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ABSTRACT

ENGAGING THE MEN OF BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN BUILDING AUTHENTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

by

Ronald Dave Williams, Jr

Adviser: Charles W. Drake, III

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: ENGAGING THE MEN OF BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH IN BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

Name of Researcher: Ronald Dave Williams, Jr

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Charles W. Drake, III, PhD

Date completed: June 2015

### Problem

According to the Pew Study (2009), the majority of African Americans are Protestants (78%) as compared to 51% of the United States population as a whole. However, African American men (16%) are more likely than African American women (9%) to be unaffiliated with any religion. The Pew Study also noted that nearly one-in-five African Americans under age 30 (19%) are unaffiliated with any religion. Pastoral observation further reveals a disproportionate number of women attending regular church services compared to men at Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is a historical problem not only with the Bethel Church, but also in many churches across denominational communities. The consequence of a large imbalance in the ratio of

men-to-women within the congregation presents a need for a ministry directed toward reaching men, especially within the urban context.

### Purpose

The purpose of this project is to identify a prescriptive approach in relationship authoring among African American men. Utilizing a small group of men who are members of Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is desired that in the formulation of authentic male relationships, church growth will be a by-product of friendship evangelism. Additionally, men within Bethel church will experience deeper, more meaningful relationships with one another and be able to disciple other men in relationship-building experiences.

### Method

In order to create a robust healthy church environment of African American (AA) men, male members of Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSDAC) were invited to participate in an intervention project. This proposed project involved a process of establishing a curriculum for training, discipling, and integrating men into a community of authentic relationship building (ARB). Participants were asked to journal their experience, views, and reflections of Bible studies, socials, community engagement, and outreach opportunities. The journals would be part of the process of compiling and evaluating a qualitative research strategy that also included interviews of participants.

### Result

The project was successful in partially completing the task I originally desired. However, my expectation regarding church growth was not realized in the outcomes. I

believe the main factor affecting this was the length of time needed to develop trusting and equitable friendships with men outside the church, so that participants could then invite them to a church encounter.

The interviews and reflections of participants indicate the men experienced the following: a) Increased sensitivity to personal reflection in relationship authoring; b) Increased priority to build relationships; c) Greater awareness of male leadership; and d) Clear opposition to journaling.

### Conclusion

This project has demonstrated that there is no one method for achieving a greater representation of African American men in churches. It can, perhaps, be used in conjunction with a number of other intentional initiatives to reach the objectives set forth by a congregation to grow male participation in church, as well as enrich the relational lives of men already in attendance.

Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church has the potential to be a groundbreaking congregation in Kansas City, Kansas, that reaches out to African American men. Considering the population of men in the community and the dearth of churches with a specific initiative to invest in this community, makes it a church with no rival in ministering to men.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

ENGAGING THE MEN OF BETHEL SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH IN BUILDING AUTHENTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

A Project Document

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

Ronald Dave Williams, Jr

June 2015

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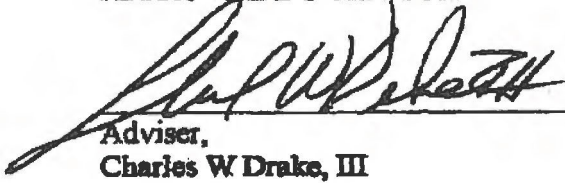
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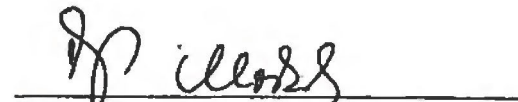
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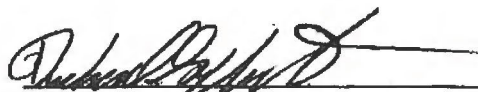
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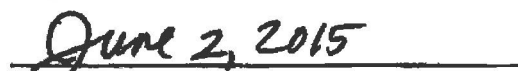
  
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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife: Janene, you have been nothing less than my best friend, soul mate, and God's gift to me. Without you holding me at times when I wanted to quit, encouraging me when I was discouraged, and believing in me when I was down, I thank you from the bottom of my heart that together we are destined for greater and better in marriage, ministry, and life. I love you always and forever...

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA – African American

ARB – Authentic Relationship Building

BSDAC - Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.”*

*– Luke 1:49*

I want to thank God. Had not the Author and Finisher of my faith seen fit to call me out of darkness into His marvelous light, where would I be? God saw nothing but greater and the best in me when I couldn't see anything else but a mess. Thank you, Father.

To my parents, Ronald D Williams, Sr. and Rose C Edwards, whose unending prayers, love, support, and encouragement has been the source of my strength and motivation. I am eternally grateful for the sacrifice you made to give me the academic opportunities you did not receive. You are the wind under my wings and the foundation upon which I stand.

To my spiritual fathers, Ronald Davis, Elder Henry Mitchell (Deceased), Pastor B. T. Rice, Dr. Charles Joseph, on whose shoulders I stand and whose prayers have covered me. These men saw more in me than I ever imagined was there. Your countless hours of encouragement, leadership, counsel, and guidance through the years have made me a much better Christian and spiritual son than I otherwise would have been.

To my adviser and second reader, Dr. Charles W. Drake, III, and Dr. Yohuru Williams, I cannot express in words the impact you brothers have made in my life by walking with me through this project and sacrificing your precious time to push me toward excellence. Your influence as scholars, your support of me as men, your willingness to model and demand academic achievement, as well as cultural awareness will forever guide me as a strong African American scholar. I cherish what you have poured in me and look to pour out to others.

To Darrell Wakefield (Best friend for life), William Hendrix (my ship), Cedric Brumley (my dean), Adean Gathright (my second Mom), Dr. Compton Ross (my Big Brother and Prayer Partner), Phi Beta Sigma (My Ships – SS Hardcore), my family and friends, who, along the way and at the last leg, came through financially and prayerfully to support me in this journey. May the God of heaven enrich your lives mightily and may you never lack any good thing God has in store for you.

To my ancestors, who paid the price of dear life crossing the Middle Passage on slave ships, may your strength, sacrifice, and stories never cease to inspire, encourage, and command respect for your contributions to history. The legacy of a rich heritage will forever speak volumes for generations to come and must be carried on, no matter the cost across the diaspora.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1901, the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church started with 12 people. This congregation is predominately African American. There are a growing number of White and Hispanics members joining this emerging and ethnically diverse community of faith.

In what is considered mid-town Kansas City, Kansas, in an extremely diverse and transitional neighborhood, sits the campus of Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, located at 6910 Riverview St. Adjacent to Interstate-70, which runs between downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and the state capital, Topeka, Kansas, Bethel is situated with convenient access to a major interstate. The campus has plenty of under-developed real estate, which has been used for camping and bonfire socials. From time to time, travelers find their way to our parking lot and utilize it as a rest stop or meeting place for commuting.

Affectionately called “Bethel,” the church sits on roughly four acres of land in the western part of Wyandotte County. Wyandotte County has a rich history of being a premier area for thriving middle-class families. Economic development and community vitality have since shifted to other emerging communities within Kansas, namely, Johnson County, which houses one of America’s top 50 communities, according to CNN Money Best Places to Live (Bluestein et al., 2014).



Typical Sabbath attendance for Bethel is approximately 140-160 worshipers weekly. The official baptized membership roster for Bethel is 547 (North American Division, 2012). The campus is equipped with a gym and stage. There is a youth chapel, four classrooms, clerk's offices, and treasury room. The church has a food service pantry and full-service kitchen. The main chapel has both an overflow section and a balcony, which serves the church well during the annual Black History Month Celebration.

Currently, the congregation operates several community programs, annual community picnic, food give-away, Bible study, women's support group, nursing home ministry, and a youth home ministry called Kaw Valley. The church will see some 4000 participants per year through these programs alone. The active staff for these programs is a great challenge, with about 50 people lending their support somewhat consistently.

Bethel is predominantly an African American church. Based upon pastoral observations and candid discussions with church leadership, especially the elders, the following demographics are believed to exist.

The church body is largely commuter-based, with members averaging about 20 minutes commute time to and from church. Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, is considered to be the Kansas City Metro area. About 280 members are located in the Kansas City Metro area, according to our church directory (North American Division, 2012).

The greater majority of the working membership is blue-collar, with a growing number of white-collar members. Many of the members are long standing "Bethelites," which means they grew up in this congregation and community. The young adult population of Bethel members is approximately 1.5% of the attending community (2555),

(North American Division, 2012). This figures out to about 38 in number. This age is composed of 17-30-year-olds. The youth population is averages about 24 in number and is made up of 5-13-year-olds.

The church leadership team is generally composed of Baby Boomers, with a sprinkle of Gen Xers, and Baby Busters. The church board is composed of 30% (6) male and 70% (17) women, which is characteristic of the congregation's composition, statistically. There are more women than men in attendance, membership and leadership. Clearly, this is a female-dominated congregation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the Pew Study (2009), the majority of African Americans are Protestants (78%) as compared to 51% of the United States population as a whole. However, African American men (16%) are more likely than African American women (9%) to be unaffiliated with any religion. The Pew Study also noted that nearly one in five African-Americans under age 30 (19%) are unaffiliated with any religion. Pastoral observation further reveals a disproportionate number of women compared to men attending regular church services at Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is a historical problem not only with the Bethel Church, but also in many churches across denominational communities. The consequence of a large imbalance in the ratio of men to women within the congregation presents a need for a ministry directed toward reaching men, especially within the urban context.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project is to develop and implement a strategy to engage and equip men of the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church to be authentically involved in meaningful male-to-male relationships that will prepare them to reach men outside of the congregation. This project will be evaluated to determine its effectiveness in mentoring men to replicate genuine relationships with other African American men in Wyandotte County, Kansas, and therefore increase the number of men committed to church.

### **Justification for the Project**

The justification for this project is seen in the following:

1. Rebuilding an African American faith community requires a holistic approach that necessitates the intentional involvement of men, who historically and biblically form a structural foundation of the family unit.
2. Representative African American male membership in the church will enhance the overall mission of the church and provide opportunities for establishing male relationship-building programs that will reinforce positive citizenry values within the community.
3. The church is called to meet the relevant felt-needs of society, and among those who need attention are African American men.
4. The gospel of Jesus Christ calls for the sharing of faith to make disciples. African American men without a religious or church affiliation are an under-represented community that needs an opportunity to be part of a spiritual congregation.
5. Men in authentic relationships with other men suggests the most effective

means of reaching other men and establishing pseudo-paternal connections with younger men who otherwise would not encounter such an experience.

### **Methodology**

The project was to engage and equip the men of Bethel church through two steps. The first step was to recruit and introduce the men to a curriculum designed to aid them in authentic relationship authoring among men within the congregation. The second step was to take the ARB skills and engage an intentional praxis of forming primary Christian with non-Christian relationships. The results of this strategy would be observed for its impact on male attendance and involvement in BSDA church.

### **Expectation for the Project**

The expectations for the project include the following:

1. The project will aid the establishment of healthy male-to-male relationships within the church, where men are held accountable and are nurtured by one another.
2. This project will equip men with the tools to venture outside of the church to establish healthy relationships with other men who do not have a religious or church affiliation.
3. This project will provide a ministry program for the church to utilize in reaching out to African American men.
4. The project will help the pastoral staff to develop ministry skills of leadership and outreach in Wyandotte County, Kansas, among African American men.
5. In the context of missiology, it is hoped that this project will result in an

increased number of African American men attending Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church, learning about God, and synthesizing life with faith in order to become Christians actively engaged in ministry.

### **Delimitations of the Project**

There are some issues that surface when endeavoring to undertake a study of this nature. The scope of this project is limited to study the members of the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kansas City, Kansas. While the study population for this project is restricted to Wyandotte County, it is my hope that other Seventh-day Adventist congregations in North America would benefit from an intentional strategy to build its number of active and attending AA men. This is especially the case for churches that share similar defining features, such as geographic location within an urban community, and socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics, with the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Midwest America.

The project sample in this study was very small and the findings were qualitatively analyzed, therefore the conclusions will not be broad-based to make quantitative observations about the study group in general or Seventh-day Adventists churches in general.

### **Limitations**

My ministry at the church began when the congregation was dealing with major conflict and internal strife. This could be perceived as detrimental to any forward development of relational authoring. To the contrary as a new pastor desiring to encourage growth within the church, the conflict and internal strife gave impetus to why such an intentional approach was needed. The trust level of pastoral leadership had been

significantly diminished and time was required to establish some level of confidence within the community of faith.

Many of the men from the African American community were suspect of being objects of a study, whether it was academic or not, and therefore another approach may yield different results for future studies.

The generation most represented in this congregation is Baby Boomers, with a very small number of Generation X and Millennials in attendance. With that in mind, the results of this study should be interpreted through that context and, again, results could be vastly different if a congregation's generational demographic is more robust.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Authentic Relationship Building* is the process of establishing a mutual connection with another individual through shared life experience or encounters of an intimate and transparent basis.

*Relationship Authoring* is another term employed throughout this study and is synonymous with authentic relationship building. The terms have been used interchangeably.

*Homoeroticism* is a "symbolic same-sex relationship in which the desire for a union with the other of the same gender and in which a sexual acting out is not a requirement" (Finley, 2007).

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

John Wesley has been noted as saying, “Give me one hundred [men] who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergy or lay; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of God upon the earth in one generation” (as cited in Sonderman, 2010, p. 13).

As a pastor of an urban church, I want to see more men in the pews. I want to minister alongside men, young, energetic, and daring. I want to serve others in the community alongside men seasoned with wisdom, fearless in faith, and desiring an opportunity to pour out of themselves what they believe have made them better fathers, husbands, siblings, sons, employees, and disciples of Jesus Christ. The church, as I see it, is the one place where men are not in representative numbers. There are a few men, dare I say several men, in congregations sprinkled across the country but an army of men in church, that is not something I have ever seen in my experience. How does the gospel of Jesus Christ effect change in a community when men are not present? How does the African American community grow, develop, and nurture itself without men of faith in tangible numbers who can have an influence?

Wesley may be an idealist, on one hand, or completely insane, on the other. Is it possible to have one hundred men who desire nothing but God and, if so, what is the key to getting that many men in any church? That is what I intend to explore, theologically,

at least, in this chapter; God's perspective on men reaching men to set up His kingdom and the effect they can have when engaged in authentic relationships.

### **Created for Community**

Since Creation, the Bible declares that man was created for community. When God "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen 2:7, ESV), man became a living being who existed in fellowship and harmony with God. Adam related to God, spent time with God, enjoyed the community of God as a created being, and yet God acknowledged "it is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). So, God gave to Adam a "helper comparable to him" (v. 18), Eve. The two of them together established a different kind of community than Adam had before.

This new community was more relevant to Adam because there was someone of like nature to himself that he could now see, touch, feel, and explore life with. Eve was human like Adam, she responded like Adam and yet was very different from Adam. She was a different gender than Adam and had a different set of qualities or traits than Adam. Eve was not inferior to Adam; Eve was different than Adam. As a woman, Eve had a unique way of relating to Adam and, as a man, Adam had a unique way of relating to Eve. This community differs from the original in that it is human-to-human and not human-to-divine. Adam and Eve thrived in an environment created perfectly for them by a God who understands all and has a plan for humanity.

The entrance of sin into human nature changed things for humanity in more ways than one. The first couple was introduced to conflict; they were introduced to emotions never before experienced; relationship dynamics never before tested and a glaring confession that each one has specific expectations and gender composition that will



further differentiate them and require attention. God informed Eve, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3: 16). This desire Eve will have for her husband is different than the desire Adam has for Eve. The declaration of Adam ruling over Eve adds one more dynamic to her make up that differentiates her from Adam.

God on the other hand tells Adam,

Because you have heeded the voice of your wife . . . cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return. (Gen 3:17-19)

This sentence on the life of Adam is gracious of God, yet it generates a new set of expectations, social adjustments, and requirements as a man in a new environment.

Adam and Eve were both created for community, however, the entrance of sin into the environment brought new challenges in how to relate to one another and how to live within this new context of existence. I suggest that Adam and Eve would need like beings to help them relate to the individual challenges they now faced as a result of sin in their lives. This new challenge with how to live post-sin created a new need for unique relationships that neither one of them ever thought would be essential to their social welfare. Adam will never understand completely what it is like to have pain in child bearing. Eve will never fully grasp the dynamic of having to toil with a cursed ground that brings forth thorns and thistles for Adam. However, if there are other women and men who come along, they would be able to relate to the new existence that is unique to

each sex, hence the need for both of them to have opportunities of building relationships with others who are experientially compatible.

In other words, a new community is needed to help Adam and Eve adapt to living with unique challenges they now face. This new community will become a new network for growth, development, accountability, and responsibility. In this new community will be social beings (males and females) that are gender compatible and able to explore shared experiences that facilitate relational connectedness. It is in this new community that Adam and Eve will learn more about themselves as separate species and more about how they relate with the God who created them.

### **Authentic Man-to-Man Relationships**

The need for man to experience community with another man is derived from the event of sin being introduced into the earth. When sin entered the human experience, God created unique challenges with the environment for Adam. God also created a need within Adam to have to adjust to the strain of living with a curse upon the environment that brought emotional, social, physical, and relational opportunities into existence. Another man can relate to Adam much better, being under the same conditions, than another woman who has a different set of challenges to deal with.

Adam has two sons Cain and Abel. Cain is much like Adam in that he thrives in nature and is a “tiller of the ground” like his father (Gen 4:2). Cain knows very well the environment that Adam must work with. In addition to vocational affiliation, there is the paternal connection of a father to his son. Cain experiences the same challenges that Adam does and this helps each one to relate with the other in an authentic way. For Cain, as with Adam, thorns and thistles are troublesome and difficult to ignore; what hurts the

one, hurts the other. What annoys the one probably annoys the other and relating to the experience produces authentic concern, understanding, and emotional attachment. This emotional attachment is what I suggest assists each one with comfort or support to work the land, regardless of the effort needed to be fruitful.

Each man understands the other man and his unique challenges with being a “tiller of the ground” (Gen 4:2). This common activity creates a community ethic and bond that is the direct result of their tasks. Abel enters the equation having a different responsibility and yet a need to be part of the community of Adam and Cain. Abel is “a keeper of sheep” (v. 2) and this is different from Cain and Adam, who are engaged in agriculture. Abel is the son of a father and a sibling to a brother. These two new relationships are introduced to the family dynamic and the concept of community. How does Abel join the community of men? Is there a place for Abel in the community of men?

### **Why a Man Does not Fit**

When Abel’s task appears to be diverse from Cain’s and Adam’s, the need for community is still present. Abel is physically part of the community by the mere fact that he is masculine. Abel is relationally part of the community by family bonds. Abel is emotionally part of the community because his sheep must feed from the same land that Cain and Adam till for human provision. Abel needs the land to be tilled so that his sheep may likewise eat and experience wellbeing. Although Abel does not till the land by vocation, the negative effects of the land can have dramatic effect upon his satisfaction with keeping sheep. The thorns and thistles can hinder the sheep from getting sustenance, can wound them, requiring extra attention that otherwise would be

problematic. The journey to finding adequate resources for the sheep can require hard work on Abel's part. This labor of keeping the sheep should qualify Abel for entrance into the community of men.

The biblical narrative suggests to us that perhaps, for Cain, this posed a problem with Abel's entrance into the community and a threat to authentic relationship. When God is introduced to what each man values most, Cain brings to God "an offering of the fruit of the ground" (v. 3). Abel brings to God "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (v. 4). Cain's value system informs him and Abel's value system informs him. Only when God evaluates both value systems do we find a problem with authentic relationship being questioned. This is in no way indicative of a problem with God or His authority to evaluate. His determination of what each man offers does carry weight with how each man feels about the community of men.

Cain, for the most part, has a problem with authentic relationship. For Cain, the value he has placed upon himself as a tiller of the soil differs greatly from Abel and his value placed upon the sheep he brings to God for an offering. Cain lets his value system inform his desire for authentic relationship. If his value system has room for a keeper of sheep, then Abel is acceptable. If his value system does not have room for Abel's offering, there will be a crucial determination made about the relationship he has with another man. Very influential to Cain's judgment is the value God places on Abel, his offering in comparison to Cain, and his offering.

According to the biblical narrative, Cain kills his brother Abel and thus demonstrates his thoughts on the value of authentic relationship and the acceptance of a diverse vocation from his. For Cain, Abel does not fit into the community of men.

Abel's offering was different, Abel's vocation was different, and Abel was different. The matter is escalated when Cain understands the value God has placed on Abel and his offering in contrast to Cain and his offering. Cain could make no allowance for diversity in his understanding of community and, as a result, he eliminates the different one so that personal harmony and peace can continue.

The only problem is, Cain does not understand that, in this new community of men, there is responsibility and accountability that is monitored by God. God is the author of the community and the only one capable of evaluating who stays and who goes. Cain learns this very valuable lesson when confronted by God and asked, "Where is Abel your brother" (v. 9)? God is challenging Cain regarding the authenticity of his relationship with another man. Cain can take ownership of his part in the relationship or seek to change the rules governing the community. He immediately opts for the latter and responds to God flippantly, if you will, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9). Cain's concept of community is clouded by something deeper than an offering. It is an emotion that has gotten out of control. White writes, "When Cain saw that his offering was rejected, he was angry with the Lord and with Abel" (1890, p. 73)

In the first place, Cain has disregarded authentic relationship by telling a lie regarding the whereabouts of Abel. Second, Cain abjectly refuses to be held accountable for engaging in authentic community by inquiring of God if he is responsible for another man. I want to suggest that authentic relationships between men are necessary for the welfare of community and are the responsibility of men who are, by default, part of the community because of their masculine trait.

## Why a Man Must Fit

Arterburn, Luck, and Wendorff (2003) propose a primary problem facing God's men today as isolation.

More than at any other time in history, men feel emotionally and relationally cut off from other men . . . Sure we have friends and we certainly lead busy lives, but as a general condition, we males are not connected to one another for any deep purposes. (pp. 5-6)

The idea that God created men not only for community but also for "deep purposes" is extremely important. Deep purposes go beyond what a man does for a living, where he decides to live with his family, and what credentials make him a successful man. Deep purposes go further than what college a man attended or if he belongs to a fraternity or club. Deep purposes are the thoughts, ideals, motivations that reveal the true character of a man. What is a man passionate about? What will a man do to make a significant contribution to society? Is there a purpose for that man being alive at the time life is given to him? "Deep purposes" are important to understanding the heart of a man.

Every man should know the meaning of his life. Every man wants to know the reason he is living. Oftentimes, life throws so many curves and obstacles at a man that, when the pressure is turned up, many men will suffer in silence. This is an unhealthy way to survive and it certainly is not God's ideal. This suffering in silence can be traced back to Cain's murder of his brother and the sentence God placed upon him for a lack of remorse and penitence for his crime. God tells Cain, "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth. And Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!'" (Gen 4:12, 13).

Cain considers his punishment to be unacceptable to him. Why? First, as a fugitive, he will always be roaming the earth and under a condemnatory status of divine judgment. That is not a comfortable way to live. Second, as a vagabond, community will always pose a problem, because there will be no settling down for him in one place called home. Cain will constantly be on the move and never able to really establish relationships with another man that could benefit him. He will be a loner and constantly on the move.

Rather than take ownership of his lack of regard for a previous relationship with his brother, Cain denies the voracity of this connection and makes excuses about his own comfort. Eventually, the Bible declares, “Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden” (v. 16). This departure from the presence of God all but ensures Cain’s isolation from God and a community he had called home with his father Adam. It is in isolation now that Cain must find a new way to live as a man without any other connection to a man. It is this isolation that is also detrimental to Cain’s existence.

There is more to isolation than just not having someone to talk to. Isolation weakens our defenses. We are engaged in a spiritual battle every day, and one side or the other is winning at each moment. So the question is, who will prevail in the various domains of your life today – the dark forces aligned with the world and the devil, or God and his kingdom? (Arterburn et al., 2003, p. 6)

This is a question every man faces each day he lives. A man who is not in authentic relationship with another man, nor has an authentic community to embrace, will find himself existing, but not living as God ordained he should.

Furthermore,

Overcoming isolation, then, is not about getting and giving warm fuzzies or an occasional high-five. It involves a war for your spiritual well-being, your

effectiveness for God, and your impact on those closest to you. What God's man needs to clearly understand is that isolation from other men is not just bad, it's deadly (Arterburn et al., 2003, p. 6).

This is why a man must fit into authentic community and relationships with other men.

The Bible declares, in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,

Two are better than one . . . for if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up . . . Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

There is responsibility and accountability for men who engage in authentic relationships and community with other men.

### **Two are Better Than One**

A man engaged in authentic relationship benefits in at least three ways: (a) from accountability with someone else other than himself for the relationship; (b) from responsibility to someone else other than himself; and (c) through an opportunity to give and receive masculine nurture to make him a better man.

In his book *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge writes,

Deep in a man's heart are some fundamental questions that simply cannot be answered at the kitchen table. Who am I? What am I made of? What am I destined for? It is fear that keeps a man at home where things are neat and orderly and under his control. (2010, p. 6)

The answers to these deep questions do not come from sitting at home watching football, washing the family car, or taking out the garbage. The answers to these types of questions come from men engaging with other men who have like questions and want similar answers as they journey down the masculine road together. And if a man is desperate enough for answers, partnership in relationship will inspire each to not quit



until the journey has yielded fruitful and beneficial answers. This is accountability for another man on the journey.

Eldredge also mentions three things every man has buried in his heart that must come out in order to experience his true masculine self. They might “be misplaced, forgotten, or misdirected, but in the heart of every man is a desperate desire for a battle to fight, an adventure to live and a beauty to rescue” (2010, p. 9). These three desires inject life into a man, instill a deep sense of responsibility for the masculine journey, and is so consuming that a man would regret being a man if he fails to fulfill any one of these desires. A man feels a sense of responsibility for other men if he sees them missing out on fulfilling these desires in their lives.

Accountability and responsibility for a man on the masculine journey will inevitably lead to the opportunity to give and receive nurture with other men. The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatian church, encouraged them, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Paul admonishes believers to nurture another who has been caught in a compromising position. First, Paul encourages that the nurturing done be administered by those who are spiritual. Nurturing another man helps a man to live the faith, which he professes to have. Second, the nurturing experience sensitizes a man to the needs of someone else outside of himself and opens a door to relationship building that is genuine, authentic, and masculine.

The point cannot be understated that Solomon shared in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV), “Two are better than one . . . for if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.” No man is an

island unto himself and every man will struggle in life at one time or another, therefore it is God's design that men not have to go it alone or be in isolation. Two are better than one.

### **Principles for Authentic Relationship Authoring**

There is a profound need in every man, a need that must be met regardless of the cost. Every boy grows up wondering, searching, and trying to fulfill this need--the need to know what it means to be a man. Depending upon social affiliations, this need for every boy to understand manhood and what it means to be a man will be reached in different ways. It could come through a male's attachment to social outcasts like gangs. It could come through more holistic attachments with a father or other respected family member. Sometimes, the association of friends, neighbors, or classmates gives a male the privilege of learning what it means to be a man, especially with the absence of a father in the family.

The challenge is this, without a spiritual commitment or component; any understanding of manhood is potentially lethal for males. It will inevitably lead to an existence for men which is unbalanced and often times destructive. This destructive nature can be community-oriented as well as self-destructive through dysfunctional behavior and relationships. To give evidence on the point, look at the prison population numbers or even the number of African American men in particular who are under the control of the criminal justice system.

In the United States, the "penal population exploded from 300,000 to more than 2 million" (Alexander, 2010, p. 6). Along with this, the African American community has been hit the hardest with "one in three young African American men currently under the

control of the criminal justice system – in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole” (Alexander, 2010, p. 9). Something must be done to stem the social tsunami that is destroying this community and this nation.

I would like to suggest there is an underlying issue that, left unaddressed, facilitates the dysfunctional social development of African American men, which leads them to behaviors and associations that are unhealthy. Eldredge states, every man’s deepest fear “is to be exposed, to be found out, to be discovered as an imposter, and not really a man” (2010, p. 47). When a male comes to an age where self-awareness becomes important, this fear of not really being a man causes him to search for what it means to be a man. Hence, the need for a clearly effective and transformational approach for men to understand manhood and have authentic relationships with other men that is not socially inept or detrimental to social norms and values of a community.

“Men become men in the company of other men” (Arterburn et al., p. 15). With this in mind, I believe the Bible gives clear principles that are timeless and help with relationship authoring, so that males become men by engagement with other men. Let us look at some men in Scripture and discover the essentials needed to build up men.

### **Covenant Agreement and Love – Jonathan and David**

In 1 Samuel 18, the King of Israel, Saul, called David, a young man who was the son of Jesse, to become part of the royal family. David proved his masculinity and manhood by stepping up and engaging in a conflict with Goliath. Goliath posed a great threat to Israel’s future and David fearlessly fought and defeated Goliath. David was then brought in to be with the king. Saul had a son by the name of Jonathan, who, like

David, was young but had not necessarily proven his masculinity or manhood. Jonathan also had not demonstrated a spiritual maturity like David had.

When David and Jonathan met, their very first encounter is recorded in Scripture and illustrates a remarkable essential.

The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (1 Sam 18:1-4)

Jonathan emotionally attached himself to David because there was something uniquely attractive and appealing in David to him as a man. There was a spiritual bond between the two of them that was established when Jonathan made a covenant with David. In Scripture, covenants were made between nations as in a treaty. God made covenants with individuals as a pledge of allegiance. In this case, the covenant between David and Jonathan was a binding alliance of friendship. It was important to them to be equals, to be responsible and accountable to one another in their relationship.

As a demonstration of equality or equity in the relationship, Jonathan, who is economically and socially above David, gives to David the very items that would separate them socially so that David understands the parameters of the relationship and the nature of authenticity Jonathan is looking for. Jonathan gives to David his royal robe, his warrior's armor, his sword, bow, and belt. Jonathan seeks equity in the relationship and authenticity from David.

Later, this equitable and authentic alliance or relationship will be further tested and enriched when David must leave the community for his own safety because Jonathan's father does not feel the same affection for David as Jonathan, and thus seeks

to kill David. Jonathan and David meet in a field because it is clear that Saul wants David killed. Jonathan and David

kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most. Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.’” And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city. (1 Sam 20:41–42)

David is invested in this relationship as much as Jonathan is and both of them accept the terms of the relationship as binding in the Lord between them and their offspring.

Covenant or authentic relationship between men happens when there is genuine concern and love for one another. This love for one another goes deeper than just mere affiliation, but engenders affection for another of the highest order.

### **Providential Relationship – Elijah and Elisha**

Elijah was a man called of God to the office of prophet. Elijah was a particularly strong man of faith, with a noteworthy character. His responsibilities on behalf of God were carried out diligently and the time has come in his life to mentor another man. He does not have the choice of picking the man God has told him who to invest himself in. Elijah is walking one day and sees a young man by the name of Elisha. God informed Elijah this would be his protégé and Elijah is reticent about recruiting him.

First Kings 19 records the events that bring Elijah and Elisha together. It is interesting that Elisha does not know his encounter with Elijah is of a divine nature, however, when Elijah passes by Elisha

Elijah . . . cast his cloak upon him (Elisha). . . And he (Elisha) took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. (1 Kgs 19:19–21)

Elisha has submitted himself to the role of assisting Elijah in what I term a providential relationship.

The assistant role of Elisha will be a time of personal development emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and socially. The culmination of this relationship will transform over time and blossom when God takes Elijah from Elisha. Elisha shows great commitment to the relationship he has with Elijah. The day comes when Elijah tries to separate from Elisha so God can take him to heaven. On three different occasions, Elijah ask Elisha to stay in a place while he goes away and each time Elisha says to Elijah, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you” (2 Kgs 2:2,4, 6). This event in particular has embedded within it a rite of passage ritual that will prove to be monumental for Elisha. The two of them eventually come to the Jordan River and it provides an obstacle. There are no boats accessible to them. A bridge over the waters does not exist. Yet they must get to the other side. Elijah takes his mantle, strikes the river, and the waters part so they may both walk through on dry ground.

Once through the river, the waters come back together and continue to flow. Elisha, seeing this, is left in amazement. Elijah, sensing his time to leave the earth is near, asks Elisha what he wants from him. Elisha answers with the request “Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me” (2 Kgs 2:9). There are qualities in Elijah as a man, a prophet, and mentor that appeal to Elisha. Elijah informs his associate that the request he has made is not his to give, but God’s. However, he informs him that if he is present when God does a miraculous thing, he will be the recipient of his request.

Elisha is present when God takes Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah leaves behind the mantle he threw over Elisha when the pair first met. Elisha notices the mantle,

picks it up, and has to ascertain what his newfound experience will be like without his mentor. Did Elijah leave him the power he requested? Will God fulfill the request of Elisha to Elijah?

Elisha is filled with questions. His mentor has exemplified for him what it means to be a prophet, a man, and involved in a providential relationship. Elisha comes to the same river that he and Elijah crossed over before. This time there is no Elijah. This time he is alone and all he has is the memory and mantle of Elijah. Elisha remembers what Elijah did and wonders if God is willing to bestow on him the double portion he requested. Elisha, who was committed in relationship to Elijah, does what was modeled for him at the Jordan River. Elisha strikes the river, calling out to the God of Elijah “‘Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?’ And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over” (2 Kgs 2:14).

Elisha has the power of Elijah as a result of this providential relationship. This event of crossing the Jordan River and striking it with the cloak of Elijah is a rite of passage for the young protégé. Elijah modeled, mentored, and equipped Elisha to step into his own masculinity by taking him under his wing and walking in authentic, providential relationship with him.

Commitment to one another in a relationship that was providential helped both men become better men. Elijah pleased God in obedience to mentoring another man. Elisha submitted to Elijah and committed himself to being a faithful follower until Elijah was taken. This providential relationship illuminates several essentials in relationship authoring: (a) commitment between men; (b) spiritual men modeling authentic maleness for other men; (c) submission to divine assignments for relationship building; and (d) the

blessing of having a rite of passage ritual to help a man assess his spiritual, social and psychological development as a man.

### **A Broken Man can be a Better Man – Jesus, Peter, and The Demon-Possessed Man**

“Every man feels that the world is asking him to be something he doubts very much he has in him to be. This is universal, I have yet to meet an honest man who won’t admit it” (Eldredge, 2010, p. 48). These words disturb many men and yet they do ring with certainty and truth. What marks the transition of a man from boyhood to manhood? How can a man know unequivocally that he has arrived at manhood? Is there something noteworthy about being a man that we should see in a man?

The call to manhood is a call to honesty within a man. Every man must be true to himself and acknowledge that there may be some areas underdeveloped or lacking maturity if a man truly wants to be considered a man. No man is perfect emotionally, spiritually, socially, or relationally. Jesus helps us to see in the New Testament God’s desire to bring broken men into authentic relationships so that they can be better men.

Peter is a wonderful example of a broken man who is willing to look in the mirror and admit there are issues and problems that he cannot handle or fix. Peter is also an example of a man who does not necessarily want to be fixed or handled by another man.

Peter, also called Simon in Luke 5, meets Jesus at the Lake Gennesaret. There were two boats at the lake this particular day and Jesus chose Simon’s to use as a pulpit and platform to teach. The crowd continued to grow and Jesus, with Simon’s permission, gets into his boat and Simon pushes out from the shore so Jesus can teach the word of God to the crowd. Whatever Jesus is teaching, Simon hears as well as the crowd.



When Jesus completes His message, He asks Simon to venture further out on the lake and drop his nets for a catch. Simon is hesitant, yet something in him tells him to take a chance. However, before he acquiesces, he tells Jesus, “We toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). In other words, Jesus, we know what we know. Do you think you know about our industry? Nevertheless, Simon drops the nets only to find

They enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. (Luke 5:6, 7)

Simon is shocked, to say the least. However, there is something deeper happening here of a spiritual nature. Simon is a man who considers himself not quite the religious type. Yet, Jesus is attracted to him, nonetheless. At this moment, Simon senses something of an epiphany, seeing the great catch, and Jesus. Simon falls to his knees in his own boat and says to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Simon understands that his lifestyle, spiritually speaking, morally, and ethically, is a contrast to his perceived lifestyle of Jesus. He realizes he is a broken man or “pertaining to behavior or activity *he* does not measure up to standard moral or cultic expectations” (Arndt, Danker, & Bauer, 2000, p. 51).

This is, however, the type of man whom Jesus chooses to ask to follow Him, and Simon chooses to do so. Simon forgoes his vocation and becomes a disciple of Jesus. This relationship is entered into because Simon also realizes that, as a broken man, he is willing to take a risk, be vulnerable, and follow Jesus, a man whom he can respect, as well as regard. Jesus has something that can help Simon be a better man.

Jesus invites Simon Peter into an inner circle of men who become closer to Jesus than His other disciples. This inner circle is noteworthy because it is fewer than the twelve, who are all followers, and they are given access to more intimate moments in the life of Jesus than the other nine. This inner circle gets the privilege to see Jesus in some of His most vulnerable moments, like the Garden of Gethsemane. This inner circle also has the opportunity to experience some of Jesus' most honorable or important moments, like the Mount of Transfiguration.

The relationship between Jesus and Peter is sometimes challenging, because Peter can be quick-tempered (see John 18:10, 11). The relationship can be cumbersome at times, because Peter will place Jesus in precarious positions (see Matt 17:24-24). The relationship will experience grave disappointment, because Peter will deny any affiliation with Jesus in a moment of vulnerability and personal threat (Mark 14:66-72). Yet, through these challenges, Jesus does something very redemptive with Peter that must be recognized.

After Jesus had resurrected from the grave, He came to the disciples, who were emotionally disheveled and spiritually in a quandary. They were unsure about what to do with the rest of their lives since Jesus was no longer leading them. Jesus appears to them on the banks of the Sea of Tiberius. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus suggests that they cast their nets on the right side of the boat. They do what He says, not knowing it was Jesus who spoke to them.

One of the disciples tells Peter the man on the shore is Jesus. Peter jumps out of the boat and swims back to shore to see if the man really is Jesus. Jesus and Peter take a walk along the beach and three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Each question is

difficult for Peter, because Peter is constantly reminded of his betrayal of Jesus. He is reminded of his lack of authenticity and commitment to the relationship. He is reminded of his own brokenness, frailty, faults, and sinful nature.

Jesus asks Peter to become vulnerable with Him and to take a risk to be authentic. He encourages Peter to invest more in the relationship than just mere presence; He invites Peter to open his heart so that they may truly connect emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. Peter finds this challenging, because this is a call to face a fear he has never been called to face before. This call is for a man to reach down within his maleness and to admit that he needs Jesus to be more than a man in his life, but a Friend, Redeemer, Savior, and Lord.

This is risky ground for Peter. Yet, to the best of his ability, he ventures out into the deep with Jesus, but not too far. Jesus asks for a depth of commitment that is of a divine nature; Peter at this time can only go as far as his humanity will let him. Rather than offer an all or nothing approach, Jesus accepts what Peter offers as a starting point and building block for them. Jesus is willing to accept this as the best Peter can offer and He affirms him in their relationship.

I suggest that Peter honestly feels he is being asked to be something he doubts very much he has in him to be. Jesus challenges him on this because it is true. He cannot be the man he could be without being in relationship with Jesus. If he commits to Jesus and opens himself up to Jesus without inhibition, he will be more of a man than he ever dreamed. For now, it seems Peter will settle with where he is until Jesus works with him more to take him where Jesus wants him to be. Peter was a broken man; now because of his authentic relationship with Jesus, he can be a better man.

There is another man we find in Scripture who encounters Jesus in the most deranged and dehumanizing position possible. He is demon-possessed and lives in an area known Gerasenes. When Jesus encounters this man he has

an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. (Mark 5:2-5)

This man is nothing like a man, as we would think to define manhood. Mentally, he is not stable. Spiritually, he is void of awareness and comprehension of God. Physically, he is a danger to himself and a community we would call normal. He lives in a cemetery, which is a metaphor appropriate to his context of life. Everything around him is dead, void of opportunity and life. Everything around him is a reminder of what used to be. Those in the tombs used to be alive. They used to breathe. They used to love, give, and exist, but now they are dead and only bygone memories of their loved ones who remain.

When Jesus sees this man, the demoniac runs toward Him and falls at His feet, asking, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” (Mark 5:7). There appears to be a glimmer of hope, a dim spark of human-ness, and the ability to articulate his broken nature to the One who could help him. However, as quick as the light flashes, it goes away. The other part of this broken man rebukes Jesus to not torment him or harm him. This man is torn by multiple personalities and is in great need.

Jesus restores to this man his mental, emotional, relational, and, more importantly, his spiritual wellbeing. The man has been redeemed from a deadly fallen nature. Jesus has restored this man from animalistic behavior to human wellness. Immediately, this

man is compelled to join with Jesus as a living witness to the power of God in restoring a most vile nature to one that redefines manhood as well as the glory of God. Interestingly, Jesus refuses this man's request to accompany Him as a witness to authentic relationship and wholeness. Instead, Jesus empowers and encourages the man, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

The man is challenged to go and engage others in authentic relationship through his testimony of what God has done for him, as well as with him. His brokenness before Jesus made possible his betterment from Jesus. With this encounter, we are shown how Jesus redeems a man so he can likewise engage in the work of redemption and relationship building as a co-laborer with Christ. This man is given responsibility to find others, including men, to share his testimony with the hopes that authentic relationships will result not only with him but also the God who delivered him. He is called to relate with others through the mercy shown him.

These two encounters help us to understand another essential for masculine relationship authoring. In each case, men were engaged whose broken spiritual nature required them to engage with a man who could help them experience a better spiritual nature through transformative relationship.

### **An Upper Room Experience**

I genuinely believe the church benefits greatly from a healthy fellowship where men are engaged in transformational relationships. The Bible illustrates this point vividly in the book of Acts. Let me clarify that growth in the body of Christ is not limited to men, because clearly Jesus' own mission was "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The

Bible also teaches that the everlasting gospel is to be preached “to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev 14:6). Subsequently, this means the gospel’s appeal will be to men, women, boys, and girls of every nation, tongue, culture, etc.

However, I contend that the context of this project is specifically the African American community in which I minister. Additionally, my focus is on an underrepresented population of unbelievers, i.e., African American males. With that in mind, does the Bible give any clues as to whether a fellowship can experience growth as far as men are concerned? I believe the answer to be a resounding yes.

In the book of Acts, Jesus visits with the disciples one last time before leaving the earth. His disciples are men who have walked with Him and lived with Him for approximately three and one-half years. Before His departure, He tells them to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). The promise of the Father was the Holy Spirit and its baptism. When the disciples receive the promise, something would happen of a divine nature. Jesus tells them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

These men would be endowed with power from God that would enable them to grow their fellowship throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. There are roughly 120 people in this upper room as the disciples wait. While they are in the upper room together in fellowship, the Bible records the names of, “Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord

were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:13-14). During this time, these men were not just praying,

They humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief . . . As they meditated upon His pure, holy life they felt that no toil would be too hard, no sacrifice too great, if only they could bear witness in their lives to the loveliness of Christ’s character . . . The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God, and as they did this they realized what a privilege had been theirs in being permitted to associate so closely with Christ. These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised. (White, 1911, pp. 36-37)

The fitness for the task ahead was made possible in the fellowship of men who sought spiritual and emotional transformation. Eventually, that time would come and at God’s appointed season.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

Mightily God worked on and through these men to equip them for a work that was bigger than them. God designated this group to be the catalyst for a new movement that would gather men, women, and children into a fellowship ordained of heaven.

Interestingly, when the men were equipped, God also had prepared an audience for them to engage.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying . . . we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. (Acts 2:5-7, 11)

This event, called Pentecost, was not without immediate growth and effect upon the fellowship. After Peter preaches with great power, the Bible records, men

were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:37-39)

When the appeal was made and the benediction was given, we find that on this day alone, “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

The exact number of men who were baptized that day cannot be accounted for, nor do I believe it is necessary. The point that cannot be missed is that a group of men in fellowship together underwent a spiritual transformation that included enriched man-to-man relationships. From this experience together, God endowed them with His Holy Spirit so that they could be witnesses to the power and purposes of God. When these men shared with other men, in particular, and women as well as children, generally, they were moved to make a commitment and join with this fellowship of men, thus growing the group exponentially.

It must be understood that nobody planned for a certain number, but certainly somebody was counting the numbers that were added. The growth, I suggest, was a by-product of the transformational experience these men shared together that culminated in God’s blessing and His crowning the group with the Holy Spirit. Transformational relationships among men will experience the same potential and possibilities as recorded in Scripture. The key is not planned growth, but intentional time together in prayer and the seeking of God’s Holy Spirit. Additionally, the Holy Spirit’s presence brought the



men power necessary to be bold witnesses, which resulted in people wanting to join their fellowship and believe in the same Jesus they believed in. The gospel in the mouths of men who have been transformed and empowered by God's spirit will yield growth for any fellowship, because it is God's will they witness. Jesus admonishes men, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).

African American men in fellowship and authentic relationship with one another can experience an upper room experience. They can likewise see growth among the group when their purposes are aligned with God's. Growth becomes a by-product because, as these men are transformed through relationships with one another, the Holy Spirit's power is endowed upon them to be witnesses where they are and wherever they go.

### **Pastor as Equipper**

He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great . . . For you equipped me with strength for the battle. (Ps 18:34-39)

Ministry to men is no easy task or small feat. Books have been written, seminars given, and many have opinions about what it takes to meet the needs of men. The Bible, in general, and the ministry of Jesus in particular, provide what I consider to be the best manual on the pastor's role as an equipper for ministry to men.

The pastor in my context is the under-shepherd of the flock of God. He has been given responsibility to not only feed the flock, but also to equip them. Paul writes, in Ephesians, that God gave to the church, "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). Here is a clear mandate for the equipping of godly men to

minister to other men. The equipping process “will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ” (Eph 4:13). This is a journey and not a short sprint to the finish line.

The pastor’s role in equipping men to minister is most effective when modeled after Jesus and what He did with the disciples for three and a half years. I believe we can see a systematic process in Jesus’ approach to equipping through the Scripture if we look for it. The Bible states,

And he (Jesus) went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. (Mark 3:13-15)

The first step in equipping is the call of men to be disciples. Jesus called men to join Him in an established community He was building. He was intentional with inviting them into fellowship with Him. He was not calling them to tasks. He did not call them into work. He called them to be with Him because “he desired them” (v. 13). They had a choice to come or not. Throughout the gospel, we find these words “Follow me!” (Matt 4:18; 8:22) spoken to men like Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Men were called by Jesus to join in community and authentic relationship with Him.

The next step we see is Jesus mentoring the men He called to be in community with Him. They were called “so that they might be with him” (v. 14). He wanted their company. He wanted their camaraderie. He wanted to disciple as well as mentor them. “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke

9:23). “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (Matt 10:24-25).

The final step in equipping men is to be able to send them out. Jesus called those to Himself because He wanted them to be with Him. He also sent “them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:15). He sent them out also to “go . . . to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Matt 10:5-8). They were to go and fulfill the same activities that Jesus had modeled for them. They were to go and serve others as He had served others. This final step was the practicum of the curriculum for the disciples. They were not to be observers only, but to be practitioners of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

These three steps may seem simple, but the depth of activities and time spent in each are in no way simple. Jesus spent more than three years with the disciples and, even after that amount of time, they were not quite ready to fly alone. As mentioned previously, they still needed the power of God in the person of the Holy Spirit to be fully equipped for a good work.

The pastor as equipper, following this model, can rest assured that transformational men will result from using Jesus’ example. God ensures faithfulness and success. As the prophet Zechariah was told, the work of God could not be done through human terms and be effective. The work of God is most effective. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6). The Spirit of God and the willingness of man to engage in transformation relationship under the

equipping of the pastor will yield great dividends for the kingdom of God, the community of faith, and the discipling of African American men.

### **Conclusion**

Looking through Scripture, a clear foundation can be established for a ministry emphasis on men in general, in which we find a subsequent benefit for African American men who are a part of this demographic. It is my belief that the principles articulated in this chapter constitute a specific approach to engaging men in relationship authoring with other men, regardless of their culture.

Since Genesis, we see that man was created for community. What makes masculine community important are the social challenges that are unique to men as a result of sin. The costs associated with living contrary to God's will caused man to have to toil and work hard to make a living. This toiling, in itself, creates a need among men to find others who can relate to the uniqueness of manhood in this context and thereby support one another through community and authentic relationships.

Authentic relationships among men do not happen without intentional authoring, utilizing principles found in Scripture. Men who engage other men and create a bond of brotherhood that emphasizes mutual respect, love, responsibility, and accountability will find a depth of richness that cannot otherwise be emulated.

God will, at times, call a man to engage in a providential relationship with another man because one has something of value for the other and vice-versa. This relationship may have a mentor-to-mentee social order. The mentor is responsible for sharing in the emotional, relational, and spiritual development of the mentee. The mentee is accountable to the mentor to for engagement in relationship authoring that has a rite of

passage for the mentee. When the mentee has faithfully passed through the rite of passage, he has now entered into manhood that requires him to likewise reach out to another man.

A broken man can be a better man when a man strong in faith decides to call him into discipleship. The disciple is not an inferior man, he is one who respects the man who called him and he realizes that there are some deficiencies in him that need to be built up. When a disciple reaches a point of spiritual and emotional maturity, the Holy Spirit's power will be evidenced in his life as he witnesses to what transformation God has wrought in him. Sharing himself in authentic relationship with others will inevitably lead to other men being attracted to him and wanting to be discipled by him as well. The number of men eventually grows as a by-product of the relationship authoring process and as the Spirit of God is continuously engaged.

The pastor is called to the specialized ministry of equipping men throughout this entire process. His calling is a biblical mandate placed upon him for the good of growing the fellowship of believers under his care. As he falls under the headship of Christ, he is furthermore challenged to disciple other men just as Christ did. This is part and parcel of his call to ministry. African American men need a spiritual man to lead them and model for them what it means to be a man in authentic relationship with other men. Jesus modeled this for His disciples and the pastor should likewise follow suit.

My hope is that the body of Christ will be blessed exponentially with men of God who are discipled, committed, and comfortable with being in Christ. Men in transformational relationship with other men, I believe, should be healthy emotionally, mentally, relationally, and spiritually. When they are healthy, they are most equipped to

reach out to other men who can likewise benefit from a relationship with them. The fellowship of believers grows when men are a vital part of the community to bring balance and giftedness to the mission given to the church by God.

## CHAPTER 3

### CURRENT LITERATURE ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN'S RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, RELATIONSHIP AUTHORING AND MALE IDENTITY

#### **Introduction**

The literature regarding the religious affiliation of African American men is a robust topic for researchers. For the purpose of this review, I have narrowed the scope to include the following areas: factors influencing non-attendance to church, young men and the church, homoeroticism, which is borrowed from the field of psychology, social stress and social symptoms, cool pose as a coping mechanism, a vision for Black men versus a bond of brother as definitions for manhood.

#### **Factors Influencing Non-Attendance at Church**

Trying to identify a definitive reason for why African American men choose not to attend church or commit to a religious orientation is as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack. To further demonstrate this point, at least four different reasons were shared in an article that reviewed various research efforts dealing with the topic at hand. Two of the reasons I resonated with were that some men outright reject faith and/or have a lack of interest in group worship.

Socialization research does not fail to enter the discussion as well through the work of Thompson and Remmes, who argue for gender role orientation as a plausible conclusion. In one area of their research, men and women were scored, and those who

scored high on indices of femininity tended to be more religiously committed than men and women who scored higher on indices of masculine gender role orientation (Thompson & Remmes, 2002). In other words, it was concluded that of the men who were more committed religiously, one way or another, were orientated toward a feminine categorization. This does not bode well with men who consider any orientation away from masculinity to be an issue when defining maleness or manhood.

Additionally, the more acceptable norms, as measured by Thompson and Remmes, for men who are considered “traditional” call for masculine men who unfortunately “are more likely to express religious doubts” (Mattis et al., 2004). These men consider themselves to be very masculine, yet they tend to exhibit a weak spirituality or religious orientation. This concerns me, because one could be led to believe that some men associate a “faith life” with being less than a man and more like a woman.

In a survey of 217 African American men regarding their social experience as it relates to church, suggest that 54% (n=118) attend some type of religious service and 46% (n=99) did not attend any organized religious service (Mattis et al., 2004). Particularly interesting to me were the reasons some of those who did not attend an organized service gave: (a) logistical barriers, i.e., lack of transportation, health, or scheduling conflicts; (b) ideological issues, i.e., ideological differences with the church, church leaders or church members, personal doubts, and confusion regarding one's own beliefs (Mattis et al., 2004).

### **Young Men and the Church**

As we turn to another area of concern for African American men, it has been estimated that, of young men, “60 percent have had no contact whatsoever with



Christianity” (Christian Century, 1994). Robert M. Franklin, director of Black church studies at Emory University's Chandler School of Theology, suggests several reasons for this exodus among the current generation of young men. Franklin (1994) believes that many of the young men are children of parents who have an affinity to Islam and one of its icons Malcom X. Others have grown weary of the “turn-the-other-cheek Christian pacifism that was a hallmark of the Civil Rights era.” Some find the symbols of Christianity unappealing, particularly because of the European images of Jesus that were used to inculcate a Eurocentric anti-African spirituality during slavery. Others find Christianity to be an intrusive religion in terms of their personal preferences to be beholden to consumerism or the “violent ethos of the street” (Franklin).

The church is called to make disciples of all nations, people, kindred, and tongues. African American young men are part and parcel of the nations, people, kindred, and tongues. The church that is willing to stay in the urban context, trying to meet the felt-needs of these young men, can find a great work ahead of them. How the church avails itself of meeting the needs through relationship building is a task not to be taken lightly.

### **Homoeroticism**

This provides another lens through which we view the challenge of African American men and their church attendance. Finley’s perspective is quite intriguing, for lack of a better word. With a Freudian emphasis, he suggests that heterosexual African American men may be absent from the Black church “due to a conflict between a masculine Black-body construct and a same-sex symbolic relationship with an all-powerful male Divinity” (Finley, 2007). He goes further and state, “God the Father” and “God the Son” “may be homoerotic constructs which many African American

heterosexual men are unable to negotiate sufficiently in order to find deep-felt meaning in Black churches and worship.”

Finley seems to suggest that there is a sexual identity issue that arises between men, women, and God that can adversely affect the acceptance of a relationship with God for African American men. This issue has much to do with men identifying God as male and the desire for a male God to be in an intimate relationship with another male who is human. Two males in relationship violate the accepted norm for many in the African American culture and, as such, pose a violation of natural manhood that is generally accepted. When God desires to engage men in a level of intimacy that is much like that of a male-female relationship, men are repulsed and find this psychologically unacceptable.

Homoeroticism, as defined by Finley, is not homosexual and must be distinguished from it. For Finley, homoerotic is referred to as “symbolic same-sex relationships in which the desire for a union is with the other of the same gender and in which a sexual acting out is not a requirement” (Finley, 2007). This concept of relating, in essence, sets aside the divinity of God and levels the field as though He is relating on a physical plane to another human. In this way, a relationship between God and man must be redefined, symbolically speaking, so that there is no violation of acceptable sexual norms.

In short, the way that a man enters into relationship with God and becomes part of the community of the church will require careful “re-envisioning and reframing of masculinity.” This re-envisioning will undo the current metaphors that exist between a male God who desires intimacy with a male human. The current metaphor of two males

is anatomically presented by the African American's sexual identity with the phallus. Under the current metaphor, women are anatomically adapted to be receivers of intimacy with a male God, whereas as men are not unless they have a dysfunctional orientation toward homosexuality.

Finley, as I stated, presents an extremely challenging perspective that warrants consideration of available literature on the topic of African American men in relationships with God, albeit, I am not sure to what degree one should go.

### **Social Stress and Social Symptoms**

The United States has a long history of harsh injustices against African Americans, especially males. This is due, in part, to past and present experiences of racism and discrimination experienced by countless numbers of Black men.

Literature argues, "Being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated – rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arena that whites have historically dominated" (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 1).

In spite of the aforementioned, African American men have defined manhood through the assimilation of terms familiar to White men: breadwinner, provider, procreator, and protector. Unfortunately, Black men have not been afforded consistent access to the same means to fulfill their dreams of masculinity and success, like their White counterparts.

The journey to achieve genuine masculine nature has been further complicated by social stressors and multiple social symptoms. It is argued in some literature that African American men "have become frustrated, angry, embittered, alienated and impatient.

Some have learned to mistrust the words and actions of the dominant culture” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 1).

It has been said that in every decade since the 1950s, American cities have more non-White, poor, and youth, while the suburbs continue to experience population growth of the affluent and middle-aged (mostly Whites) (Majors & Billson, 1992). This mass exodus from the city to the suburbs leaves behind an increasing population in which poverty and uncertainty flourishes. According to Wilson, “One of the legacies of historic racial and class subjugation in America is a unique and growing concentration of minority residents in the most impoverished areas of large Northeast and Midwest central cities” (1990).

The excessive concentration of poverty is oftentimes accompanied by high rates of joblessness, despair, and alienation. Together, these elements converge to create a climate of “predictable eruptions of violence and a flood of so-called social problems” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 11). It is also noted that,

The statistics show a clear disadvantage to being born black and male in America: Black males have higher rates than white males on mental disorders, unemployment, poverty, injuries, accidents, infant mortality, morbidity, AIDS, homicide and suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, imprisonment, and criminality; they have poorer incomes, life expectancy, access to health care, and education. (1992, p. 12)

Majors and Billson choose to term these social problems as “social symptoms of a history of oppression” (p. 12). How can Black men be expected to develop meaningful and enriched relationships with such disarray and disharmony within their life and community? This environment of social being is vastly different from the dominant culture and thus calls for an approach to relationship authoring that takes into account the obstacles that Black males must circumvent.

## Mental Disorders

If one wants to identify the effects of high levels of stress within a particular culture or community, then mental disorders could be a very good indicator. Black males suffer from mental disorders, as well as receive more psychotropic medication and psychiatric hospitalization than Black females or the White population (Majors & Billson, 1992).

National data on inpatient admissions to state and county mental hospitals show an age-adjusted rate of 509 per 100,000 for black males and 213 per 100,000 for white males. . . Admission rates for blacks under age forty-four years old are three times those of whites in the same age group. (p. 12)

The mental capacity to adapt to social stressors may have an impact on Black men relating to one another and those of other cultures. This is not to say that Black men, in general, are incapable of authentic connections with one another or others, but the path to developing relationships might be more complicated as a result of mental disorders.

## Education

When the American education system is viewed through the context of African American men, there are some findings that should be alarming if not a “State of Emergency.” In special education classes, Black males make up 80% of the students. Pre-school students who were expelled account for 5,000 Black boys. On college campuses, there are three Black females for every one Black male. Forty-percent of Black males are said to be illiterate in America (Kunjufu, 2009).

What if a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, study is reflective of public schools systems all across the country? What would be the response of the community? It was found, through this study of approximately 5,700 African American males in high school, that

only 2% have a grade point average (GPA) greater than 3.0. As a matter of fact, it was revealed that 80% of all African American males in Milwaukee public schools had a GPA below 2.0 (Weatherspoon, 1998).

An educational system that struggles to meet the demands of teaching basic communication skills, language arts, and other disciplines to African American males is unacceptable, to say the least. It must also be determined what other issues exist within the family structures of Black males that may also have an impact on the challenging statistics we have seen in education. The family structure is just as accountable to educating Black males as the school system.

Kunjufu (2011) argues that many school systems across the country, public and private, are in danger of perpetuating an increasing academic achievement gap between Black males and White males. Kunjufu suggests that the learning styles of Blacks and Whites, in general, are diverse, and yet the pedagogy does not take this into account. To be accurate in assessing the Black male problem in education,

Boys of all races are struggling in school. As recently as 2002 there has been a two-to-one ratio of White boys to White girls in special education. During this period, there has been a four-to-one ratio of African American boys to African American girls in special education. (Rowland & Sandler, 2002)

In a Department of Education survey, it was revealed that, in 1989, 17.5% of Black males (ages 18 to 19) had dropped out of high school without graduating, in comparison to 14.4% of White males. “Naturally, dropping out has an enormous impact on functional illiteracy and, ultimately, marketable job skills, employment, and the ability to seek out legitimate means of proving manhood” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 14). Another unfortunate consequence of this is that Black males are once again the

benefactors of a symptomatic legacy of centuries of educational discrimination, which will not be removed overnight.

The disparity in education of Black males must be considered when the tools essential to building relationships with other males are experienced in a learning environment. I believe the experience of education can either advance or impede the self-imagery of males, in general, and Black males, in particular. The impact of that experience has the ability to create psychological barriers or facilitate mutual connectedness in relationship authoring.

### Homicide

African American males are reaching manhood in terms of age, but are violently leaving it just as quickly. According to 1990 statistics, there were over 400 murders committed in Washington, DC, by young Black males. That is commensurate with one black person dying per day and that trend continued into 1991 (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 20).

In 1995, there were more than 1,900 black males murdered. The tragedy of this is that 90% of them were murdered by males who look like them and were under the age of 24. The issue of genocide within the African American community is not isolated to this community; it must be seen as a national issue. What impact on a definable transition to manhood is seen when there appears to be a gross disregard for life among young Black males? How does a community stabilize and thrive in the midst of male violence against other males?

Literature argues that the environment of a sizeable urban core increases the likelihood of Black males being the victims of murder. It is furthermore touted that

murder is the major cause of a higher death rate among Black males between that ages of 25 and 44 years old (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 20). It is alarming to know that the life expectancy of Black males is 69 years; one of every 12 Black males in Washington, DC, is a victim of homicide; the death penalty is sought 70% of the time when a Black male victimizes a White person by prosecutors, and 19% of the time when White males victimize a Black person (Kunjufu, 2009).

Research on the number of deaths of African Americans at the hands of white police officers reveals that, on average, two occur each week of the year (approximately 96 per year). Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) statistics report that at least 400 police involved shootings ending in death occurs each year by reporting police agencies. More than 50% of the shootings reported by police agencies have African American males under the age 20 as the victims (Johnson, Hoyer, & Heath, 2014).

The Black man presently recognized by mainstream society is not the Black man who invented the cotton gin; he is not the Black man who pioneered the development of blood transfusions; he is not the Black man who performed miracles with the peanut; he is not the Black man who fought tirelessly for civil rights and women's rights in 1800's; and he is not the Black man who in the late 1960's led Black people on a journey to the "promised land". Instead, the Black man recognized by mainstream society today is fearsome, threatening, unemployed, irresponsible, potentially dangerous, and generally socially pathological. Despite their growing numbers, the Black males who do not share these characteristics are thought to be anomalies. (Franklin, 1994, p. 11)

Black manhood is endangered when we consider the homicide statistics as another social symptom. It is egregious to think that there is a community of men who have life and death issues to deal with on top of trying to define manhood and live as respectable citizens.



## Media Representation

I would be remiss in discussing the challenges of male-to-male relationship authoring if I did not include in this overview some of the most challenging social science to be released recently. In a comprehensive literature review, the question was posed as to the impact, if any, that media poses on the lives of Black men and boys. In a well-written and documented review, *The Opportunity Agenda* shares “a troubling link between media portrayals and lowered life chances for black males” (“Media Representations” 2011, p. 13).

The literature reviewed from social science focuses on “what is known” by social scientists, utilizing experimental or other empirical evidence. The body of research documents how Black males are being portrayed in the media and the impact it has on society as a whole. Five areas are discussed, some in more detail than others, with the bottom line being that there is a problem with Black male imaging in America, due to negligent media representation. It is argued, “From the perspective of most scholars who focus on the topic (*media portrayals and Black male outcomes*), there is a clear causal story that links media representations of black men and boys to real-world outcomes. The story can be summarized as follows:

- For various reasons, media of all types collectively offer a distorted representation of the lives and reality of Black males.
- In turn, media consumption negatively affects the public’s understandings and attitudes related to black males (sometimes including the understandings and attitudes of Black males themselves).

- Finally, these distorted understandings and attitudes towards black males lead to negative real-world consequences for them” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 22).

There is an insistence that this area of study be investigated to gain an understanding of the stubborn challenges faced by Black boys and men trying to advance in American society. Distorted portrayals of Black (male) lives and experiences, why media patterns are distorted, causal link between media and public attitudes, documentation of the public’s bias—both conscious and unconscious—against Black males, and practical consequences for the lives of Black males are reviewed by literature, helping to flesh out the three salient points listed above.

#### Distorted Portrayal

In a wide range of literature studied, it is argued that the overall presentation of Black males in media is oftentimes grossly exaggerated in some dimensions and poorly omitted in others. Findings tell us “black males...tend to be underrepresented as experts called in to offer commentary and analysis in the news...Black males are underrepresented in the roles of computer users and technical experts in television commercials” (“Media Representations and Impact” 2011, p. 23). While, on the other hand, images of “African Americans are disproportionately represented in news stories about poverty, and these stories tend to paint a picture that is particularly likely to reinforce stereotypes and make it hard to identify with black males” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 24).

One must question where the stories of positive Black male imagery are in the media. Principally speaking, media has one purpose—to tell the story, “whether it is

through journalism, fictional narrative and entertainment, reality TV, and even advertising, video games and music videos” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 25). Varied dimensions of Black males’ stories are often untold by media. There is a context that is neglected when one-sided stories continually narrate a narrow scope of an otherwise complex life for Black males. It is easy to tell about the murder of a 17-year-old recently graduated Black male on his way to college, who was gunned down in a drive-by shooting. What the media seldom shares, if ever, is “how the lives of Black men and boys are affected by larger contexts, such as historical antecedents of black economic disadvantage, persistence of anti-Black male bias, and relative disconnection from the social networks that help create wealth and opportunity” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 26).

#### Causal Link Between Media and Public Attitudes

Research is mounting with rigorous evidence at times and through common sense inference— “that representation in the media affects viewers’ perceptions and specifically, that distorted portrayals lead to distorted and/or negative perceptions” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 27).

Walk through any mall or other public space where young Black males are present and you will find instances of behavior, deportment, and appearance that begs the question, “Why are you presenting yourself in that way?” Social science reveals at least four patterns that can be linked to a person’s perception of Black males via media presentations.

- “Patterns in portrayals of Black men and boys can be expected to promote antagonism towards them.

- Patterns in portrayals of Black males can be expected to promote exaggerated views of, expectations of, and tolerance for race-based socioeconomic disparities.
- Patterns in portrayals of Black males can be expected to promote exaggerated views related to criminality and violence.
- Patterns in portrayals of Black males can be expected to work against identification with them” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 27).

#### Documentation of Bias

It is of profound interest that researchers are stating the impact media has in aiding people to form biases, either consciously or unconsciously. The data of psychological experiments clearly articulate, “that many if not most non-Blacks have negative unconscious associations with Black males, even if they have no consciously biased attitudes. And many African Americans share these negative associations toward their own group” (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 30).

Sometimes the responses to Black males by others range from automatic responses to open hostility, and it does not have to begin with any negative encounter with a male. There are occurrences where there is an unconscious discomfort by the presence of a Black male.

#### Practical Consequences

In literature reviewed, either implicitly or explicitly discussed, is the understanding that attitudes and biases against Black males can lead to real, practical consequences. These attitudes and biases can affect how Black males behave, respond, think, and perceive themselves and others. What Black males processes, consciously or

unconsciously, is a relevant part of social interactions engaged in. It is stated that attitudes (shaped in some degree by media) can and do:

- directly affect the likelihood of being hired or promoted;
- directly affect the likelihood of school admission;
- directly affect school grades;
- directly affect treatment within the justice system;
- directly affect chances of getting loans;
- end up affecting health and life expectancy;
- end up affecting self-realization and individual development;
- end up affecting the state of social policy (e.g., punitive laws and police practices that impact communities) (“Media Representations and Impact,” 2011, p. 31).

Media has played an important and significant role in the formation of Black manhood, as well as public perception of Black manhood. Through various methods, media portrayals of Black males also have an impact on the populations’ outcomes in America. The distorted representation of lives and reality of Black males have not helped in self-imaging or development. The public’s consumption of media negatively affects the public’s understanding and attitudes toward Black males, consciously and unconsciously. All of this, in the final analysis, leads to real-world consequences for a community of men who are already under great duress and stress from other societal challenges.

## **Cool Pose**

Majors and Billson (1992) argue for a coping mechanism employed to keep Black men, to a degree, able to survive the encounters they must live with daily in an oppressive and racist environment. They posit “cool pose” as that distinctive mechanism. Cool pose is a

presentation of the self many Black males use to establish their male identity. Cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control. (1992, p. 4)

Cool pose helps Black men survive in what may be termed a hostile environment to their well-being.

The future of the Black family is inextricably tied to the current and future status of the Black male. The problems that Black people face, some for centuries, are not the family instabilities, but the socioeconomic conditions that put families asunder. (Staples & Johnson, 1993, p. 236)

DuBois (1903) has contended that many African American males living in segregated communities have learned to move between two cultures, theirs and the dominant group’s. They have also had to employ adoptive mechanisms to counter racial discrimination often faced. Furthermore, he argues, “The ability to dominate with a competitive spirit, which is often seen as crucial for Black males’ survival in dominant White society, contradicts White society’s expectations of passivity and noncompetitive behaviors from Black males” (Moody, 2004, p. 16). Hence, cool pose as a coping mechanism, becomes a necessary survival tactic.

## **A Vision for Black Men**

One question under research in this work is “How do African American men define manhood in a way that facilitates authentic relationship authoring?” Research

appears to be developing in regards to African American men, to put things positively. Akbar (2013) argues that African American manhood develops in stages that appear to be uniquely cultural. It is very much a process like other cultures, yet the process itself takes into account the “Africentric context” of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the narrative of the uniquely strange African slave experience in America. This experience, for the African in America, was a crisis that continues to have residual effects on African Americans.

The crisis of the African male in America began with the landing of the first slave ship in the vicinity of four hundred years ago. This crisis has varying levels of intensity throughout our recent history in North America interacting with the conquerors from Europe. . .The millions of African people who died in the middle passage and the subsequent millions who died from abuse and neglect on the plantation certainly constitute a crisis. When we recount the mutilations, murders, dismemberment, violent beatings, and inhumane abuse we see a crisis. When we recall the terror of intimidation and psychological dismemberment, we see a crisis. When we are reminded of the destruction to family units, culture, intellect, spiritual concepts, human degradation, and the centuries of terrorism against Africans in American, there is no other way to understand these conditions except as persistent life-threatening and murderous conditions. (Akbar, 2013, p. 7)

The transformation process, according to Akbar, has three phases in the development of Black males to Black men. Each phase of the development process comes with its own challenges and experiences. The key to moving from one phase to another is not based upon age so much as it is on knowledge. “Knowledge is the key to getting where we need to go. The human being is actually transformed by what he knows, not passively by just potential” (Akbar, 2013, p. 2). Moving from (a) maleness, (b) boyness, to (c) manness is a matter of the transformation process of African consciousness.

## Maleness

Maleness is a predetermined point of being for masculine construct simply because of biological determination. “A male is a biological entity whose essence is described by no more or less than his biology. One needs not to look beyond the observable anatomical characteristics, primarily the genitals, to determine that he is a male” (Akbar, 2013, p. 3).

Maleness as a mentality for Black masculine construct means that a male operates according to his biology, with little to no regard for mental or emotional maturity. This level of being has a mentality that is dictated by appetite and physical determinants. The male is ultimately guided at this stage by his instincts, urges, desires, or feelings. To say that a boy is impulsive would be very appropriate. For a man to continually operate from impulse when he is an adult would be categorically inappropriate. To bring in the narrative of the slave experience would be to see a man operating consistently and constantly by his sexual passions. The desire for a man to sleep around or be led by anything out of his control that is in his domain of control positions him at the lowest level of development as a man.

## Boyness

This is the next phase of growth beyond maleness. At this stage of development, discipline is the leading determinant. “Discipline transforms passion into a fuel reserve for self-determined action” (Akbar, 2013, p. 6). When a person is able to subdue his passions and tell them to “wait and be still,” he has arrived at the next level of “human power and effectiveness.” Stillness is a pre-requisite for boyness to develop.



It is expected at the level of boyness that growth will need to continue. Boys like to play games and play with toys. The psychological development of boys at this stage can be used to manipulate situations and people. The boyish mentality occurs with men who pursue material things that they truly cannot afford to have. The boyish mentality demonstrates itself in relationships with women where games are played and commitment is not authentic or monogamous. Boyness has great potential to evolve into the next phase of manness.

### Manness

The evolution of male to boy is discipline that frees boys from being slaves to their male passions. The discipline that a boy demonstrates aids him in achieving self-mastery. “Learning to exercise control over one’s self is transformation energy. The force that transforms the person from being a boy to becoming a man is knowledge” (Akbar, 2013, p. 12). Learning about self comes from critically engaging problems and resolving them through the development of solutions. Education is of great importance and value in this phase of transformation. “The process of educating our boys requires that we require them to tackle real-life problems and watch them find solutions. They should have early work responsibilities, management responsibilities, and social responsibilities” (Akbar, 2013, p. 13).

The greatest demonstration of the growth from boy to man is when a man can truly take care of another person. When a man can put aside his own needs to meet the needs of his spouse and children without regret, he has reached the next level. Though the obstacles are many, he finds a way to be responsible, dependable, and honorable. He is a man who can be trusted and counted on. When a man begins to understand that he

can share himself and not only be concerned about himself; when he begins to understand that his concern about other people can be bigger than the concern he has about his own needs; when he can broaden his scope to include more than himself, then he is growing into manhood (Akbar, 2013).

Akbar offers an approach to manhood that includes unique cultural experiences and psychology. As he argues for a more appropriate definition of manhood for African American men, you shall see it is very different than the definition of manhood for the dominant culture or religious-based male concepts.

### **Bond of Brothers**

Literature on manhood, in general, seems to exclude, and justifiably so, a social issues construct as an intimate part of the narrative and transformational process. Yoder, who writes extensively on religious Christian men's issues, describes manhood as having three essential components. (a) Manhood is about being authentic. For God, who created masculinity, calls men to be honest and alive in the presence of others. (b) Manhood is about initiating a confessional life acknowledging, "When I'm weak, then I am strong." The caveat here is that the confessional is not supposed to be public relations a man puts out to make others think he has expunged all weaknesses and character flaws he otherwise enjoys. (c) Manhood is a process of becoming whom God says a man is to be, and as he becomes true, he is also set free (Yoder, 2010).

Yoder is pretty clear when he states, "There is no miracle formula by which a boy becomes a man . . . but what a guy does with the pain in his life is a major key to finding the doorway to manhood" (2010, p. 23).

Relationship authoring among African American men has cultural considerations that are necessary for engaging. When we look at relationship authoring among other cultures and, more specifically, Whites, there are some stark differences. Among Christian men, it is argued that “true conversation” leads a man to discover his identity and renewal in his heart makes for real-friendship, because transparency and deeper sharing beyond game talk engender authenticity.

Game talk is the shallowness of sharing between guys that provides a kind of recreation or surface friendship for guys who enjoy the thrills of the game and admire a great athletic performance (Yoder, 2010). Game talk, though acceptable at times, between men often occurs in such volume that men engage this level of conversation to keep from growing relationally and becoming more vulnerable with other men. There is a real fear that the shame they may feel deep within will show weakness and inferiority to another man. Unfortunately, the secrets of men’s hearts are slowly eroding who they are and keeping them from experiencing richer connections with other men. There is also a level of shame that continues to be fed from this fear, which has destructive implications for male self-imagery. Yoder suggests, “Shame-based secrets mar not only our self-image but also our identity as men” (2010, p. 34). Therefore, many men are living behind facades and walls meant to keep them from experiencing genuine connectedness and peer acceptance. To compound the issue, the life-giving act of friendship and conversation among men has nearly vanished (2010).

“Friendship—spiritual friendship—is the life-giving core of all healthy relationships among men” (Yoder, 2010, p. 45). Therefore, a main ingredient of fostering authentic man-to-man relationships is being emotionally connected enough with a man to

be present with him in his troubles. Too often, men want to fix other men, especially if there is a spiritual context for the relationship. Spiritual men feel obligated to be like God with a man who is in need. Unfortunately, there is a grave misunderstanding among men that being like God translates into working as God in another man's life. God is more than capable of solving men's problems and there is a good chance men can help other men along the way, however, being there to comfort, love, listen, and lead a man to Jesus together in brokenness makes for authentic friendship (2010). For Yoder, conversation is key and depth is a necessity for men to connect with one another. This translates into the rich essence of manhood.

### **Summary of Literary Findings**

Researching African American men within the context of religious affiliation may be too broad a scope for this work, however, there is much to be learned when the context is narrowed to relationship authoring and defining manhood. There are many factors that influence why African American men do not attend church. Socialization research helps us to understand that men are not interested in a spiritual experience that has the propensity to challenge their natural masculine perception. African American men are challenged by a feminization of spirituality that compels them to be less than authentic men.

African American young men can find church or Christianity, more specifically, "too soft" for their urban mentality. The European images of Jesus and many other anti-African media has the ability to suggest to them the need to find a religious context that is more culturally accepting or embracing. When language is used in Christian circles that impose intimacy constructs unfamiliar to African American men, often they are repulsed

and find the entire system to be psychologically unacceptable. Homoeroticism helps bring understanding to the conversation on how to articulate familiar Christian idioms, ideas, and practices in a way that appeals to men, in general, and African American men, in particular.

There are various social stressors and symptoms that create severe challenges for African American men. These stressors are, unfortunately, unique to them because of a historic phenomenon tied to oppression and discrimination. African American males have so much to endure socially that it could appear an insurmountable task trying to also engender authentic relationships with one another and other cultures. When a man from another culture can understand the plight of African American men, it helps to bridge a gap in relationship authoring. When African American men understand their own stressors, and can grow past them, they too can begin a journey of authentic living with one another, in spite of the social barriers meant for their destruction and psychological dismemberment.

African American men, in some ways, like other cultures, define manhood. Yet, there is a cultural consideration to take into account that makes their manhood authentically different and relevant. Surely it has variables of manhood that are similar to other cultures, but the diversity of experience in American society has required psychological coping mechanisms other cultures do not necessarily need. Whether it is phases in development or conversation that goes deeper than game talk, men must find a way to connect authentically so that life can be enriched and relationships more relevant. More research is needed and this particular study adds to a growing body of literature needed for African American men.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AND NARRATIVE OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

In 2007, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life conducted a survey. This survey's purpose was to look at the religious portrait of America for themes in religious affiliation, demographics, beliefs and practices, as well as social and political views. My interests were peaked when I discovered some challenging facts related to the African American community in America and its religious affiliation.

According to the Pew Research Center (2009),

While the U.S. is generally considered a highly religious nation, African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population as a whole, including level of affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer and religions' importance in life. Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, African-Americans are among the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, with fully 87% of African-Americans describing themselves as belonging to one religious group or another.

On one hand, it is encouraging to know that the African-American community seems to have a strong grasp on faith and has embraced it as a vital part of life. However, when I attend my local church and travel around the country to other Seventh-day Adventist churches where the predominant culture is African-American, another concern shows up. When I look across the congregation of these local fellowships, I can see a huge disparity between the number of men and women in attendance. Without taking an

actual count, and visually looking across those in attendance on any given Sabbath worship in my own church, I typically see many more women in attendance than men. I see more girls in Sabbath school classes and youth church than boys. I see more mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters, than fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers. For me, this presents several questions as the pastor of the church.

### **Justification of Methodology**

What is it about my local church that attracts women to the body of fellowship in greater numbers than men? Is the church truly a functional and missional body if you have disproportionate representation from one sex (female) more than the other (male)? When Jesus gave the “Great Commission” in Matthew 28, did He have in mind a church that would feed the spiritual needs of one group and perhaps neglect the needs of another group? Finally, if the body of believers is to represent God in the earth and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, is that gospel or its presentation problematic to the sparse numbers of men who are not there to hear it, ponder it, and decide for it or against it?

These questions are foundational to the tension I believe the church is experiencing when it comes to ministering to all people. I also believe that, by answering these questions, the church must develop a productive methodological approach in reaching men for Christ in a way that increases their commitment to God, their attendance in church, their willingness to share their faith in the marketplace of life, and, ultimately, complete the fellowship of believers by their consistent presence and contributions. It is my intention to share a process that I hope will make a difference in the effectiveness of ministry to men and their role in the life of the church. If men are committed to Christ Jesus and His church, I posit that they will be key to reaching other

men not committed, and thus a church's membership will increase in the number of men in ministry through evangelism that is specific as well as innovative. I believe that effective ministry to men starts with a man wanting to connect with another man.

Another way to say it is, "It takes a man to reach a man." I see this modeled by Jesus in His recruitment of the disciples (Matt 4:18-22). We will discuss this later in the chapter.

The process for men reaching men in the church and outside of the church has a very important yet organic approach to it. Men, in general, are not easily swayed by religion as it is and African-American men, more specifically, pose an interesting feat. According to Perry (2006),

Numerous black men feel that the church is irrelevant to their real needs and that the church has almost become a mausoleum for dead worship services, a museum that archives and preserves the past, or a place to go only for rituals such as baptisms, weddings, holy days, and funeral services. (p. 31)

Therefore, the approach to introducing faith to men must be one that engages their interest and breaks through preconceived notions and prejudices. Research on ministering to men suggests a common thread needed to engage and connect men to Christ and His church, "When it comes to ministry to men, it's all about relationship, relationship, relationship" (Sonderman, 2010, p. 25).

It is not only about relationship, and that is an important basic element to any ministry, whether it is men, women, youth, or seniors. Ministry that is based on relationship building must also be authentic. This is where things get difficult and challenging. Men, in particular, have needs like everybody else. Men also have issues like everybody else. The difficulty comes in getting men to be open, transparent, and vulnerable enough to share so that they can be ministered to. In church, "Many of the problems among Christian men today are direct consequences of an inability to practice



biblical openness—being honest about our struggles, questions, and temptations—and to connect with one another” suggests Arterburn, Luck, and Wendorff (2003, p. 3).

It is my belief, based upon the experience of other experts in ministering to men, that five qualities are necessary to reach men if this project is going to have an inkling of success. Sondermen suggests that any ministry targeted to men will call men (a) to invest their lives in others. We can clearly see this as Jesus called men from various walks of life to be His disciples (Matt 4:18-22). (b) Fervent prayer is essentially the vehicle which calls for divine aid in challenging men to relate to one another beyond superficial discussion that usually surround sports, news, or contemporary issues in politics. Men have real issues that often necessitate a higher intervention beyond human ability. “Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse . . . Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path” (White, 1892, p. 94). (c) To a consistent life of faith and practice. This project wants men to understand the value of not only attending church, but also becoming actively involved and engaged in sharing their faith with other men. (d) To genuine love as modeled by Jesus in His sacrifice for humanity on the cross. God demonstrates His genuine love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). (e) To use the Word (the Bible) as a means to growing in faith, fatherhood, as husbands and men (Sonderman, 2010, pp. 26-33). It is assumed that men in the local congregation invited for this study have some level of acceptance of faith in their lives. The spectrum of men being invited to participate in this project covers a wide gamut; some men have a nominal faith (attenders) and others are actively engaged in the life of church, as well as in ministry (committed). The need for each man to live

life to its fullest will require an understanding of God as the main medium for faith development and doctrinal teaching. This comes to us through the written word of the Holy Bible. This study will encourage men to have an active Bible study life and attend some kind of Bible study with other believers to maximize growth opportunities.

If men in the church are able to have authentic relationships with each other that are built on mutual trust, respect, and transparency, then I believe the opportunities for men to reach other men will yield fruitful harvests and a healthier fellowship where men do attend, commit, and participate in ministry. The process that creates opportunities for authentic relationship building is key and forms the strategy of this project that we will discuss. The outcome hopefully will yield men in the church in authentic relationships with other men, who are then equipped with tools to effectively reach other men through authentic relationships in the church and in the marketplace of life, thereby growing a fellowship through an organic relational evangelistic approach.

### **Outline of Steps**

The most difficult part of reaching men is the deciphering of steps necessary in the church to minister to men. Every man is different, and every church has its culture. Men are as diverse in culture, age, religion, and vocation as is possible. Men are at different stages in life, some retired, some not. Some men work and some are unemployed. Some own businesses and others do not. Some men are well educated and some are not. There are men who are married, single, divorced, or widowed. As you can see, men are so different that any approach to reaching them must be broad enough to interest them and yet specific enough to eliminate any distractions that could take the current study in a wide array of directions unrelated to our purpose.

Many of the books and articles read on ministry to men, psychology for men, counseling men, mentoring men, evangelizing men, have something different to say about reaching men. One approach to reaching men is utilizing small groups, while another approach advocates one-on-one ministry. There are some who say group therapy around an emotional or physical trauma can be helpful in reaching men; then there is the social or event-driven approach. A review of the various approaches has led me to believe that a customized process would be worth the investment of time and energy for several reasons. First, the audience I am particularly interested in is African-American men in an urban setting. Second, the men who will be initially approached are already attending my local church and are at different stages in their commitment to church life. Finally, I believe Jesus modeled a process of discipleship in the New Testament that I think would be valuable in providing insight into how to effectively reach men for kingdom building. Although Jesus' audience was not African-American men, but Jewish men by culture, my hope is that the basic principles are transferable, regardless of culture.

One writer, speaking on the method Jesus used to connect to people, asserted,

The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (White, 1905, p. 143)

In other words, Jesus approached people in the marketplace of life, no matter where they were. He connected with them by meeting them in their diverse places in life. If they were afflicted, He drew near to them. If they were mentally challenged, He entered their world to identify with them. The needs that they exhibited, Jesus made it a point to fulfill and, as such, they were confident that He had their best interest at heart. In a state of authentic human connection or relationship building, He could then ask the person to

“follow me” and they would gladly yield their lives to Him (Matt 4:19). This is relationship building at its best.

Authentic relationship building is the process of connecting with people on an intimate and transparent basis. It is coming alongside a person in their walk of life and saying let us walk together on this journey and learn from each other, support each other and build up each other. When men experience this sort of process, I believe authentic relationships are forged and everybody matures emotionally and spiritually. White (1905), evaluating a process of authentic relationship building, offers the following insight,

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If . . . more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit. (p. 143)

In order to enable and equip men to reach men, it is believed that the process most effective will include small group ministry that utilizes various resources and a curriculum to create environments of sharing, accountability, and nurture. Men will be solicited through an intentional process in the church. They will be asked to make a commitment of engagement. Support and materials utilized with the men will be Bible study, prayer, social activities, community service gatherings, sermons, and interviews at the beginning and end to evaluate the validity of this process in relationship authoring.

### **Resources and Curriculum**

One of the most helpful resources I have found to date to aid in developing an effective ministry to African-American men comes from Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu. Kunjufu (2006) gives insight on some considerations to take into account when developing a

strong Black male ministry. He suggests four needs to accommodate when creating a curriculum for helping African American men engage in relationship building.

1. Men need close male friends with whom they can share their most intimate secrets, fears, desires, concerns, and goals. This trusted friend must be chosen with care.
2. Men want to be respected in marriage and the greater society.
3. Men want to hear good news.
4. Men want to be great and want to make a difference. Men want their lives to count. (pp. 64-67)

Sonderman (2010) echoes Kunjufu's thoughts with an added variety when he suggests "Ministry is first and foremost about relationship, one man walking with another man, encouraging and empowering him in his spiritual journey" (p. 12). In other words, any curriculum that is needed for relationship authoring should have a component in it where men get to come alongside one another as they journey through life. One-on-one and small groups allow the greatest opportunity for men to bond with one another and grow in many ways that otherwise would not be as easily realized. I believe Jesus models this for us when you read through the New Testament accounts of His interactions with His disciples. The Gospels show us how Jesus interacted with men, taught men, counseled men, challenged men, mobilized men, lead men, and called them into a deeper commitment with God.

The curriculum considerations for this project will be based around four strategic steps of spiritual development, which I believe will aid men in becoming strong, authentic men who have and nurture healthy relationships with other men. Sonderman (2010) suggests that men grow spiritually through certain relationships, certain experiences, certain activities, and the Holy Spirit (p. 74).

Every man needs relationships that inspire, encourage, ask difficult questions, and provide counsel, support, and comfort. Men need certain relationships that encourage them to be held accountable in some of the tough areas of life—marriage, family, career, and faith, to share a few. When you consider the apostle Paul, as a model of men he had in his life, you will find Barnabas and Timothy to be extraordinarily important. Barnabas was a strong encouragement to the ministry of Paul. It was Barnabas who vouched for Paul with the disciples so that he could begin to share in the work of ministry (See Acts 9:26-30). Paul wrote a letter at length to Timothy, characterizing the importance of doing ministry to the glory of God. Timothy was a young minister with great promise and Paul acted as a spiritual father or mentor to him. This conceptualizes three critical men every man should have in his life; every man needs in his life: Paul--a mentor who inspires and provides advice, Timothy--a man one is building his life into, and Barnabas--a person who encourages everyone and accepts everyone for who he is.

Certain experiences in life generally teach us very valuable lessons. The event itself of bringing men together in a small group setting can be challenging and rewarding in creating certain experiences. It is challenging to the extent that men are uncomfortable sharing intimate secrets or issues they face, regardless of how difficult life may be. Men want to work things out on their own in isolation. This approach to life seldom reaps positive tangible benefits. The reward of sharing oneself with another man fulfills a principle we glean from Scripture, namely that two are better, stronger, and more helpful toward survival than one man alone.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one

keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Eccl 4:9–12)

Certain activities are important to men growing not only together, but also individually. Prayer, Bible study, fasting, worship, journaling, and community service can provide a man needed venues for listening to God and growing in his faith as he walks through life encountering diverse events. Men ought to hear God’s voice, sense God’s presence, experience God’s power, and develop in character to be more like Him. These activities are methods intentionally meant to help men in their development.

The Holy Spirit is the appointed Divine Helper of the Godhead for executing the work of shaping men into the image of God spiritually. Ever since sin entered the world, the image of God in humanity has been badly marred. God wants to restore His image in humanity and the Holy Spirit’s greatest work is on the hearts of humans; this work is one of the ultimate determining factors of mankind’s fitness for heaven. This activity, though extremely difficult to literally put into curriculum development, must be acknowledged as part and parcel to a man’s ability to have healthy relationships with other men and women, as well as children. We must leave room or make space for the Holy Spirit to do His work and the greatest venue that affords this to happen is prayer. Therefore, this curriculum considers prayer to be a vital component of equipping men for authentic relationships with other men.

### **Small Groups and One-on-One Ministry**

When we consider the most effective approach to helping men develop strong, lasting, and authentic relationships with other men, Jesus’ model is second to none. Read the Gospels and you will quickly observe that Jesus called men one by one to Himself to be disciples (See Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20, 13-17; Luke 5:1-11). He engages them in

the marketplace of life and through personal encounters and experiences and He offers them the opportunity to “follow” Him. They sense a deep connection and desire to reorder their personal lives to follow Jesus. Interestingly, Jesus takes whatever their current life’s work is and He shifts their paradigm, while still maintaining the tenure of what was familiar to them. For example, when Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, who were fishermen, He tells them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). Andrew and Peter know fishing. They know their craft and they know water. Yet, when Jesus calls them, He tells them they will remain fishermen except they will not go to lakes and other bodies of water, they will fish among humanity for people open to the kingdom of God and its call on their lives.

One-on-one is not the only approach helpful to men in building relationships with other men; additionally, small groups are a germane undertaking for helping men reach other men. What is it about the small group experience that can be helpful to this curriculum? Considering some of the negative press this avenue of ministry has undergone over the last few years, Sonderman (2010) states that small groups are

a place where the men can be comforted when they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, a place to be encouraged when they take a step of faith or say no to sin, a place where their faith can be fanned into flames, and a place where their gifts can be discovered and used. It is a place where they can do life together, where they can love, forgive, accept, and carry one another’s burdens. (p. 76)

Stabler (1983) is correct in saying that men need these four things if they are going to be ministered to,

an honest place where there is no spiritual, relational, or vocational pretense; a place of acceptance where they can talk about anything and everything; a gospel with teeth, but not one that bites; and to be stretched, yet . . . an environment of grace, liberation and Christ’s authentic power. (p. 74)



If Perry has correctly assessed the five P's of personal connection for men by stating that men need pardon, patience, permission, participation, and play, then small groups answer a relevant need men have in order to grow emotionally, spiritually, and relationally (2006, pp. 31-44). Small groups, I believe, provide the greatest environment for men to invest themselves without judgment and fear in order to grow in grace and wisdom.

The greatest argument for a small group approach again is the ministry and life of Jesus. In the Gospels, we find that Jesus called many people to be followers, yet He had twelve disciples. According to Matthew, "When He had called his twelve disciples to Him, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matt 10:1). These are the men Jesus called to Himself. They were selected for a closer fellowship with Him, even though we read in Scripture that they were not the only ones. They were, however, the ones He spent most of His intimate time with, nurturing, equipping, teaching, and preparing for a ministry after His death, burial, and resurrection. Mark is furthermore insightful about the power of small group as it applies to Jesus' disciples when he states that Jesus "called to Him those who He himself wanted. And they came to Him" (Mark 4:13). Jesus not only called this small group, but He wanted them to be with Him. He desired this small group to effectively have authentic relationship with Him. We can also go another step further and see that Jesus had an inner circle that was smaller and even closer in Peter, James, and John. This inner circle had access to experiences with Jesus that the other disciples did not. They accompanied Him on the Mount Transfiguration (Mark 9:2). They were

asked to go with Him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). They also went with Jesus to Jairus' home, where He raised a little girl from death (Mark 5:37).

We get a glimpse of the intimacy of small groups and the power of one-on-one ministry by studying Jesus' ministry as a model for relationship authoring. This project utilizes the greatest example possible with the hope that, since it worked for Jesus, it must work today for African American men in the Adventist Church and community.

### **Support for Small Groups**

It has already been mentioned that the invitational process for small groups will occur via personal, one-on-one interactions. It is my plan to meet with men after worship service in the receiving line and ask them to meet me in our fellowship hall for a 15-minute informal presentation. Men will be told up front that the commitment to this project is six months. They will be given the parameters of the project: Weekly meetings at a scheduled time, entry and exit interviews to assess skills learned, the tools to establish authentic relationships with other men in the church and outside the local congregation, as well as the monthly community outreach activity, along with periodic socials.

The men will be informed of the desired outcome to establish authentic relationships with other men in the church and, ultimately, have at least one relationship with a man outside the fellowship who will be given the opportunity to attend church and the small group encounter.

The Bible will be the main resource for biblical instruction, along with various study guides being introduced to the group throughout the project's duration. One-on-one meetings will occur between the facilitator and each man actively engaged in the

project. The men will have the responsibility of contacting the facilitator if they agree to be part of the study. The facilitator will not be following up with invited men. This will demonstrate each man's initiative to be involved and serve as an evaluation of openness to participation without personal pastoral influence.

At least two sermons will be preached before any invitations will be extended, highlighting the problem, as I see it, with the number of men in the local church and the number of men currently in authentic relationships with other men. These sermons will highlight the ministry of Jesus with His disciples and the call on men's lives He issued. After the sermons are preached and the informal presentation event occurs, each man in attendance will be given a letter with instructions on how to go forward with the next steps. Those men choosing to go forward will be contacted with a specific date for the first meeting and project orientation.

The orientation will include a list of materials that will be used during the project timeframe. Men will be invited to purchase their own books by a desired date. The facilitator for specific meetings will provide tertiary materials that are needed. A Certificate of Completion will be given to each man. Orientation will include an interview on what each man thinks about the current state of the church and the relationships between men in it. They will be asked to share what they personally know about authentic relationships and how they author them. Additionally, they will be asked to share how many authentic relationships they have with men in the church and without.

This project's success, I believe, hinges on each man clearly understanding the five qualities of effective men's ministries, as shared by Sonderman (2010). Therefore, it

is incumbent that each man signs a written commitment to be part of the project that clearly lists the following expectations:

- Project participants will invest their lives in others
- Commit to fervent prayer
- Live a consistent life
- Experience and give genuine love
- Use the Word of God (pp. 26-33)

These expectations, I believe, encourage an environment and lifestyle of transparency that men need in order to deal with many of the issues we face. White (1898) offers,

Through social relations, Christianity comes in contact with the world. Everyone who has received the divine illumination is to brighten the pathway of those who know not the Light of life. (p. 152)

Men who commit to this project will be doing more than just taking part in a study; they will be acquiring skills that fit them for evangelism that is innovative and more organic. The fact that authentic relationships are the focus means that a man must not think about how they reach another man; instead what is the value of my relationship with another man. What do we have in common with one another? What can I offer that is truly inspiring, encouraging, or positive? What can I receive from another man in the way of inspiration, encouragement, or positivity?

### **Church Growth and Community Engagements**

This project's success, I believe, also relies on the men involved to formulate authentic relationships with other men outside of the church. Too often the church focuses on evangelism from a numbers standpoint and people become objects of success. This project posits that, if focus is placed on relationships, numbers do not matter and the church will experience natural growth through authentic connections of caring people.

Although men will begin inside the church by nurturing relationships with one another, there will be secondary emphasis placed on reaching men outside the church through the same process. Men will be encouraged to begin relationship-authoring techniques with men that may already be in their circle of influence, but may not be very entrenched. Another suggestion could be those relationships that were dissolved or fractured because of past misunderstandings or events. Regardless, there is a “warm market” for men to start with before diving into a “cold market” (people they have little or no connection with on an authentic level).

Outreach events that are community-focused will provide test events for men to engage the tools they learn throughout this project. They will have to commit to community service projects once a month that are part of the expectations mentioned above. Any man uncomfortable with this aspect will be asked to really consider the opportunities this would offer them in personal growth spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

It is believed that natural church growth will occur when authentic relationships are embraced by men and experienced with other men. Additionally, men will experience life as Jesus did when He was on the earth doing ministry. White (1898) tells us,

Jesus saw in every soul one to whom must be given the call to His kingdom. He reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue, by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs. He carried His instruction into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts. He often repaired to the mountains for solitary prayer, but this was a preparation for

His labor among men in active life. From these seasons He came forth to relieve the sick, to instruct the ignorant, and to break the chains from the captives of Satan. (p. 151)

Jesus invested Himself in reaching out to others. He poured much of His three and-a-half years of ministry into serving men who would likewise do the same once He left. It is the purpose of this project to follow Jesus' example, which proved to be extremely effective and efficient.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it has been my purpose to highlight a problem with the Christian church from the perspective of the absence of African American males. I have endeavored to outline a process for relationship authoring that is believed will help eliminate the potential deficit in male participation and commitment in my local congregation.

We understand the invitational process for soliciting men to take part in this study has a six-month commitment. The resources and curriculum of this project will be custom designed to meet the researcher's specific criteria of African American men in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who live in the urban context.

Based upon research, it seems most appropriate and effective to utilize small groups and one-on-one ministry to actively interact with men in the church and equip them with tools for engagement within the church and without.

This study will primarily use the Bible as the main text, with various articles and books referred to during the life of the project. Sermons will be used to initiate interest of men in joining this project and personal invitations will be given to each man rather than making a general appeal during a worship service.

Church growth and community engagement projects will be implemented to challenge men to utilize the tools they have learned in a real effort to practice authentic relationship building. It is believed that church growth will naturally occur when a more organic approach to evangelism is employed. Too often, evangelism has been based on pure numbers; this project seeks to focus on people as relationship opportunities rather than bodies to fill up a local church. With this approach in mind, this project follows along the lines of Jesus' ministry on earth and His method for reaching people from all walks of life.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

#### **Research Methodology**

In order to create a robust healthy church environment of African American (AA) men, male members of Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSDAC) were invited to participate in an intervention project. This proposed project involved a process of establishing a curriculum for training, discipling, and integrating men into a community of authentic relationship building (ARB). Participants were asked to journal their experience, views and reflections of Bible studies, socials, community engagement, and outreach opportunities. The journals would be part of the process of compiling and evaluating a qualitative research strategy that also included interviews of participants.

It was believed that journaling and interviews would give the participants the best opportunity to express themselves and how they processed information from encounters with other men they engaged in ARB sessions.

Authentic relationship building is the process of connecting with people in an intimate and transparent basis. It is coming alongside a person in their walk of life and saying let us walk together on this journey and learn from each other, support each other, and build up each other. When men experience this sort of process, it is believed that authentic relationships are forged and participants mature emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.



ARB is a term the researcher has coined to describe the process of ministering to men, introduced to the researcher by Steve Sonderman in his book *Mobilizing Men*. Sonderman (2010) states, “When it comes to ministry to men, it’s all about relationship, relationship, relationship” (p. 25).

### **Research Participation Sample**

For this study, 15 volunteers were recruited from BSDAC, Kansas City, Kansas. In order to gather the most objective group available, all male members and non-members 18 years of age and older were solicited to participate through one-on-one invitations for two weeks after church service. They were asked to meet on the second week at a designated location to be briefed about the study. The primary criterion was a willingness to come to the informational to evaluate their level of interest.

### **Demographic Data**

Descriptive analysis (mean, median, mode, maximum, minimum, and range) was generated from participant questionnaires. Fifteen African American men were included in this study that participated in orientation. Seven men dropped out of the study for various reasons that will be discussed later. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the small group.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Small Group*

Demographic Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Range	Min	Max
Age	57.6	61	61/66	51	22	73
# of Children	2.3	2	2	7	0	7

**Sample Demographic**

Table 2 illustrates the demographics of the sample. The mean age of the sample was 57.6 and the majority of men reported their relationship status as “married” (66.7). The majority of the sample reported their “highest level of education” as “high school” (46.7). In terms of religious activities, the majority reported they “attend worship services  $\geq$  4” times per month (73.3), while midweek worship attendance by the majority (53.3) reported they “never attend midweek prayer service.” When asked about their personal devotional life the majority (53.3) participates at least “3-6 days a week.”

Table 2

*Demographics of the Small Group (N=15)*

Demographic Variable	% of Sample	n
Age		
22	6.7	1
29	6.7	1
40	6.7	1
51	6.7	1
56	6.7	1
58	6.7	1
61	13.3	2
66	13.3	2
68	6.7	1
70	6.7	1
71	6.7	1
72	6.7	1
73	6.7	1

(Table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Demographic Variable	% of Sample	n
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Widowed	6.7	1
Divorced	20.0	3
Married	66.7	10
Never Married	6.7	1
<b>Number of Children</b>		
0	13.3	2
1	20.0	3
2	33.3	5
3	20.0	3
4>	13.3	2
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	6.7	1
High School	46.7	7
Some College	20.0	3
Associate's Degree	13.3	2
Bachelor's or four-year degree	13.3	2
<b>Religious Expression and Experience</b>		
Attends worship service per month $\geq 4$	73.3	11
Attends worship service per month $\leq 3$	26.7	4
Attends midweek prayer service per month $\geq 4$	6.7	1
Attends midweek prayer service per month $\leq 3$	40.0	6
Never attends Midweek prayer services	53.3	8
Family worship per month $\geq 4$	20.0	3
Family worship at least once a month	26.7	4
Personal devotion daily	20.0	3
Personal devotion 3-6 days a week	53.3	8
Personal devotion $\leq 1$ day a week	26.7	4

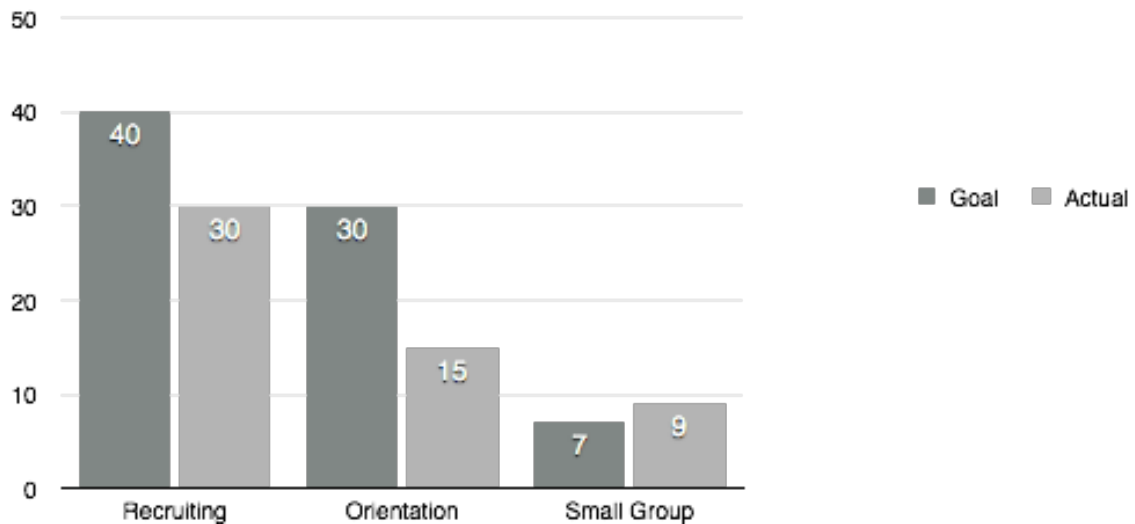
## **Outcomes**

In this section, I will discuss the outcomes of the project. This section will include the interviews of participants. I will share what was discovered and concluded from the recruiting phase and small group intervention phase.

### **Recruiting**

The recruiting phase had a goal of 40 men (*Figure 1*). The informational meeting was attended by 30 individuals, all of whom signed up to be part of the study. Each man gave contact information and shared a consistent level of interest in moving on to the next step. Participation in the study was another matter.

All men who attended the informational meeting were contacted via an electronic calling tree the week of the first orientation meeting. The first meeting yielded seven men and the second meeting 10 men. The orientation meetings gave men the opportunity to make a firm commitment to attend for the duration of the study. Fifteen men in total were seen during the orientation phase that committed to the study and completed a general questionnaire. It should be noted that, within the first two weeks of the study, men began to drop out without communicating their intentions until later approached by the facilitator.

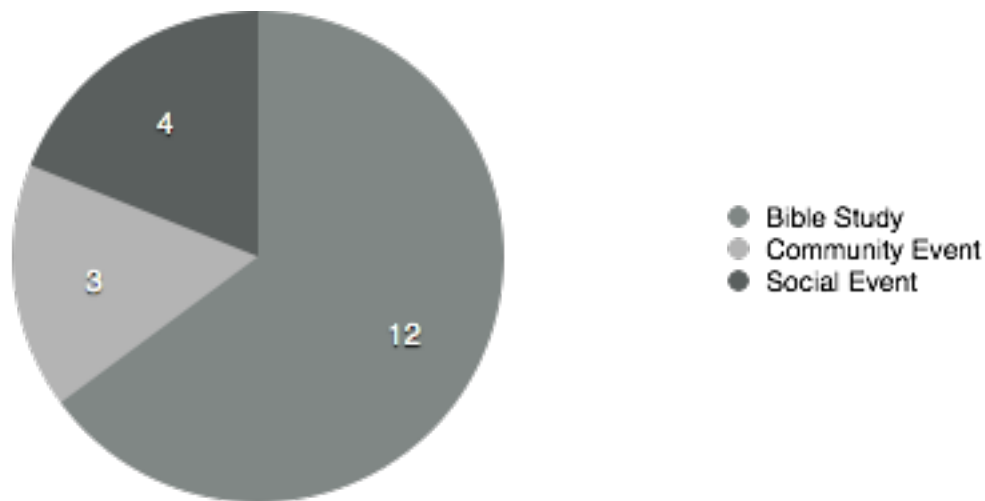


**Figure 1: Recruiting goals versus actuals.**

Each man was given a journal, expectations/meeting schedule, discipleship syllabus, and general demographic questionnaire to complete. The net result was nine men committed to meeting as a small group for the duration of the designated study time. The goal was to have seven men engaged in the small group (*Figure 1*).

A number of men did not participate in the project, although they signed up at the informational meeting. After talking with some of the men, the reasons for their lack of participation were: a) They were unwilling to commit to the length of time the study would be held. b) They did not feel the study would be of any value to them personally. c) There was a certain amount of suspicion about being a part of an academic study that was very unappealing. d) Other members indicated they did not think the small group was diverse enough, with a missing segment of young adult men not participating. The mean age of the small group was 57.6, clearly demonstrating a lack of young adult participation (22-35 years of age).

The small group meetings were slated for 12 hours and divided into six two-hour sessions conducted over two months. There was a three-hour community event and a three-and-one-half hour social event each man was to attend (*Figure 2*). Bible study, prayer, transparency, and active participation characterized these sessions. When the sessions ended, nine men completed the curriculum and were interviewed (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 2: ARB contact hours.**

### **Small Group Bible Study**

The men were immersed in Bible study, covering six different aspects of manhood and relationship authoring. The studies covered spiritual life, self-perception, relationship building, community building, emotional wellness, brotherhood, conflict management, and witnessing. These areas of emphasis were specifically chosen because of the impetus they could have in forging authentic encounters of transparency and vulnerability among the participants. Men are truly hurting in their personal lives for

varied reasons and they seldom have someone to journey with them along the road of recovery or they have trust issues with inviting other men to walk with them. Sonderman (2010) states,

We men tend to devote massive amounts of time to making money, enjoying hobbies, and succeeding at our jobs, yet we often neglect what is most important: people. Seeing men as God does starts with a commitment to looking around and having Holy Spirit sensitivity to the needs of others. Allow me to remind you that every man has a mat, a place of brokenness, a weakness in his life. Every man has a wound that needs healing. Every man has a need for others to carry him at times. (p. 17)

Each session opened with prayer and a time of sharing called “Check-in.” Check-in gave the men the opportunity to share a positive or negative event that happened in their life during the course of the week. Check-in introduced the men to taking risk in a trusted, controlled environment to be vulnerable with one’s peers and receive genuine emotional, relational, mental, and spiritual support. In the beginning, two or three men would share something positive that happened in their lives. The group would affirm that man and I observed a sense of acceptance and regard in each participant’s demeanor that shared.

Week three, I introduced greater vulnerability by checking in with the men regarding a very personal and trying experience I had with the death of my father’s oldest brother. I shared with them the struggle I genuinely had at the funeral and the emotional trauma I was dealing with. This inspired two other men to share very private struggles they too were having. I observed a very decisive shift in this community of men. There seemed to be a breaking down of barriers and walls. One affirmed another man for having taken a risk to share and a sense of acceptance, as friends seemed to emerge after that meeting. I must admit that Kundtz (2004) has properly evaluated men and close friends.



Of course, most of us do have friends. What too many of us don't have are close friends, 'close' meaning one with whom I am able to be myself completely – vulnerabilities as well as strengths, seriousness as well as humor, caring as well as disagreeing, anger as well as joy. (p. 91)

Study of God's Word on a particular emphasis made up the majority of the two-hour sessions together. Scripture was read and questions were asked of the men that required them to personalize the text. In other words, they were challenged to apply the text to their lives and share with the group how it applied or did not apply. This gave the men an opportunity to actively participate and thus begin the process of sharing who they are, how they think, what are their strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for genuine growth.

### **Spiritual Life and Self-Perception**

The men actively engaged and shared a greater appreciation for Bible studies that covered spiritual life, self-perception, and emotional wellness. In talking with them on a one-on-one basis, the majority of them had very healthy perceptions of their spiritual lives and self-image. This does not surprise me as a researcher, when I consider what Kunjufu (2006) says regarding men: "Men want to be respected, in marriage and the greater society . . . men want to be great" (p. 65). Being in church and actively involved in a ministry gives men a great level of respect, especially if they hold an office of leadership.

Kunjufu (2006) states, concerning African American men, "The spirits of our men have been broken, not only by schools but by the larger society" (p. 69). The Bible study curriculum created for this study was chosen with careful attention to narratives and themes that focused on men interacting with men in very specific situations. In this way, men could analyze the character's actions and responses, thereby applying them directly

to their life situations. For example, during the study “Mighty Man of Valor,” the story of Gideon was explored and the challenges he endured as a judge for the nation of Israel were highlighted. Using an interactive approach by asking particular questions to introduce a method of narrative analysis to the men yielded engaging perspectives of an old story applied to contemporary times. Men who may have been told they were underachievers or insignificant found great courage, as well as inspiration, when they realized the humble beginnings of Gideon and read in the text where God called Gideon a “mighty man of valor” (Judg 6:12).

### **Emotional Wellness**

What I did find extremely interesting interviewing the participants was a certain level of confidence in the area of emotional wellness. Men were asked if they spent time understanding their emotional state when challenged with difficult situations in life. There were asked if they helped other men process their emotions when they are in challenging situations. They were asked whether they believed they were emotionally mature for their age. Several of the men felt very competent in this area.

Kundtz (2004) states,

Too many guys of all ages do not have about half the information we need in order to achieve success in life. The part that we actually get is the thinking half. That’s the part that deals with facts, figures, and procedures. For the most part, we men do well when we’re dealing with this kind of factual information – really well.

The part we don’t get is the emotional half. How do all the things that happen to us make us feel? You could say that we lost this half before we ever got it. Something in us – something urgently important – never gets life at all. It remains asleep, as good as dead. There are reasons for this – we’ll name a few later on – but whatever the reasons, the smart, successful guys will get this information. And the sooner you get it, the easier your life. (p. 1)

These men were comfortable in this aspect of life. An observation I think that may have some bearing on this is that 12 of the men in the group were 50 years of age or

older, and all but four of them were married. Two men were divorced and one man was a widower. To say that these men had life experience under their belt would be an understatement. It would be interesting to research if their faith had anything to do with them being competent in this area as well.

### **Community Building**

Community Building, Brotherhood, and Witnessing were three areas where interviews suggested that the men found these competencies to be the most challenging to them. When we studied community building through intentional outreach efforts, men seemed to be verbally in support and physically uncomfortable. There seemed to be a clear understanding that men are to go and fulfill the Great Commission of Christ. Each man sensed a need to get out of his comfort zone to be uncomfortable and experience the community in which he lived or worked. The problem seemed to be a lack of motivation or fear of not being successful. In the face of potential failure, the men found it difficult to participate in an intentional outreach initiative. I concur with the thoughts of Sonderman (2010) on men in our churches. “We have to leave our comfort zones, our ‘holy huddles,’ and go to where the men are living out their lives” (p. 54). MacLeod (1981) could not have said it better when he declared:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace, as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew, in Latin, and Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that’s where He died. And that is what He died about. And that is where churchmen ought to be and what churchmen should be about.

Three men from the study attended a scheduled community outreach event. This event allowed the men to integrate concepts and tools of relationship-authoring they were

exposed to in a real-world situation. Interestingly, all three men were asked that evening after the event how things went. Each man shared his feelings on the effectiveness of meeting other men from the community. One attendee commented on how excited he was to re-connect with a childhood friend he had not seen in years. Another attendee enjoyed the camaraderie of the evening, but shared how uncomfortable it was to try and reach out to complete strangers. The third attendee felt empowered and equipped to engage in more outreach events given the opportunity in the future.

A few of the men who did not attend the event gave various reasons for not participating. The majority, however, were not comfortable going to the event with an agenda in mind to reach out to other men. Their sentiment was that they felt attending the event under those circumstances made them feel their motives were artificial and their behavior contrived. Others said the timing of the event was not good for them and could not be prioritized. This suggests one reason why the group seems to be weak in the area of community building.

### **Brotherhood**

Brotherhood was another area where the men showed vulnerability. This area of focus is based upon the Bible's reading of Cain and Abel. The concept of brotherhood revolves around being personally responsible for the welfare of another man whom you would consider important enough to protect and connect with. When it comes to brotherhood among men, the main point to be stressed is simply this, "Men become men in the company of other men" (Arterburn, Luck, & Wendorff, 2003, p. 15).

It is the researcher's belief that the small group concept has the greatest opportunity of helping men understand and embrace biblical brotherhood. The primary

reason this is so comes from the thoughts of Arterburn, Luck, and Wendorff (2003) on men pursuing friendships with other men. They write,

Deep down, men really do want close friendships with other guys. We don't enjoy living on the barren islands of our own secret struggles. However, many men choose to process life, relationships, and pressures individually because they fear the vulnerability required in small-group gatherings. Suppose someone sees behind my carefully constructed image? Suppose I encounter rejection after revealing one of my worst sins? Men willingly take risks in business and the stock market, sports and recreation, but we do not easily risk our inner lives. (p. 6)

Interviewing the men from this study confirmed for me a core weakness among African American men, in general, and men of faith, in particular. When it comes to creating and sustaining authentic brotherhood, there are challenges. In this group, at least two men stressed their lack of trust and willingness to take risks with this group of men because of a substantial fear that they would be vulnerable to being perceived as weak or inadequate. There was also an undercurrent between two men, one who was in church leadership and another man who served under this man's ministry. The subordinate would take liberties to highlight what he saw as inadequacies in his leader at certain points in discussions. He presented situations in which he would be at odds with his leader and yet make things appear to be harmful to him and his wellbeing. I saw this as a competition between the two, which had adverse effects on each person's ability to share in biblical brotherhood. Kunjufu (2011) observes, regarding the interactions of men, that "Males tend to be more hasty, impulsive and willing to take risks . . . Interactions among males, including their discourse are marked by competition" (p. 64).

On one hand, this competition among men might be viewed from another culture's perspective as detrimental to relationship-authoring and communication effectiveness. On the other hand, when viewed from the cultural context of an African

American lens, this style of engagement creates opportunities for cooperative learning to take place on relational dynamics. According to Kunjufu (2011), “Black boys are very competitive. Cooperative learning can be used in competitive context to maximize academic achievement” (p. 51). Granted, we are dealing with adult men, and I do not think it's a stretch to apply the principle to men who may have grown up physically, but not necessarily emotionally.

### **Witnessing**

Witnessing was another area where the men appeared to need further development. Four men in the group felt that this was a strength they possessed when it was contextualized to relationship authoring with other African American men. The others acknowledged a fair amount of discomfort in witnessing and a need to have tools that would be helpful in strengthening their interactions.

When the men were asked if they prayed regularly for the opportunity to share their faith, 10 of them answered in the affirmative. However, when asked if they actively engage in building relationships with other men who have no faith life in order to lead them to Christ, seven of them did not. One is left to ponder, then, what the men consider witnessing to be. Is it sharing doctrinal beliefs tied to your denominational affiliation? Is it a specific belief held true that differentiates the man from other men who may already be believers in some other religious system? The answers to these questions present an opportunity for further research.

It appears that men from the group believe strongly in sharing what God has done for them personally as an effective form of witnessing. This sharing of their personal

testimony does not necessitate a call to faith, but it creates a privilege to share with another man what makes them better men today than they were in the past.

The men who found witnessing to be difficult were sincerely underestimating the work of God in their private lives and felt that other men would not necessarily find their testimony to be very helpful in life transformation. There was also a pressing concern of rejection and what that would mean to their ego.

### **Relationship Building**

This small group of men has shown remarkable emotional growth and connectedness. The main emphasis of this project is the process of developing authentic male-to-male relationships between African American men. Yoder (2010) makes a striking statement about men in general when he states,

The things men don't talk about are some of the most important things in life. They are clues both to our sorrows and to traits we esteem but cannot achieve, to things we love and things we fear. But rarely do conversations among men drill down to this place where the good water flows. (p. 19)

The "good water" of relationships among this peer group became stronger as the weeks went by. I observed these men interacting more with one another outside the group after church and before our meetings. At least one of the men admitted that he and his wife had decided to be more engaged in church life by coming to prayer meeting. This was something that they had not done in a long time. Another man who has never attended a church business meeting showed up for the first time since I have pastored the church because he wanted to support his pastor and become more involved. Several of the men have expressed a deep desire for the group to continue outside the parameters of this study. There is a sense of community and connectedness that some feel may diminish if the group stops meeting.

The challenge I have observed, after asking several interviewees specific questions, is that the group has experienced connectedness, but I have yet to observe their connectedness translate into developing new relationships with other men outside the group. The men feel they have a better handle on what elements make for healthy male-to-male relationships. Can these men forge more relationships without having a small group is one question. How long will it take them to begin striking out on new ventures of relationship authoring is another question. These men are sharing more and more of their “good water” with one another in healthy ways. They are deepening their resolves to care for one another and get to know one another better over the long term.

### **Conflict Management**

Conflict inevitably will happen in life and on more than one occasion. Speaking on how men typically react to uncomfortable events in life, Yoder (2010) states,

more disturbing and damaging than the pandemic physical disappearance of men from their families is their retreat into muteness, their descent deep into the underworld of insecurities, lost or dark romance, discouragement, failure, depression, and evaporated dreams. Over time, as every man knows, the silence within develops a mind and commanding voice of its own and seeks to become his master. (p. 19)

Men in the study group overwhelmingly admitted that conflict is something they try to avoid at all cost. This is to be expected, in my view, because no one wants to be at odds with people normally. However, two men in the group felt confident in their ability to manage and reconcile conflict effectively. The rest of the men in the group felt either marginally able to handle conflict or unable to handle conflict appropriately.

Therefore, this Bible study served to meet a very real need expressed among the men. This study equipped the men to utilize biblical principles that would aid them in



resolving conflict quickly and seeking reconciliation accordingly. This study gave men tools that could reap immediate benefits if prayerfully and wisely applied.

### **Social Engagement**

The last activity for the men was a brunch together at a local restaurant. It was believed that a time of socializing away from the normal meeting place would help the group relax more and become more informally engaged with one another. The men were asked when and where they would like to meet to fellowship together. A date, time, and location were agreed upon in advanced and shared.

Five men met for breakfast at a buffet. These five men were the most faithful of the group and it was a time of sharing, learning, and reflecting. There was discussion about world events, sports, family, and, of course, church. These men care about their church. Three of the men are actively involved. One is marginally involved and one only attends worship service and our small group.

I learned what these men really think about their church. One commented, “We lack love. True love to work together is missing because there is this feeling of big “I’s” and little “You’s.” One felt that people have made it hard to do things at the church because of the mishaps of past volunteers whom the church was hurt by. One man expressed the need to serve his church because he did not want it to be in need and not representative of God’s best. He felt missional in his endeavor to care for his church. Another man loved to use his gifts for the church to the glory of God. To him, it was an offering and fulfillment of stewardship to the Lord who had blessed him.

There was discussion about the struggles of life as men, and one man confessed he is still struggling with sin in one area of his life. He felt comfortable enough to share a

fault he has and that the circle of men he was with was a safe place for him to be vulnerable. This is definitely a step in the right direction of what this study is attempting to evaluate.

### **Evaluation of the Project**

The interviews conducted with participants highlight a noticeable transition in attitude and perspective regarding the significance of an intentional strategy for relationship authoring among African American men. Participant responses to specific questions regarding the effectiveness of the intervention indicate the study was beneficial to them a several ways.

#### **Increased Sensitivity to Personal Reflection in Relationship Authoring**

The participants revealed that, because of their participation in this study, they have gained an appreciation for reflecting more on themselves as men and what they bring to relationships with other men. Participants admitted having previous “trepidations” in connecting with men, “feeling the need to be in relationships with men at my church” and feeling “better talking with them on a more personal level.” At least one participant stated that the intervention gave him “an opportunity to see myself as other men see me.” One participant demonstrated great difficulty in seeing how his personality may make it difficult for other men to connect with him, albeit he was open to exploring further methods that could be of benefit in the future.

### **Increased Priority to Build Relationships**

All of the participants reported that they are more inclined to pursue authentic relationships with other men in the church. Authentic relationship-authoring means getting beyond the cursory conversations of sports, weather, news, to in-depth areas of personal goals, dreams, aspirations, challenges, weaknesses, and issues. One participant said that the intervention gave him a set of tools to aid him in effectively connecting to men within and without the church.

### **Greater Awareness of Male Leadership**

The majority of the men in the group felt that their ability to connect with other men came with a certain perspective of spiritual leadership within the church. The feeling that women, youth, and other men were watching their interactions with one another and other men was an indication of the importance of authentic community building and relationship-authoring. As leaders, they felt that it was important to be viewed in a positive light or “friendly.” “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Prov 18:24, NKJV).

### **Clear Opposition to Journaling**

The men were asked at the beginning to keep a journal during the project. When the project ended and the men were asked to share them, only two out of the group had spent any time recording their thoughts on paper. One individual commented that he could share with me his thoughts without having to rely on a journal. This indicates a strong opposition to journaling among the group. The group of men who were the focus of the study was African American. One man in the group was of Caribbean descent. It appears that the men have adverse feelings about reflecting their thoughts and thought-

processes in writing. The journal was a significant resource for the project and the participants did little to contribute through this form of communication. This needs further research.

### **Church Growth and Evangelism**

The study had as one of its goals to increase church attendance of African American men. The study has not accomplished the objective in the timeframe allotted for it. It is believed that, with a longer implementation window and intentional accountability measures adopted into the study, that this objective could be met. One example of an accountability measure that could be used is challenging men to bring to a meeting at least one man who they would like to develop a meaningful relationship with and who currently has little to no church affiliation. They would also be asked to develop a plan to intentionally bring this man to Christ using the relationship they share as the primary means.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Summary**

The intervention project developed for Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSDAC) was launched June 2014 and completed September 2014. The report of this intervention included the following:

The ministry context was a predominately African American (AA) church in Wyandotte County, Kansas, where the male population is grossly underrepresented in terms of total membership attending.

A theological foundation was framed for relationship-authoring and community development using the biblical narrative as the primary source. This reflection revealed that, from the beginning of time, God created man to be in community. Adam was first in community with his wife Eve. Later, they had a son Cain, and Adam experienced the first male-to-male community given to humanity. The next step in relationship authoring came when Adam and Eve had a second son, Abel. Abel enters the community and poses an opportunity for Cain and Adam to adjust or readjust how the male community will take shape. When Cain kills his brother Abel, we are faced with a new dynamic in male-to-male relationship-authoring that never existed before. There is a genuine judgment of the value of another man who is in relationship with his brother and how that relationship will survive the tension that is added to it. We later find in the Bible that Jesus had established relationships with His twelve disciples and within that community, there was

an inner circle of Peter, James, and John, again highlighting the intricacies of male-to-male relationship-authoring.

A review of literature was presented that dealt with: a) Factors influencing non-attendance to church among African American men. b) Young men and the church's attractiveness to a post-modern generation. c) Homoeroticism and its effect on church attendance of African American men.

There has been a discussion of the methodology developed and narrative of the project implementation. This included development of custom curriculum, engagement of men in small groups, and intentional community-building activities.

Finally, a report of the outcomes of this project was shared that revealed the impact of the project on the men who participated. Again, the outcomes included: a) Increased Sensitivity to Personal Reflection in Relationship Authoring. b) Increased Priority to Build Relationships. c) Greater Awareness of Male Leadership. d) Clear Opposition to Journaling. e) Church Growth and Evangelism.

### **Recommendations**

Equipping men of the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church to engage in authentic relationship-authoring has been a learning experience. I believe that the process will benefit Bethel and other churches with similar demographic makeup and challenges among men who are interested in truly connecting to one another and willing to build up the community of men.

This study was not without some challenges along the way. There are some areas where the study could be improved and here I will share some of those recommendations:

## Implementation at Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church

1. Secure pastoral leadership and engagement. In order for this project to be successful in this context, it was necessary for pastoral leadership and engagement to be acquired at the beginning. When men discovered that the pastor was driving this, attendance and participation interest was increased.

2. Create small group environment with the rules of engagement clearly spelled out. Integrity, accountability, and confidentiality are paramount to men entering a community and being asked to be transparent.

3. Have trusted assistance and leadership that men can feel comfortable with and accept as a group leader. This became important when the leader was not able to be at a meeting on time.

4. Men must be willing to commit in writing to the expectations and outcomes of the group.

### **Small Group Meetings**

1. Begin and end on time, as agreed upon when the group was organized.

2. Engender vulnerability, transparency, and authenticity by leadership taking risk and inviting others to reflect and share candidly.

3. Have a consistent schedule of when, where, and how long group meetings will occur.

4. Have a dependable method of communicating with group outside of being together. This was accomplished through a calling tree that was valuable in reminding men of the meeting date and time.

5. Utilize Bible-based curriculum that encourages men to apply principles taught in meaningful ways.

6. Provide extrinsically valuable motivation to attendees for most effective committed attendance.

### **Fellowship and Interaction**

1. Make sure fellowship lunch is available after church to keep participants from having to leave church and return later for the meeting.

2. Host social programs that bring men together in a non-church related activity, such as brunch at a buffet, Super Bowl party, or other recreational event.

3. Host community outreach events specifically geared at men, such as helping a non-member of the church, feeding the homeless, volunteering at the local food bank, and/or attending a community symposium on relevant community issues.

### **Project Improvement**

In this section, I will share some further recommendations for specific project areas: Recruiting, journaling, and small groups.

#### **Recruiting**

1. A method to attract the younger generation needs to be established. The 20-35 years of age demographic was grossly underrepresented in this study. Although two young men started out, neither finished the project.

2. Implementation needs to happen very quickly after interest is gathered. The project had a lapse in time from the interest meeting until the first meeting, which allowed some participants to change their minds regarding involvement.



3. Encourage men who have committed to the study to invite other men to journey with them. This method could help friends become closer and men who are acquaintances can become better acquainted with each other.

### **Journaling**

1. The value of journaling should be emphasized and taught to the men before asking them to participate. This would help them embrace an appreciation for this method of reflection.

2. Participants should be clearly informed regarding what should be captured in the journal and how the information will be used. This will alleviate some suspicion the men shared about journaling.

### **Small Groups**

1. Language used to describe the encounter men experienced should be specific and intentional. The ministry context of African American men is not too keen on small groups per se. Asking men to journey together on a discipleship venture or to fellowship with one another and the Word helped men decide to be part of the study.

2. Men need to be led to be transparent and take risk. A leader who is comfortable with this and participants who are open to learning this will be best for this type of initiative.

3. Men thrive on affirmation and it goes a long way with building community when they are taught to affirm one another for taking risk or being engaged. Some men will need to be drawn in by asking direct questions to them and waiting for a response. It appears that most men want to talk, but they may need a jump-start to get involved.

## **Post-Small Group and Implementation**

1. Put in place a method to carry on the small group dynamic. The closeness and bonds forged need time to deepen and further grow in to rich friendships and authentic relationships. The project did not deal with this.
2. There should be an instrument to gauge the effectiveness of the small group approach that would help with a quantitative analysis of this methodology.
3. Participants should be encouraged to start small groups where they become leaders and facilitators of relationship-authoring.
4. Individuals without a church affiliation should be intentionally sought out to forge relationships with and thereby invited to participate in these small groups.

## **Conclusion**

Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church has a diminutive number of men actively engaged in the church and thriving in authentic male-to-male relationships. This is characteristic of many Protestant churches across denominational communities. Therefore, an intervention was derived to address this problem, with the understanding that when men are in authentic relationships within the church, they are best equipped to bring other men into the church, thus growing a church's membership.

Participants for this study were invited to take part in small group encounters that focused on personal, spiritual, and relational development. The group invited to participate consisted of 30 men, but the actual number of men who completed the curriculum was 10. The men were asked to keep journals and were interviewed one-on-one to discuss their experience.

The project was successful in partially completing the task I originally desired. However, my expectation regarding church growth was not realized in the outcomes. I believe the main factor affecting this was the length of time needed to develop trusting and equitable friendships with men outside the church so that participants could then invite them to a church encounter.

The interviews and reflections of participants indicate the men experienced the following: a) Increased sensitivity to personal reflection in relationship-authoring. b) Increased priority to build relationships. c) Greater awareness of male leadership. d) Clear opposition to journaling.

This project has demonstrated that there is no one method for achieving a greater representation of African American men in churches. It can, perhaps, be used in conjunction with a number of other intentional initiatives to reach the objectives set forth by a congregation to grow male participation in church, as well as enrich the relational lives of men already in attendance.

Bethel Seventh-day Adventist Church has the potential to be a groundbreaking congregation in Kansas City, Kansas, that reaches out to African American men. Considering the population of men in the community and the dearth of churches with a specific initiative to invest in this community makes it a church with no rival.

Upon completing the project and analyzing the results, I have determined that more time is needed to ascertain whether this process will result in church growth. It is clear, however, that men meeting in small groups will develop sincere relationships with one another and be equipped with the proper tools for relationship authoring. I further conclude that there will need to be an instrument developed that measures the increase in

membership attributed to this process. Finally, I believe that, with some adjustments and a formal implementation strategy, this project could help BSDAC reach African American men through small groups and intentional immersion the men will experience.

## APPENDIX A

### **Workshop Training Outline** Men Of Valor Engaged (M.O.V.E.)

Session 1: Man of Grace (Topic: Spiritual Life) What is a man of grace?

- a. Grace through the motif of Salvation
  - i. Ephesians 2:8, 9; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:11-24; John 3:16; Matthew 20:28; John 10:17-18
- b. Grace through the motif of Creation
  - i. Genesis 1:28-ff; John 10:10, 17-18; Zech 13:6
- c. Grace is not mercy and mercy doesn't trump grace
  - i. Definition of Mercy - compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. (If I am speeding and get caught, the officer pulls me over, tells me I was speeding, but doesn't give me a ticket--that's mercy. When food pantry give food to the poor and it is a hand down that's acting like giving in mercy - no, no the poor don't need our mercy)
  - ii. Definition of Grace - the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners (vertical dimension) AND the bestowal of blessings (horizontal dimension). (When I can see and appreciate the beauty of God in the straight or the gay, the right or the wrong, or hold an oppressed, broken person in the highest esteem possible despite their challenge, this is grace, this comes only through God's doing and not my own.)
- d. A Man of Grace will live with Unconditional Positive Regard - John 21:1-19

Session 2: Mighty Man of Valor (Topic: Self-Perception)

- a. Gideon (Judges 6:11-ff)
- b. Jephthah (Judges 11:1-ff)
- c. Saul (1 Sam 15:1-23, **17**) poor self-perception

Session 3: Can a Man Love a Man? (Topic: Man-to-Man Relationships)

- a. David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-ff, 20:17-ff)

Session 4: A Man and His Inner Circle (Topic: Three Men Every Man Should Have)

- a. Peter, James, John and Jesus (Matt 17:1-ff, Mark 5:37-ff, 13:3-ff, 14:33-ff)
- b. At Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42)

Session 5: A Man Like Barnabas (A Barnabas Friend)

- a. Paul and Barnabas (Acts 4:36-ff, 9:26-ff)

Session 6: A Man and Accountability (Topic: Community Building)

- a. David and Nathan (2 Sam 11-12:15)
- b. Peter and Paul (Gal 2:11-ff)

Session 7: A Man and His Legacy (Topic: Poured in to be Poured Out)

- a. Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:1-ff; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 1 Tim 1:1, 18)
- b. Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2)

Session 8: Every Man's Battle (Topic: Emotional Wellness/Spirituality and Sexuality) - *Pathmaker Meeting*

- a. David, Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Kings 11)
- b. Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13)
- c. The Adulteress (Proverbs 7)

Session 9: A Man and His Demons (Topic: The Enemy in Me)

- a. The Man Among the Tombs
- b. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife (Gen 39)

Session 10: Bond of Brothers (Topic: Brotherhood)

- a. Peter, James, and John (Gal 2:9-ff; Mark 1:19-ff; 3:17-ff; 9:2-ff)
- b. Paul and Silus (Acts 15:22-18:5)

Session 11: A Man and Conflict (Topic: Conflict/Conflict Management/Settling the Score)

- a. Paul, Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:2-37-ff)

- b. Jesus and Peter (Matt 17:24-ff)
- c. David and Saul (1 Sam 18:7-ff; 29:5-ff)
- d. Retaliation (Matt 5:38-42; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 2:23)
- e. Love Your Enemy (Matthew 5:43-48, 16)

Session 12: A Man and His Witness (Topic: Witnessing/Reaching Other Men/Evangelism)

- a. Jesus calls Peter, James and John (Matt 4:18-22; Luke 5:2-11; Mark 1:16-20; John 1:40-42)
- b. Paul's Call (Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-ff; 2 Cor 11:22 -31)
- c. Stephen's Call (Acts 6:5-9; 7:2-59; 8:2)
- d. Elisha's Call (1 Kings 19:16-19; 2 Kings 2:1-14)
- e. David's Call (1 Sam 16:1-13; 2 Sam 2:4-5:3)
- f. Moses' Call (Ex 3:1-ff)

## APPENDIX B

### **Men Of Valor Engaged Participant Expectations**

Restoring Men, Recovering Families, Reviving Churches & Reshaping Communities

- Fill out general questionnaire
- Attend at least six fellowship gatherings
- Attend community building and service events
- Keep a journal of your journey through the workshops
- Complete homework before attending each session
- Participate in an exit interview and/or focus group
- Meeting dates, time, and location
- Just be you and be open to God's work in you

#### **Workshop Sessions**

- Man of Grace (Topic: Spiritual Life)
- Mighty Man of Valor (Topic: Self-Perception)
- Can a Man Love a Man? (Topic: Man to Man Relationships)
- A Man and His Inner Circle (Topic: Three Men Every Man Should Have)
- A Man Like Barnabas (A Barnabas Friend)
- A Man and Accountability (Topic: Community Building)
- A Man and His Legacy (Topic: Poured in to be Poured Out)
- Every Man's Battle (Topic: Emotional Wellness/Spirituality and Sexuality)
- A Man and His Demons (Topic: The Enemy in me)
- Bond of Brothers (Topic: Brotherhood)
- A Man and Conflict (Topic: Conflict/Conflict Management/Settling the Score)
- A Man and His Witness (Topic: Witnessing/Reaching Other Men/Evangelism)



APPENDIX C

**Men of Valor Engaged (M.O.V.E.)**

**General Information Questionnaire**

A. Birth Year \_\_\_\_\_

B. Marital Status

1) never married \_\_\_\_

2) widowed \_\_\_\_

3) divorced \_\_\_\_

4) married \_\_\_\_

5). Other \_\_\_\_

C. Number of Children \_\_\_\_\_

1) Birth year, child 1 \_\_\_\_\_

2) Birth year, child 2 \_\_\_\_\_

3) Birth year, child 3 \_\_\_\_\_

4) Birth year, child 4 \_\_\_\_\_

5) Birth year, child 5 \_\_\_\_\_

6) Birth year, child 6 \_\_\_\_\_

D. How many times per month do you attend Sabbath services \_\_\_\_\_?

E. How many times per month do you attend mid-week prayer services \_\_\_\_\_?

F. How many times in the past month have you had family worship with your family \_\_\_\_\_?

G. How many times per week do you have personal devotional exercises (Bible Study & Prayer) \_\_\_\_\_?

H. What is the highest grade in school you completed?

1). Less than High School \_\_\_\_

2.) High School \_\_\_\_

- 3.) Some College \_\_\_\_
- 4.) 2 years of college or technical training \_\_\_\_
- 5.) Bachelor's or 4 Yr. College degree \_\_\_\_

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## VITA

- Name:** Ronald D Williams, Jr  
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**Background:** I was born on March 17, 1969, to the proud parents Ronald and Rose Williams. I have one younger brother whose name is Steve who is one year younger than me. I attended Catholic schools until seventh grade and was eventually baptized into the Presbyterian Church. In December 1994, I recommitted my life to Christ and was baptized at Northside Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was a monumental event, having spent considerable time in various denominations from Baptist to Islam.
- Family:** I was married on July 30, 1995, to Janene Williams who is from St. Louis, MO
- Education:**
- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 2011-2015 | DMin, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary                    |
| 2003-2006 | MDiv, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary                    |
| 1997-1999 | MS in Computer Resources and Information Management, Webster University                |
| 1993-1995 | University of Missouri - St Louis<br>BSBA (Emphasis in Management Information Systems) |
| 1983-1987 | High school diploma from Jennings Sr. High (Jennings, MO)                              |
- Ordained:**
- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2010 | Ordained by and currently hold ministerial credentials from Central States Conference of Seventh-day Adventists |
|------|---|
- Experience:**
- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 2010-Present | Pastor of the Bethel SDA Church (Kansas City, KS) and serving as Director of Men's Ministry of Central States Conference |
| 2009-2010    | District Pastor of Tabernacle of Hope and Emmanuel SDA Churches (IN)   |
| 2007-2009    | District Pastor of Trinity Temple and Niles-Philadelphia SDA Church (MI)   |
| 2006-2007    | District Pastor of Trinity Temple and Jackson SDA Churches (MI)  |
| 2005         | Evangelist Central Kenya Conference (Kenya, Africa)  |
| 2003-2006    | Intern Pastor of the Strafford Memorial SDA Church (Chicago, IL)   |