy, Grave, Legacy Walk

It is significant that the man who gave the retreat the highest scores was also the man who was facing arguably the most present-tense disorienting dilemmas at the time of the retreat. He gave the retreat the highest score possible, four, in all categories. He even used the language of “four plus” for three categories. In the post-retreat interview, he described his experience as “Unbelievable because of where I was at,” then went on to describe challenges that involved the areas of physical health, career, and family relationships. Similarly, when a different participant was asked about the most challenging part of the follow-up group, it is significant that he did not talk about an experiential learning process. Rather, he described challenging, present tense life

circumstances brought into the group by himself and others. “At different points each individual shared something that they normally would not have shared whether it was marital struggles, temptations, workplace issues—you just don’t share that kind of stuff in a normal environment. But in that environment, knowing that it was with a bigger purpose to get closer not only to each other but to God that fostered that.”

This reflects the approach of Jesus whose discipleship of the twelve was a series of escalating disorienting dilemmas—a storm at sea, empowering them to cast out demons, washing feet, being a suffering Messiah, rising from the dead, and giving them a worldwide mission. He was unafraid to leverage the challenges and pain of this world to promote change. Yet he did so in an environment of love and grace.

Disorienting dilemmas are rarely accessed by church leaders. Pastors are trained to feed and shepherd which is often limited to teaching information and comforting the afflicted. But transformation is promoted when the challenges of life are accessed in the presence of God among safe people. That also means those who want to facilitate transformation must be willing to live with tension created by bringing up sometimes painful truth in the lives of those they are discipling. “Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation. These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self” (Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions* 168). Those who want to promote change learn to leverage pain for redemptive purposes.

Deepening Critical Reflection through Experiential Learning

The retreat and follow-up group employed various experiential processes to involve men in learning. Methods included role-playing, interviews, visual art, and

creative writing. The risk of creative experiential learning processes is that they can become an end in themselves. The power of experiential learning processes is unleashed when they connect to the rough and tumble of life resulting in new perspectives. Experience should be familiar ground for those who endorse the Wesleyan quadrilateral. “The peculiarity of Wesleyan theology is its emphasis on holiness as personal experience” (Wynkoop Loc 688).

Vivid group experiences were recalled by men during real life situations. M11 referred to the Grave Process when he said, “if stuff comes back to burden me, I can walk back to the grave with the old clothes, lay it there, and walk away. As things have come in, I’ve replayed that image.” M4 also appreciated the visualization and role-playing exercises. “There is value to acting out some of these things because as guys we’re sort of like tell me what 3 things I need to do.... I’m a busy guy and gotta get out of here... acting out the shadow voices, etc. makes it more real. And it vividly sticks with you.” Mezirow concurs, “Imagination is central to understanding the unknown; it is the way we examine alternative interpretations of our experience by ‘trying on’ another’s point of view” (Mezirow “Learning to Think” 85).

One of the most dramatic examples was recounted by M4 who described the process called “Torn Between” from week ten of the follow-up group. As he listened to another man go through the process, he said he wanted to jump in and give advice. Then it was his turn, and he recounted a dilemma at work. This is a description of his experience in the role play, “Literally it rocked me. With the previous person I had in my mind ten ways for that person to respond to the negative voice. And now here I am and suddenly, wow, I had never realized how negative my attitude was, and how ungodly my

attitude was, and how I could defeat it.... I went back to work during the week and literally it was like I had M10 sitting on my shoulder. Even now months later, literally, when I start thinking like that way I start getting reminded and convicted from the words that M10 said to me. It opened my eyes and I saw it in a way that God sees it not in the way I see it from my micro-vision.” Experiential learning elevated critical reflection to new levels when this man moved from passive observer to active participant.

Benjamin Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.” Jesus often prompted deep critical reflection through experiential learning processes. It could be as simple as asking a profound question or as terrifying as inviting a man to step out of a boat and walk on water. He was unafraid to let his disciples fail knowing that failure was an opportunity to debrief and learn.

A Safe Container for Honest Discourse

Many men face struggles alone for fear of being shamed if they reveal weakness. But deep and honest discourse is possible where a safe container is created. The retreat and follow-up group utilized deliberate and direct practices to do this. A safe container was expected, even demanded through the signing of a document titled “10 Agreements.” Before it was signed, every man was asked to publicly verbalize the content of agreement four which reads, “Confidentiality: I will keep anything that is said in this group in absolute confidence.” Men were reminded of this commitment throughout the weekend.

A safe container was modeled by leaders. Reflecting on the reason for depth of sharing, M9 said, “I think the reason they did that was because of the trust they have in the leaders of this—that they had sanctioned this. (My leader’s) complete honesty and manner was incredibly refreshing.” That trust came from the group leaders modeling

open and honest sharing from their own lives. M13 added, “I think that’s what I loved the most. No one was trying to be macho. Nobody was trying to be anything but themselves. There was no pretense whatsoever. That was rare, especially among a group of men.” As the weekend progressed, the safety of the container was demonstrated by the leaders who often shared first. M10 highlighted this, “The thing that really made a difference for me is the guy who was leading our group went first. He was very transparent.... He could have had a pat thing, but he shared something that was very recent in his family dynamics.... He entered in as one of the guys.... He really set the pace of transparency by how he opened discussion.” Men realized they were not alone, and this was a place they could share deep concerns.

A safe container was strengthened through active listening. This is an overlooked and underutilized tool that can be taught. The environment of work groups allowed men to be on both the giving and receiving end of active listening. M4 said “We often moved our chairs closer and leaned in listening and engaging. There was no sense of checking-out.” M8 said, “Eye to eye in the group was really powerful for me. I really connected to whoever I was speaking to. I could see that what I was saying was sinking in. I was connecting.” M10 said, “One of the biggest takeaways was just the ability to listen when someone speaks. So often I’m trying to sort things out in my mind. I’m trying to think of a response. And just let someone really share, not rush them, not press them to finish but to really listen and trying to see where is that person coming from? What are they trying to tell me? That unrushed ability to really connect is something I’ve struggled with in the past. Go with them on their journey and ask questions for clarification.” This is reinforced in the “Guard Rails” found in the first lesson of the follow-up group

(Coleman, *12 Week* 22). It is a list of “10 Deadly Sins” such as giving advice, judging, fixing, interrupting, and shaming along with solutions. M10 observed that when the art of listening is practiced, it draws someone out and encourages them to share more deeply.

Because a safe container was expected, modeled, and strengthened, the depth of sharing at the retreat and follow-up group was remarkable. M9 used the metaphor of playing cards. He observed that men who attend his weekly men’s group “throw fours and fives. Here guys were throwing jacks and aces. Maybe it was because of the safety of the environment.” M3 said, “I didn’t expect us to go into the depth that we did. I appreciated that. I felt safe. I could tell my story. And that’s hard for me even now. Guys were really listening and understood.” M4 said, “There were instances with individuals sharing things that they have never shared with another living human being including their spouse or anyone. When someone shares something like that with you, it makes you realize what a sacred moment, what a privilege it is for you to be in that place and at that time and a responsibility... they are trusting you with something very, very valuable.”

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the two on the Road to Emmaus and spent the first half of the journey asking penetrating questions and listening deeply (Luke 24:13-24). That provided an environment for even deeper sharing when it came time for Jesus to reveal more about himself (Luke 24:25-27). Peter Scazzero goes so far as to describe the incarnation of Jesus as a model for the church to follow by entering the world of others physically and emotionally. “The person listening attempts to enter the world of the person speaking, laying aside questions, agendas, defenses, and simply seeks to understand the other person’s experience” (Scazzero 179). James puts it this

way, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (1:19, NIV).

Generative Affirmation

According to Erikson, the crisis that must be resolved in middle adulthood is generativity versus stagnation. When it is resolved positively, it results in care for others. Most men instinctively know that they are meant to be generative, life-giving, caring contributors to their families and society. But as Kenneth Boa says, “We cannot consistently behave in ways that are different from what we believe about ourselves” (107). Rather than micromanage a man and tell him what to do, it is better to help a man discover who he is then help him remove obstacles to living in alignment with that identity.

In Coleman’s baseball diamond (see Figure 2.4), positive feedback is the focus of “second base” and “home plate.” This positive affirmation is prominent at the retreat. First, after men complete one of the learning processes, the group often completes the sentence, “The gift your story gave me was...” This lets a man know that others heard him and care while avoiding efforts to fix him. Second, after a man creates his mission statement at the retreat, he delivers it to the group. The environment mirrors a pep rally as a man is asked three questions that correspond with the three dimensions of his mission statement. After each answer, the group shouts back affirmation. Soon after the mission statement pep rally is the third dimension of positive feedback with the “Hot Seat.” The purpose of this process is “To give the small groups a chance to bless, honor and affirm one another. To complete the initiation and welcome into the brotherhood” (“Iron on Iron Master—LEADER” 19). It begins with a man telling his work group what action he plans

to take when he gets home. That is followed by the men in his work group completing the sentence, “The light of Christ I see in you...” Because men have journeyed together into new territory through the weekend, there is greater trust for what is shared.

The “Hot Seat” was an emotional experience for several men and challenged their assumptions about themselves. M14 got emotional during his interview and grabbed his chest as he recounted, “One man said I was strong. I thought that’s not a word I normally associate with myself. It affects me a lot when someone else affirms me when it’s positive and not something I saw. It is very powerful.” M13 said he rarely gets emotional, but he teared up during the “Hot Seat” saying, “You don’t think you’re having an effect on people until they tell you.” M7 was also surprised by what he was told. “Strength came up several times, and I don’t see myself that way.” M10 kept a written record of the affirmation he received and reread it, honoring it as something the Lord gave his work group to say to him. M3 added that the words meant more because of the relationships built throughout the weekend. He admitted, “I suffer from shame. I don’t know that I see myself as others do. I thought that this group set the right tone and the right environment for people to say things about others so I took them as truth. And I’m not so sure I would have done that in a different setting.” Words used to describe receiving affirmation included humbling, eye-opening, validating, love-filled, kingdom-focused, impactful, powerful, and magic.

M3 noted that most men are asking some form of the question, “Am I good enough?” or “Do I have what it takes?” John Eldredge concurs. “Why don’t men play the man? Why don’t they offer their strength to a world desperately in need of it? For two simple reasons: We doubt very much that we have any real strength to offer, and we’re

pretty certain that if we did offer what we have it wouldn't be enough" (*Wild at Heart* 48). M3 concluded that men who participated in the follow-up group were "coming to the realization that, you know what, I think I am okay. That is a huge step, and then from there who knows what the possibilities are because now they feel it. Now they experience it. Now they can start focusing on someone else." That conclusion was affirmed by M7 saying, "Words of affirmation helped my confidence to grow as a leader."

When men receive affirmation from other men they respect, it helps them move toward action and caring for others. Six months is a relatively short time to track change in a man's life. And it would be next to impossible to identify the root cause or causes for those changes. But there were actions planned and begun. Those generative outcomes included personal spiritual practices, interaction with wife and children, new guidelines for connecting at the family table, follow up with relationships forged on the weekend, new perspective on work, and new strategies for engaging in ministry. Examples in each of these categories can be found in chapter four under the "Taking Action" headings for both the retreat and follow-up group.

Every man who participated in the retreat and follow-up group felt closer to the men he journeyed with. M5 compared relationships before and after his experience. He said, "What hit me hard was when they asked, 'Do you have 4 guys you can trust?' I may have had 2. Now I have more." There was eagerness to translate what was experienced to ongoing men's ministry. M6, M7, M8, M9, and M11 all recommended leadership development meetings for Iron Men table leaders that would meet regularly in the range of monthly to quarterly. M6 saw this as a time for "Continuing to keep a dialog of what's

working in that environment and challenges.” A variety of implications for ongoing ministry are being considered.

Even Jesus needed affirmation from his Father in order to fulfill his mission. Speaking of Jesus’ baptism, Robert Lewis reflects, “Why do I see this as the preeminent event in Jesus’ life? Because at his baptism, the two most important elements in a son’s life--the embrace of a transcendent cause and a father’s affirmation--came together in one unforgettable, breathtaking moment” (*Raising a Modern Day Night* 140). What Jesus received, he passed on to the twelve. As Jesus disciple John, he was transformed from impetuous “Son of Thunder” to “Apostle of Love” and disciple-making pastor. Jesus’ choice of John as a member of the inner circle of Apostles might have surprised some of his contemporaries given John’s elitism (Luke 9:49-50) and ambition (Matthew 20:20-28). “To understand this, it must be remembered that Jesus, unlike most men, could love a disciple not merely for what he was, but for what he should become” (Bruce 243). Most men need another man they respect to look them in the eye and say, “I see you—I see your scars, your challenges, and strengths—and I believe you can do it!” Men need another man they respect to give them generative affirmation.

Leadership from Trusted Grand Fathers

Discipling men cannot be done from a pedestal. It requires relationships that leverage tension, show affection, and exercise discernment. It requires trust to stay out of God’s way so that a man will take responsibility for doing his own work. And it requires personal engagement to model the ongoing work of transformation. This is consistent with transformative learning theory that shifts the role of teacher from “teller” to collaborative learner (Mezirow, “Learning to Think” 81). “In order to foster learner

empowerment, the educator gives up position power but maintains and uses personal power” (Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting* 165). This corresponds with what Jeff Fortenbery, *Men of Iron* retreat leader, shared with me as we prepared to conduct the experiential learning process addressing shame. I wrote in my field notes, “If you want to share God space with men, you need to be ready to do the work they do. You cannot share the same old story. It has to be fresh not rehearsed. That means letting God continue to break you. For example, repeating the same old shame story you have shared before and rehearsed keeps the mask on. If you want to engage emotionally, do some work” (Flood). M9 reinforced the importance of modeling by leaders when he said, “This particular experience gave people an opportunity to come to a safe place where men are trusted to lay things out they may never have before. I think the reason they did that was because of the trust they have in the leaders of this (and) that they had sanctioned this. My leader’s complete honesty and manner... is incredibly refreshing.”

When I started this research, I thought that discipleship of men needed to be less classroom and more boot camp. I thought that disciple-makers needed to see themselves less as lecturers and more as drill sergeants. But now I propose family as the central metaphor for discipleship and fatherhood as the primary role of a disciple-maker. A father models, disciplines, affirms, guides, challenges, and loves. Though Jesus did not have a wife or biological children, he was a “Patriarch” blessing children and fathering men (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 5:1-11). “Jesus obviously knew how to father his followers, nurture their potential, discipline their laziness, and confront their weaknesses. Like any true mentor and successful leader, Jesus held each of them in his heart and cared for each of them like a son” (Arnold 189).

Robert Coleman, exemplar of biblical evangelism and discipleship and big brother to Lyman, reinforced the use of family as the central metaphor for discipleship in a personal interview. Sitting in my office after preaching, he said, "We miss the obvious with the Great Commission. It starts in the home. It is not about programs but relationship" (Coleman, Robert, Personal Interview). Then he put his words into practice by sharing lunch in our home and treating my children like his grandchildren. The family was God's original work group designed for optimal transformation where children are meant to experience all the phases of transformative learning under the care of caring, involved parents (Deuteronomy 6:1-9).

For boys to become men, they need grand fathers—men who are elders to the community. This corresponds with findings cited in the opening of the *Men of Iron* curriculum:

Young men's relationships with their fathers and other older male figures emerged as a distinct, significant influence forming their adult spiritual identity. Whether constructively or destructively present, or physically or emotionally absent, fathers were critical factors in these young men's identity and meaning-making. Regularly, other older males became significant surrogate substitute or supplemental 'fathers' providing important psychological and spiritual nurture (Coleman, *Launching* 5).

"A truly *Grand Father* is one who is able to treat children who are not biologically his own with the same unselfish giving he learned to give his own. An elder is a father to his community" (Wilder 31). Spend five minutes with Lyman Coleman and you realize that he is the living embodiment of this. He is full of generative strength, and he hasn't stopped pursuing his mission well into his eighties. When he called me the day after our retreat in the summer of 2015, I asked him what his mission statement is. He said, "I exist to create safe places for men/people to experience the church as it was

meant to be. I do this by writing at least 250 words per day.” How fitting then, that M6 went so far as to describe the retreat as a “taste of the church as it was meant to be and future of the kingdom of God—joy.”

“It is grand fathers who help men become fathers—just as fathers help boys become men” (Wilder 172). Exemplified by Gandalf, Obi Wan Kenobi, and Lyman Coleman—the world needs more of them—grand fathers—community elders. “There is a great lack in our churches and communities of elders. There are many men who have grown into their sixties still waiting to meet someone who is a father capable of telling them, ‘You are now a man’” (Wilder 31).

Older men need this as much as younger men. If an old man is going to finish well, he must invest in the next generation and pass on wisdom that comes from his successes and failures—a perspective that comes with age. “Grand father or grand mother energy is an energy that is quiet and secure. It has been tested and not found wanting. It does not need to prove itself any longer, and so it can approve and bless the efforts of others who are not yet sure of themselves” (Rohr, *From Wild Man to Wise Man* 171). Men who become grand fathers will be able to successfully navigate Erikson’s final crisis of integrity versus despair resulting in wisdom. Their final act of mentoring comes in showing us how to die well.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

Those wanting to promote deep discipleship among men through the church should consider the following:

Disciple Makers Need to Learn about Learning

The church would benefit greatly if ministry leaders learned about learning. This will require a radical reevaluation of goals and methods among pastors who focus on information transfer and call it discipleship. “The focus of discipleship is not on teaching per se, but on learning. It is as important for teachers to understand how people learn as it is to understand the material they teach. When transformation is the goal in teaching, the teacher’s role is not to transmit information, but to use content to engage students in the learning process” (Young, *Deep Change*, 224). This cannot be done in large groups. It must begin with a few and spread to others. It will foster deep relationships among small groups and 1-to-1 mentoring. It will combine challenging teaching with time for reflection and discourse. “Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can offer grown-ups is time to reflect” (Marmon 428).

Don’t try to cover so much content. People have a lifetime of disorienting dilemmas. Focus on one of those and mine it for all it is worth. Don’t move on too quickly. Stay with it, reflect on it, follow through with all dimensions of transformative learning before moving on.

Choose to Invest in a Few Men

A man who wanted to start a ministry of discipleship to men should follow Jesus’ example. That means selecting and investing in a few men who have potential to influence others. If such a core group wanted to use the Men of Iron curriculum as a discipleship pathway, they could find an upcoming weekend retreat and attend it together. Then the twelve week follow-up group could be experienced. After a few months of investing in personal growth and relationships, brainstorming could begin about what

ministry could look like in their unique setting. In his work to restore male initiation rites that promote healthy manhood, Richard Rohr writes the following, “Finally, you can only give away what you have. If the fathers have not gone through significant spiritual passages themselves, they really have nothing to say to the young men. It will descend into mere parody, nervous male humor, or strained symbolization” (Rohr, “Boys to Men”)

Apply the Wisdom of the Two Journeys

Discipleship of men that focuses prematurely on mission will set men up for failure because of unaddressed wounds. Discipleship of men that focuses too long on introspection will lead to ego-centeredness. This is the wisdom of the “Road Map” on the weekend retreat. It leads men on a descending journey through wounds of their past to the ultimate disorienting dilemma of their own death. But that becomes the turning point for an upward journey of discovering how to make the most of the rest of his life. Deep discipleship of men will involve both journeys. While the first time through these journeys may be the most memorable, ongoing discipleship will require revisiting them.

Plan with the End in Mind

The power of a safe container created by the retreat and twelve week group can produce uncommon results. But questions remain about how to integrate those practices in the ongoing life of the participants and ministry of the church. The level of confidentiality and trust established on the retreat and sustained in the follow-up group is difficult to achieve in environments that welcome guests. It would seem that churches need multiple levels of commitment that allow people to take their next step toward deep transformation.

For those who want to follow the full Men of Iron program, there are four more work group series. Each ten week series focuses on one of the four domains: heart, soul, mind, and strength. The strength domain prepares the group to host a retreat for a new generation of men.

Limitations of the Study

There are a lot of logistics required to pull off the retreat. It would be difficult for a group to conduct the retreat for the first time by themselves without support from an experienced group.

The application questionnaire started a reflection process for men before they arrived at the retreat. But the questions and responses were not incorporated into the retreat or follow-up group. There should have been a closer link between the surveys and their subsequent experiences, or an opportunity to debrief responses should have been offered in the post-retreat interview.

Question two on the follow-up group interview worksheet was modified in a detrimental way. The post-retreat interview asked, “On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was time for critical reflection?” The post-follow-up group interview asked, “On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was the solo work—private study?” It would have been far better to ask the same question in both interviews. The subsequent questions still collected feedback on critical reflection, but comparisons between the retreat and follow-up interviews were invalidated due to incongruent data.

Three men were recruited from our church to serve as assistant work group leaders alongside the staff from out of town. That means they were helping lead groups while they were going through the experience for the first time themselves. There were

times when these leaders were in staff meetings when other participants had time for solitude or relaxation. It would have been valuable to give these men the full experience of weekend at another location before serving on our weekend.

Asking men to prioritize the follow-up group created some negative repercussions. Some men pulled out of other small groups or ministry commitments for the twelve weeks.

Unexpected Observations

I expected everyone to resonate deeply with writing, memorizing, and reviewing a personal mission statement. There was widespread enthusiasm after the retreat. For a couple of men, their enthusiasm about their mission statement increased during the follow-up group when they refined them to fit their passions. But others lost enthusiasm. Reasons for this were not determined but could include many factors. For some, their mission statement was cumbersome and needed refinement that never happened. There may have been insufficient accountability in the early weeks of the follow-up group to reinforce it. And a formal mission statement may not be deemed important by some men or fit their personal style.

A major component of the follow-up group was called “Solo Workouts.” They were designed to give men an opportunity to debrief the group work and to engage men in habits of personal spiritual practices. Focusing on the “Solo Workouts” instead of the broader category of “critical reflection” during the follow-up group interviews was problematic for data analysis. But it did highlight general dissatisfaction with the solo workout. When asked, “On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was the solo work—private study?” it received an average score of 1.8. Minimal discussion of homework in the group meetings may have contributed to ambivalence. Referencing the solo workouts,

M3 said, “We felt so full leaving a meeting, and then this didn’t seem to compare.” M12 said the solo workouts “Didn’t always parallel what we were talking about; felt like busy work.” It seems that a more helpful approach to “Solo Workouts” would be a direct debrief of the group work in the context of each man’s ongoing life. For instance, week 4, “The Shadow”, solo work could involve the following questions:

1. When did your shadow voice show up in the past twenty-four hours?
2. What did he say?
3. How did you respond?
4. What’s true and what’s false?
5. Which of the following verses help you live in truth and overcome the shadow voice? (list verses that focus on one’s identity in Christ)

Rather than adding more content to the group work, solo workouts could integrate the powerful concepts of group work in one’s daily life. Homework was rarely discussed in the group meetings. One suggestion was to review it in pairs at the beginning of each meeting.

Future Directions for the Study

The follow-up group workbook contains a fascinating summary chart for each of the four domains of heart, soul, mind, and strength (Coleman, *12 Week* 38, 50, 80, 114). The charts include character traits, wounds from childhood, dysfunctional adult behaviors, and redeemed qualities. These lists beg for further explanation in either leader notes or an article in an appendix of the follow-up workbook.

The experiential work group processes found in the Men of Iron curriculum have already been adapted for women and couples. Investigating outcomes of those audiences could provide fascinating comparisons and contrasts.

Lyman Coleman has expressed a desire to see seminaries use this material as spiritual formation curriculum among emerging leaders. There would be several potential benefits. It could form strong bonds among classmates that could be nurtured throughout one's educational journey. The writing of personal mission statements could help students take ownership of their learning. Experiencing transformative learning could set new expectations for how disciples are made in churches they will lead.

If churches want to support the formation of disciples across the full lifespan from cradle to grave, they would do well to pay attention to the crises articulated in Erikson's life stage development theory. "If little attention is paid to the developmental crises of life, few objections are likely to be raised by the church. Yet in fostering transformational learning through these typical life situations, pastors may find their greatest satisfaction because they have their greatest impact in fostering growth" (Young, *Deep Change*, 228).

Review of the Chapter

This chapter reviews the findings of this project. *Men of Iron* was found to be a theocentric and church-based delivery system for transformative learning. Disciple makers were urged to leverage disorienting dilemmas to promote deep change. Experiential learning was found to deepen critical reflection. Practices were identified that created a safe container for engaging discourse. Affirmation was presented as a better motivator for generativity than task lists. Those who learn to apply these findings among men were identified as courageous grand fathers. Ministry implications were suggested.

Limitations of the study, unexpected observations, and future directions for study were presented.

Postscript

The scope of this study felt overly ambitious at times, yet I am grateful that I remain motivated to learn more about transformational discipleship among men.

Learning how to do doctoral research as I did it was cumbersome. But now that I've done it, I'm finding myself enjoying it—thinking of more ways the data could be explored and conceiving of new studies that interest me. I hope this leads to asking better questions and making better decisions as I shepherd and lead.

APPENDIX A
ANALYTICAL GRID

Participant	Disorienting Dilemma: More aware of the context of their problematic understandings and beliefs (a disorienting dilemma)	Critical Reflection: More critically reflective on their assumptions and those of others	Discourse: More fully and freely engaged in discourse	Taking Action: More effective in taking action on their reflective judgments
M1	Quotes and observations...			
M2				
M3				
M4				
Etc.				

APPENDIX B

APPLICATION FOR IRON ON IRON

Weekend Intensive for Men

July 10-12, 2015

Last Name _____ First _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work or Cell Phone _____ E-mail _____

Emergency Contact Name: _____ Phone _____

Special needs after arrival:

Are there any physical issues, such as back trouble or heart trouble that the staff should be aware of?

1. How would you describe your relationship with God right now? (1= ice cold, 10 = red hot) _____
2. Personal Growth / Spiritual Weekends previously attended?
3. Complete the following sentences:
 - a. Real men...

 - b. Real men don't...
4. Can you recall a time that signified you moving from boyhood to manhood? Describe what happened.
5. What are the three greatest fears in your life?

6. What are your current personal growth goals?

7. Name three things that you would like to get rid of.

8. What would you like to have happen on this retreat?

9. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about you?

I agree to arrive at the conference center between 6:00-6:30 pm. I understand that if I arrive after 6:30, my weekend experience will be diminished. In case of emergency or unavoidable delay, I will contact R.A. Atanus or Eric Flood.

Signature

Date

Location:

University of Saint Mary of the Lake Conference Center
1000 East Maple Avenue
Mundelein, Illinois 60060
(847) 566-6401

Starts: Friday 6:00 Check-in (*No Dinner provided Friday night*)

Ends: Sunday 4:00 pm.

Cost: \$150

Please pay by cash or check payable to South Park Church.

Note "Iron On Iron Men's Intensive" on memo line of check. Drop off check (or cash) payment in Oak boxes found at VCC in Atrium or lobbies, or at Vineyard Resource Center during normal weekday business hours. Or mail to: VCC, c/o Dan Henry, 11340 Century Circle East, Cincinnati, OH 45246

APPENDIX C

RETREAT INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

I. Preparation

- A. Consent form
- B. As you check-in, what is one word to describe how you're feeling?
- C. Create God-space: *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus; the love of the Father; and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be present here. As we reflect and share, set up your kingdom among us."*

II. Interview

- A. I'm eager to hear about the weekend. How would you describe your experience?
There are 2 images to keep in mind as we proceed: 1) the V-Shaped Journey,

2) God Zone

1. On a scale of 1 – 4, how challenging was your experience? (1 = not at all, 4 = deeply challenging)
 - a. What was the most challenging part of the weekend to you personally?
Please describe.
 - b. What feelings did it bring up? (sad, angry, scared, happy, excited, tender)
 - c. Can you identify any assumptions (or patterns of thinking) about reality, yourself, or God that needed to be transformed?
2. On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was time for critical reflection? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important). This includes time for thinking, asking questions, journaling, and praying.
 - a. Were there any old ways of thinking or acting that you identified that need left behind? If yes, describe one that is important to you.
 - b. Were there any new ways of thinking or acting that you identified that need to be started? If yes, describe one that is important to you.
 - c. Did you have any breakthroughs or new discoveries? Please describe.
3. On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was your interaction with others? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)
 - a. Choose a moment when someone else was sharing deeply. What was going on inside of you as that person shared?

- b. Choose a moment when you decided to share deeply. What was going on inside of you?
 - c. After you shared, how did others respond?
 - d. What is something you learned about yourself from someone else?
4. On a scale of 1 – 4, how applicable to your life was the work you did at the retreat? (1 = not applicable, 4 = very applicable)
- a. What plans did you make, if any, to think or act in new ways? (action step in next 2 weeks)
 - b. What is your personal mission statement?
 - c. What did you receive (knowledge, skills, support) on the retreat that will help you follow through on your plans?
 - d. Have you attempted any new ways of thinking or acting? If yes, what were the results?
 - e. What will you need (knowledge, skills, support) in order to keep growing?
- B. How did you see God at work this weekend?
- C. What should I have asked you that I did not think to ask?

III. Check Out

- A. Do you plan to participate in the 12 week follow-up?
 - B. Feel free to email me with more reflections. Or approach me any time with questions.
 - C. As you check out, what is one word to describe how you're feeling?
 - D. Prayer of gratitude: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits... “*
-

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP GROUP INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

I. Preparation

- A. Consent form
- B. As you check-in, what is one word to describe how you're feeling?
- C. Create God-space: *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus; the love of the Father; and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be present here. As we reflect and share, set up your kingdom among us."*

II. Interview [I'd rather hear what you really think than what you think I want to hear.]

- A. How would you describe your experience of the 12 week follow-up group?
 1. On a scale of 1 – 4, how challenging was your experience? (1 = not at all, 4 = deeply challenging)
 - a. What was the most challenging part or practice of the 12 weeks to you personally? Please describe.
 - b. What feelings did it bring up? (sad, angry, scared, happy, excited, tender)
 - c. Can you identify any assumptions (or patterns of thinking) that you were encouraged to change? (about reality, God, yourself, God, others)
 2. On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was the solo work—private study? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important). This includes time for thinking, asking questions, journaling, and praying.
 - a. Were there any old ways of thinking or acting that you identified that need left behind? If yes, describe one that is important to you.
 - b. Were there any new ways of thinking or acting that you identified that need to be started? If yes, describe one that is important to you.
 - c. Did you have any breakthroughs or new discoveries? Please describe.
 3. On a scale of 1 – 4, how important was your interaction with others? (1 = unimportant, 4 = very important)
 - a. Choose a moment when someone else was sharing deeply. What was going on inside of you as that person shared?

- b. Choose a moment when you decided to share deeply. What was going on inside of you?
 - c. After you shared, how did others respond?
 - d. What is something you learned about yourself from someone else?
4. On a scale of 1 – 4, how applicable to your life was the work you did at in the 12 weeks? (1 = not applicable, 4 = very applicable)
- a. What plans did you make, if any, to put what you have learned into practice? (action step in next 2 weeks)
 - b. What did you receive (knowledge, skills, support) during the 12 weeks that will help you follow through on your plans?
 - c. Have you attempted any new ways of thinking or acting? If yes, what were the results?
 - d. What will you need (knowledge, skills, support) in order to keep growing?
 - e. Did your mission statement change at all during the 12 weeks? If yes, what is it now? What kind of influence has your mission statement had on your life?
- B. How did you see God in the 12 weeks?
- C. The overall big picture of our time together was the baseball diamond (show image). By the last week, how far do you feel your group made it?
- D. What should I have asked you that I did not think to ask?

III. Check Out

- A. Feel free to email me with more reflections. Or approach me any time with questions.
- B. As you check out, what is one word to describe how you're feeling?
- C. Prayer of gratitude: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits... “*

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

How Experiential Work Groups Promote Transformational Discipleship among Men

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Eric Flood from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a man who is serving as a leader of men at South Park Church. The purpose of this research is to learn how experiential work groups influence the discipleship of men. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- Complete the Iron Men Leadership Retreat Application giving me permission to review your answers.
- Participate in an interview within two weeks following the Iron Men Leadership Retreat to be held July 10-12, 2015.
- If you participate in the 12-week follow-up group, you will be asked to participate in a second interview in late fall.

All interviews will take place in a classroom at South Park Church and be video recorded. Eric Flood will be the only other person in the room during the interview and the only person who views the recording. The recordings will be stored on an SD card and kept in fire/water-safe box with a keyed lock. Your participation will be as a volunteer, so you will not be paid for the time you invest. Your family will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number will be used instead of your name to keep your information private.

If something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please tell Eric. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. You can ask Eric questions any time about anything in this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

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