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### A Parental Management Strategy For Single-Mothers With Adolescent Boys In South Chicago

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ABSTRACT

A PARENTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR  
SINGLE-MOTHERS WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS  
IN SOUTH CHICAGO

by

Philip C. Willis Jr.

Adviser: David Sedlacek

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A PARENTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR SINGLE-MOTHERS  
WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS IN SOUTH CHICAGO

Name of researcher: Philip C. Willis Jr.

Name and degree of adviser: David Sedlacek, PhD

Date completed: May 2017

### Problem

The Mizpah and Brunswick Heights Seventh-day Adventist Churches are located in a predominately low-income community in the South side of Chicago. The church has many single mothers who face the challenges of raising their children without the presence of a father or male figure. This has had a devastating impact on the family and the children. Single-mother families are more likely to suffer from economic insecurity than two-parent families (McLanahan, 2004). Father-loss causes object hunger in males (Herring, 2005) and 75 % of all drug users and 65 % of all suicides (Sowers, 2010) come from fatherless homes.

## Method

Training programs on finances, relationships, self-esteem, and raising boys were conducted for single-mothers. Surveys were administered among the participants to determine their level of satisfaction and self-esteem. Literature was reviewed on the challenges of single mothers who raise at-risk adolescent males and lessons were learned about a variety of skills and techniques that can be used to establish improved self-esteem, life satisfaction, and improved parenting skills.

## Results

This project revealed the challenges that single-mothers have in raising adolescent males alone. It also raised the awareness of the specific needs for both single mothers and their children who are growing up without fathers. This project also revealed the challenges that single mothers have with self-esteem and gives hope that self-esteem can improve with training projects such as this. The focus groups with single mothers detailed their struggles and gave rich insight into their needs and how best to minister to them. This study further identified some of the possible programs that the church and community leaders could implement to support a growing need.

## Conclusions

On the basis of this project's findings, the church should be instrumental in the development of programs that implement training for not only single-mothers, but also for their sons.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A PARENTAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR  
SINGLE-MOTHERS WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS  
IN SOUTH CHICAGO

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Philip C. Willis Jr.

May 2017

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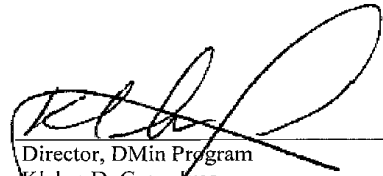
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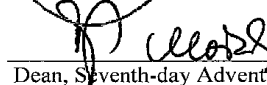
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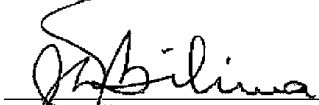
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March 6, 2017

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

I was moved by my employer from pastoral ministry in Michigan to a new pastoral setting in South Chicago following several long deployments to Iraq. In my previous ministry setting, I was used to being around mostly intact families, educationally advanced professionals, and economically stable churches and community members. South Chicago was exactly the opposite of that educational, professional, economic, and social setting to which I was accustomed. I was literally in a state of despair as I witnessed the depressed housing situation, the constant threat of violent crime and the number of young men that I met without fathers present in their homes. I had not expected an environmental setting similar to what I had experienced during my two wartime turns in Iraq.

My passion for this project began while pastoring in this newly appointed ministry context in South Chicago/Gary, Indiana. A young man had an angry outburst during a worship service while I was preaching. I was literally preaching when there was some commotion at the back of the sanctuary and the next moment the young man punched a hole in the wall. I was shocked at this, but at the same time it was a wake-up call for me that the ministry as I had known it was about to change. I could no longer ignore the present realities that I believed actually existed in the context of the current community and church ministry.

After this violent outburst, I found out that a single mother was raising this young man. He exhibited aggressive traits and feminine characteristics; he had no clear direction and very little education. I started my Man College training program as a result of my search to deal with him and other young men in the church and community who had the same problem.

There are two critical foundational professional experiences that paved the way for my work with young men and ultimately led me to work with single mothers in this project. My first professional experience working with young men was through the Pontiac Public School Systems' "Healthy Peer Relationships" program. This program focused on elementary aged children (grades 1-6) and helped them solve problems through mediation. The program also taught basic essential life skills such as positive communication, attitude adjustment, discipline, and living by positive core values. In addition to classes for the students, there were separate parenting classes for parents once a quarter throughout the school year. The combination of youth and parent training was very instrumental in helping me develop my Man College model.

The second foundational experience that further developed me and led me toward working with at-risk adolescent males was my experience as an operator and warrior trainer with the Army. I was trained at Camp Shelby as an observer, controller, trainer, and mentor to young men and women who were to deploy to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Kuwait, North Africa, and Cuba.

There is a third experience that I can add to this developmental curve that gave me insight and compassion for this most important topic. The experience is a personal one. Following the devastating break of trust in my marriage and the long rocky road to

emotional recovery, I learned what it meant to be a single parent. The pain of this feeling of embarrassment, isolation, rebranding, and skepticism took a toll on my self-esteem. I became acutely aware of the shift of society's view of individuals facing such a challenge. Support from family counseling experts or support groups during this transition would have been a priceless building block in an otherwise darkened journey.

I found myself on the opposite end of the spectrum that I have researched here because I was a single father with a daughter. My daughter lived primarily with her mother, but I desired to have her live with me. I came to understand that fathers do not seem to have the same legal opportunities as mothers regarding custody of a young child. I learned that the legal system appears to be biased toward mothers with young children regarding custody matters. One attorney told me, "I can take \$10,000 from you, but you stand less than a 20 percent chance to receive full legal custody."

Today, I am married again with four beautiful children. Unbelievably, my eldest daughter is also a constant and permanent presence with her two sisters and brother. Through time and careful preparation, I eventually did obtain full custody.

Because of my previous experience, not a day goes by that I do not think about the importance of my presence or the impact of my absence on my children. I make a concerted effort to be a strong and yet positive, loving presence in their lives. At times, I struggle with my own vulnerabilities and shortcomings, as well as the tug of the lack of time and energy due to work-related projects and responsibilities. My only desire is that, as a result of my intentional presence, my girls and my son will partake of the good from it and that they will benefit from my experiences and grow to be whole, productive, and successful people to make their own spiritually strong and healthy families.

The professional and personal skill set that I gained in these areas laid the foundation for my Man College program and led me to pursue greater understanding and training in the areas of Family Ministry and Social Work. I went back to school to specialize in Family Ministry, as well as Social Work, in order to combine clinical skills with the previous professional experiences. I personally feel that a multidisciplinary approach is needed in the professional ranks of ministry. Incorporating pastoral and clinical skills may be just what this current complex ministry climate calls for. I loved preaching and sharing, but I felt there was more for me to learn and skills I could use to help single parent families and at-risk adolescent males. I know that I still have growing edges that can be enhanced through practice and experience in the fields of knowledge through which I have begun to journey.

Today I serve as the senior pastor of the Mizpah SDA Church and the Brunswick Heights SDA Church in Gary, Indiana. I am also the Deputy Command Chaplain in the US Army Military Intelligence Readiness Command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. As a result of the educational and military skills I have gained, I have also added experience as the Behavioral Health Support Chaplain to Veterans at the Edward Hines Veterans Administration Hospital.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Mizpah and Brunswick Heights Seventh-day Adventist Churches are located in a predominately low-income community in the South side of Chicago. The churches have many single mothers who face the challenges of raising their children without the presence of a father or male figure. This has had a devastating impact on the family and the children. Single-mother families are more likely to suffer from economic insecurity

than two-parent families (McLanahan, 2004). Father-loss causes object hunger in males (Herring, 2005) and 75 % of all drug users and 65 % of all suicides (Sowers, 2010) come from fatherless homes.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a coping seminar at the Mizpah and Brunswick Heights Seventh-day Adventist Churches to help single mothers address the problems created by the absence of the father with at-risk adolescent boys.

### **Justification for the Project**

President Obama said that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime, nine times more likely to drop out of schools, and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, run away from home, or become teenage parents themselves (Biblarz & Stacy, 2010).

The rationale for this parental management strategy is based on three key concepts: When fathers are absent, the male specific modeling that is needed is lacking. First, male body care and male mannerisms are issues that are typically not addressed adequately by single mothers. The second key concept is that single parenting often involves extreme financial challenges. Single mothers have to survive on one income or very little extra financial support. The third key concept is that single mothers may have self-esteem issues related to past hurts, family relationships, or life failures that impact their ability to be emotionally available to raise children alone.

## **Expectations for the Project**

This project works to advance the parental management skills of single mothers who are raising boys in a fatherless home. Also, the project should transform the attitudes and decisions of single parents who face financial challenges, practical problems, and discipline issues.

In addition, this project should help single mothers deal with self-esteem and issues from the past. Also, this project should provide the families with additional resource guides to deal with these challenges.

## **Delimitations**

The single-mother focus on at-risk adolescent males in South Chicago is representative of many single-parent families in urban areas around the country. There are single mothers in other social and economic groups, but they do not all have the same support systems for their sons. Single mothers in this setting are left to manage everything on their own and struggle with some of the most important areas of parenting such as self-esteem, financial literacy, relationship skills, and knowing how to raise boys (Frisbie & Frisbie, 2007).

Adolescent males in this urban setting are at risk for higher rates of crime, being targeted by police, being more likely to land in jail, dropping out of high school, ending up in poverty situations, getting lower grades, being influenced by gangs, and potentially becoming single parents themselves (Biblarz & Stacy, 2010).

## **Limitations**

Volumes of literature exist about single parenting. It is not difficult to find current literature reviews on the subject of single parenting, absentee fathers, and their impact on



at-risk adolescent males. The main limitation I found in the theological realm was the lack of biblical references that point to and address the topic of single mothers directly or their issues related to raising children alone. From the numerous articles that I reviewed, I found it very difficult to piece together a theological portrait from current authors.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Single mothers:* Women who are either divorced or widowed, or who were never married, had an unplanned pregnancy, and carry all the responsibilities of raising the children alone.

*At-risk adolescent males:* Young men who have grown up without the presence of a father in the home and who exhibit additional risk issues related to anger, depression, aggression, antisocial behavior, and/or feminine characteristics.

*Absentee fathers:* Men who are not the custodial parents, those with whom the children do not live. It also refers to the men who fail to relate to their children or who are not present in the homes or lives of the children.

*Parental management strategy:* This is a training platform to address problems single parents face such as low self-esteem, finance challenges, barriers to successful relationships, and skills required to raise boys without significant male influence.

*Mentorship:* Leadership that has a shaping and developing presence, filling a void that encourages positive growth and edification.

### **Description of the Project Document Process**

The theological reflection explores a Scriptural narrative taken from 1 Kings 17:8-24: (a) Single mothers benefit when they have spiritual support (1 Kgs 17:12-16): God sent a spiritual leader to help provide resources when they were nearly financially

bankrupt; (b) Holistic management balance for single mothers includes confronting the past and recovering self-esteem (1 Kgs 17:18); and (b) Spiritual men can offer meaningful interaction (1 Kgs 17:19-23): the spiritual man's one-on-one engagement with the boy leads to his revival and recovery. The theological reflection will also explore how Jesus dealt with single mothers, how Wisdom Literature speaks to strategies for developing boys into men, and further biblical reflections on the impact of mother-son relationships through the lives of Jacob, Moses, and Jesus.

Current literature review includes books and articles on single parenting in the context of adolescent boys in fatherless homes that give suggestions to guide mothers through financial, self-esteem, practical, and discipline challenges.

I implemented a seminar based on single mothers' management strategies. During the seminar, participants were given the opportunity to share personal stories about management strategies and single-parent satisfaction.

Thirty days after the seminar, I had the participants evaluate their parental management strategies by sharing stories and answering questions about their family dynamic.

The Seminar was conducted March and April 2015, and the project manuscript completed in August 2016.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

#### RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

##### **Introduction**

This theological reflection is designed to address the specific biblical/theological view of family from the perspective of single mothers with adolescent boys as found in the Old Testament, New Testament, and other spiritual literature. This reflection will narrow its target to a few specific instances in the biblical context that speak to single mothers with adolescent boys. It will combine ancient texts with current judgments in the hope of providing innovative conclusions that will be spiritually meaningful.

This theological reflection will also speak to the current impact, religious perspectives, and societal view of the issue of single mothers and fatherlessness in our current culture.

Finally, this theological reflection will conclude with sound guidance for a legitimate approach about how current culture should deal with single mothers with adolescent boys in our churches and abroad.

There are several theological questions and/or problems that persist in consideration of this study on single mothers with adolescent boys. The past and present problem of struggling with youth from single-parent families and the perceived plight of single mothers demand a response from the theological realm. Does the Bible address the

specific needs of single mothers with adolescent boys? How does God deal with the struggle of single parents then and now? How does God view the plight of mothers with boys? What is the responsibility of those given spiritual leadership of families in need then and now? What is the impact and what difference does it make when God does intervene in less-than-ideal family situations? What lessons are there for us today from the guidance of this wisdom we gain from Holy Writ?

### **God's Ideal for Family in Scripture**

There are two opposite schools of interpretation regarding the biblical report of creation of family from Genesis 2. The first one adheres to a divinely intended hierarchical structure of marriage. The second one is complementary and supports gender equality. Regardless, the responsibilities of the man are to be present and to bring and keep the family together.

In the beginning, God created human life in order to protect and to develop creation (Gen 2). The loneliness of man was the only thing that God declared as “not good” (Gen 2:18). It appears here that while man was created first, he still needed companionship, as well as partnership.

Adam was put to sleep while God provided a partner for him. A rib was taken from his side and a woman was formed to fill his loneliness (Gen 2:23, 24). This partnership or family was carved out of the same flesh, same ribs. There is a comfort, equality, and compatibility that God must have intended in having him realize that his counterpart was created out of his own flesh. This co-mingling of flesh of a man and a woman illustrates God's intent for humanity.

In fact, Garland (1999) suggest, “the use of the plural in the biblical account

indicates that God did not design a hierarchical relationship” (p. 178). An example of this ideology is found as follows: God created them, and blessed them, and named them (Gen 1:27, 28; Gen 5:1-2). Garland (2012) goes on to indicate that understanding the wife to be a “helper” meant to be “his partner.” The fact that Adam needed a soul mate and a partner is in itself contrary to the concept that she is beneath him. She was taken from Adams rib, therefore, as one flesh, they are part of each other (Garland, 2012).

### **Evidence in New Testament**

The family in the New Testament is supported by Christ’s life testimony in Scripture. The husband’s love for the wife is supposed to be an example of the love that Christ had for the church (Eph 5:2). Christ’s sacrificial life on behalf of the church was how he became the head of it (Gal 2:20; Eph. 5:26-27). It is the same way that “husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies” (Eph 5:28). This sacrificial and submissive love in the marriage, in which the family can trust, is characterized in Ephesians 5 (Garland, 2012).

### **Sexuality**

Paul went on to emphasize unity, togetherness, and equality in the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7). They were to share together sexually within the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:2-3). This is very different from the problems we see today that result in broken homes and dysfunctional relationships. There is judgment for “whore mongers and adulterers” (Heb 13:4).

God has a particular way for a man and woman to be in harmony with his will. Biblically speaking, since there is to be no sexual expression outside of marriage (Lev 20), the family begins with marriage and then includes children in most instances.

Because we live in an age where religious beliefs are vastly different, in order to keep the family on a solid foundation, believers are instructed not to take unbelievers as spouses. This is a matter of loyalty to God, as well; therefore, he said that “they will turn away thy son from following me” (Deut 7:3-4). Furthermore, it is stated, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14).

### **Children**

Biblical instruction has provided for unity and togetherness to be mingled in the family model. There are no changes evident when dealing with children. Both parents are told to “train up a child” (Prov 22:6). It is the duty of the parents to provide protection and shelter for their safety. Children flourish best in normal situations when both parents are engaged in their lives and development.

In addition, fathers are also to surround the children with love and a nurturing environment (Eph 6:4). They were not to “provoke anger.” It is the specific duty of the parents to discipline as well with the “rod of correction” (Prov 22:15).

The Old Testament is clear when it comes to the obligations of the children, too. The responsibility that children have in the family circle is to “honor their father and mother” (Deut 5:16). Children are also obligated to adhere to the wisdom and instruction of the parents. “Hear, ye children the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (Prov 4:1). This text speaks to the father’s instruction. The children miss so much when the father is absent. More information on the impact of absent fathers, as well as other biblical illustrations, can be found later in this study.

We are reminded in the New Testament about what is expected of the children: they should “obey [their] parents in the Lord” as well as “honor [their] father and

mother” (Eph 6:1-3).

In summary, the Bible is specific about the balance needed in the home between the husband and the wife. There is no domination between the sexes, but biblically speaking, there is a sharing of love and mutual respect along with togetherness.

Children, as well as parents, have obligations. In order for society to fix the challenges it deals with on a regular basis, there must be an effort to move back to a model set from the beginning, to bring back the necessary equilibrium intended by God for both the parents and the children.

### **Ellen G. White**

Ellen G. White did not speak specifically to the single parent, the unwed mother, or the at-risk adolescent male, but she did speak about families and parenthood. When she did speak on the issue of children without both parents, she noted that “many of them have inherited evil traits of character” (White, 1952, p. 167). Her language was strong, but often she spoke to the point of what right should look like and what it should be. There was not the prevalence of single parents in the past as we see today. Communities were closer knit with programs that helped each other, as well as strongly looking down on the circumstances we see today in almost every inner city.

White (1952) outlined detailed roles for husband and wife: “God designed that the family circle, father, mother, and children, should exist in this world as a firm” (p. 211). She went on to say that the children look up to the father as the key individual for “support and guidance” (White, 1952, p. 211).

The mother’s role is as specific as the father’s. White (1952) said that the mother should fulfill the role as the father’s equal. She added that the mother positioned as the

queen of the home should be respected with her word as “law.”

White (1952) may not have intended to address this sentiment for single mothers, but this thought certainly applies. She said that God “knows the burdens of every mother’s heart and is her best friend in every emergency. . . He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares and anxieties. The Savior . . . will hear the mother’s prayers and bless her children” (p. 204).

When she acknowledged the role of children, she supported the biblical principle of giving honor to the ones who brought them into the world. White (1952) noted that children should feel “indebted” to their parents and should never be excused from honoring them.

Continuing her discourse on children, she indicated that there is an impact on children who have lost one or both of their parents. White (1952) noted the struggles that children without two parents have. She said that these children need to be placed “in a position favorable for the formation of a right character” (p. 187). White (1952) also illustrated the responsibility of the church to “take these destitute children, bring them up for Me” (p. 167). Nowhere did she specifically identify and give guidance for the challenge of the unwed mother or the irresponsible father.

The traditional family with a father and a mother is the ideal for every home. It truly takes a cooperative effort to be successful. White (1905) noted that both father and mother should work together “for the highest good of their children” (p. 393).

The concepts presented are solid and biblically based. However, there could be a real challenge to take the number of fatherless children we have today into our churches and homes to raise them. However, this may be a call for more mentorship programs, as



well as leadership and training programs to help mitigate the issues she addressed as inherent evil (White, 1952).

### **Widow of Zarephath**

In the ancient Near East, widows were less disadvantaged when they had no children because they would be the responsibility of the deceased husband's family (Coomber, 2007). Because the woman of Zarephath had a son, she carried an added societal hardship without a husband to provide support (1 Kgs 17:12). A widow with a son would have to rely largely on charity for her basic needs (Coomber, 2007).

During this time of hardship and drought, God called a godly man to the aid of this widowed mother who was socially and financially weak (Coomber, 2007). While Elijah had survival needs, the widow woman's need was greater. In order to be fed, Elijah also had to feed. Elijah multiplied the raw materials—flour and oil—that she supplied (Cohn, 1982).

The widow's son unexpectedly died. The child was fed, but he died anyway. Cohen (1982) points out the "deuteronomic principle that man does not live by bread alone" (p. 337). The widow's emotions captured his attention when she not only brought up her own past shortcomings, but also started hurling accusations around. The woman stated that Elijah has "killed" the boy as punishment for her sin, and Elijah, in turn, accused the Lord of "causing the boy to die" (Yates, 2008). There was no question within the textual words of 1 Kings 17 that both the widow and Elijah believed that the boy had actually died (Lasine, 2004). However, Lasine (2004) alludes to the fact that in the ancient world, dead people might merely have been in a state of coma or reversible illness. Delays in burials were common.

Elijah took the situation into his own hands. This is illustrative of what needs to happen in support of single mothers with boys. Elijah took stewardship of the young man in his time of need. It is also important to note that Elijah “took” the child; she did not give him (Cohen, 1982). Elijah took the boy to the “upper room.” This is the place where Yahweh had his final impact. Some scholars suggest that Elijah’s actions of restoring the youth’s soul was similar to a shaman or healer using ancient Mesopotamian methods of substitution (Lasine, 2004). However, the text clears up any doubt that Yahweh restores life (1 Kgs 17:19–21). After the boy had been restored, Elijah returned him to his mother (1 Kgs 17:23).

In the story of Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), there are two things to notice. First the Lord demonstrates compassion for this single mother with one son. Luke 7:13 tells us that the Lord not only had compassion on her but he “saw her.” Second, we see that the Lord commanded the young man to arise from his deathly position. The Divine saw the needy condition and breathed life into the son. There is a restoration of both the mother in society and the son back to a life of purpose.

Throughout Scripture, we encounter this theme that God is a “helper of the orphan” (Ps 10:14) and “the father of the fatherless” (68:5).

### **Scriptural Mentoring**

Akin to the concept of Elijah’s sheltering and restoring the young man in a one-on-one situation is the concept of mentoring. Simply put, mentoring is a relationship between two people, the mentor and the one being mentored. Given in a more scholarly way, Rivera (2007) suggests that mentoring is a strategy to recruit and retain talent in many work and educational environments.

Mentor (n.d.) illustrates a story from the literary work of Homer, where Odysseus, a Greek warrior, went to battle in the Trojan War. Before he left, he placed his son Telemachus in the hands of a man named Mentor. Odysseus was gone for 20 years. It was during that time that Mentor trained and imparted wisdom and knowledge to Telemachus. From this literary legend, we get the meaning of a mentor sharing knowledge and wisdom with a younger mentee.

The biblical message is clear that “iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov 27:17). The two together are better for the relationship. A mentor can really help the mentees be all that they were meant to be or at least, put them on the right track. The well-known idiom states, “show me your friends, I will tell you what kind of person you are.” A mentor really helps mentees reach their potential.

Jesus was a key figure in mentoring when he called disciples and then expected them to follow in his steps (Luke 10:2). In addition, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go spread the good news. They had a powerful example of what mentoring was all about (Matt 28:19).

The biblical import of mentoring comes into view when we consider two key figures: Paul and Barnabas. Both served as mentors. Paul mentored Timothy (2 Tim 2:1-2) and Barnabas served a critical role in Paul’s life.

When Paul mentored Timothy, he drew him to himself by calling him “son” (2 Tim 2:1-2). He not only used discipleship, but also mentoring as a working tool with Timothy. Paul looked out for Timothy’s well-being. Paul made sure that the Corinthians took care of Timothy’s needs so he had “nothing to fear” (1 Cor 16:20). Paul also wanted to keep hindrances out of his way: “Don’t let anyone look down on you” (1 Tim 4:12).

All the work that Paul put in with Timothy paid off: “Timothy has proved himself” (Phil 2:22). From here, Paul released him to “carry on the work where it is needed” (Acts 19:22).

Elijah’s work with the young man was no less important as he worked with him to build him up, but after the exercise was complete, he released him back to fulfill his mission.

Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) was given the title “Son of Encouragement” by church leaders. It was after his Damascus journey that he became a mentor to Paul. While Paul had been his own man as an apostle, his acceptance into the group was proctored by Barnabas (Acts 9:26-30). Their relationship began when Barnabas introduced him and recruited him to teach new believers at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

Rivera (2007) noted that the relationship of Paul and Barnabas worked well because they accepted their roles and allowed for growth and development of both. However, this mentoring relationship concept was not foreign to Paul. He had previous experiences with elders in the Pharisaical order (Acts 23:6). Paul was in the habit of learning from his elders.

Paul was not the only one familiar with mentoring relationships. Barnabas developed mentoring as a part of his lifestyle (Rivera, 2007). Barnabas brought Paul to be observed as he interacted with new converts in Antioch (Acts 11) and with church leaders (Acts 13). Barnabas also opened doors for Paul to the brethren at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Barnabas, willing to help and influence where he could, simply had the heart of a teacher, leader, and mentor. This is not surprising because Jesus developed his disciples through

the process of mentoring. All Jesus did was draw his men close to himself (Rivera, 2007), and that was enough to change them and the world.

Rivera (2007) notes that Barnabas took on a mentoring role with Mark when Paul made a decision to end his partnership and go in a different direction (Acts 11:38–39). Mark was left alone to find his way, but Barnabas saw the need and made a commitment to see to it that Mark had the right feedback in order to sharpen him for the tasks ahead and for greater responsibilities.

This relationship from one perspective appears to reflect a parallel to a single mother with a male child being taken under a mentor’s wing to help coach and guide through difficult challenges socially, professionally, and relationally. I am not from a single-parent home, but I understand the inestimable value of having a mentoring relationship with someone who has been where I am trying to go and can offer to teach, guide, and rescue at times. Dockery (1992) indicates that Barnabas had “rescued” Mark. Barnabas not only “rescued” Mark, but poured himself into the relationship (Acts 9:39). It was perhaps necessary for Barnabas to pour himself into a mentoring relationship because it appeared that Mark really needed a key leader to help him establish a level of professional discipline and maybe even make sacrifices for the tasks ahead. Mark had abandoned them on their first journey in Pamphylia (Acts 15:38).

Barnabas fully committed to the task of mentoring Mark. Paul chose Silas (Acts 15:41) and Barnabas chose Mark (Acts 15:39). At this point, Mark could benefit more from the leadership of Barnabas than of Paul. The parting of ways and taking on a new protégé was a natural progression of Barnabas’ senior leadership. Pouring into Mark would be his last known major work in this area, for there was not much more written

regarding his exploits (Rivera, 2007). However, Barnabas must have made a significant impact on both Paul and Mark, because later on, Paul requested Mark's assistance (1 Tim 4:11).

Mentorship plays an important role in shaping individuals to do greater work. It is clear in the Bible that mentoring is significant in the development of individuals without other possible leadership in their lives. In the Greek illustration of Odysseus and Mentor, we see that while Odysseus was absent, Mentor filled the father role and prepared his son for the challenges of life with wisdom and knowledge.

### **Significant Impact**

Balthazar (2007) indicates that it is difficult to call God "father" when one's father is absent. A young man in summer camp illustrated this point by saying, "How can I call God 'Father' when I do not know what a father is?" Many young people deal with this troubling reality in their relationship with God. These youngsters become angry with themselves or toward the absentee fathers, or completely displace it. They also begin to take the blame themselves asking: Why were we abandoned? What did we do wrong? Are we bad? Furthermore, if the fathers who abandoned them, abused them, and neglected them go to heaven, they do not want to be there.

The absent father not only makes it difficult to have a relationship with God, but a view of their own self-worth and sexuality is also impacted. Seutter (as cited in Nicolosi, 1991) points out that the primary dynamic behind male homosexual desire is the failure of the father-son relationship, noting that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to have had a distant, hostile, or rejecting childhood relationship with their fathers or father figures. Seutter (2004) seems to suggest that the "father-of-origin" theory supports

the former supposition. This theory says that much of a person's self-image, values, and relationships are formed by one's family-of-origin experiences.

The impact of an absent, inactive, and emotionally absent father has tremendous impact in respect to the view of God, as well as a personal view of self. Balthazaar (2007) notes that the nature of relating to God as Father and wholeness can be a painful and irreconcilable experience if the father relationship was poor. Those hoping to approach a knowledge of God as father, uncle, or mentor must be willing to deal with their pain of separation.

Understanding the spiritual dynamic of the absent male figure on youth, we must also acknowledge the negative impact, as well as the favorable review, when that male figure takes action, and leadership in crisis. Evidence of emotion or rather, an episodic outburst, was directed at Elijah and God when the widow reacted to the loss of her only son and the emptiness by the loss of her husband. First, we notice that as Yates (2008) states, the twofold repetition of the verb "to slay" in verses 18 and 20 presents the Lord as responsible for the boy's death (p. 10). Second, we see the woman addressing Elijah directly, saying he had "killed" the boy as punishment for her sin. Therefore, in the widow's view, Elijah had killed the boy and God was being held responsible for his demise.

However, notice that when Elijah was active in supplying food, she called Elijah a "man of God." When the boy died, we witness the outburst. Cohen (1982) says that at the end, she transformed the designation "man of God" into a term of praise by acknowledging Yahweh's truth in Elijah's "mouth."

It is evident even in this story that when a male figure is positively connected,

active, and present, that there is a very different response from everyone in the house. The widow recognizes Elijah's authority and apparent contribution and the child's life is revived in him again (1 Kgs 17:24). The connectedness families feel toward fathers and male figures in the home clearly has close ties to how we relate to God as Father, Provider, and Lord.

### **Current View**

Rector (2010) finds that the principal cause of child poverty in the U.S. is the absence of married fathers in the home. According to the U.S Census, the poverty rate in 2008 for single parents with children was 35.6 %. The rate for married couples with children was 6.4 %. Being raised in a married family reduces a child's probability of living in poverty by about 80 %.

A survey in the spring of 1976 showed that residents of a juvenile treatment center held a very negative concept of the very word "father." He was seen as powerless, inactive, and generally bad. Of the twenty 12-17 year-old youths tested, 18 lived in homes where the father was absent (Rowatt, 1977).

The effects of being raised in a single-parent home continue into adulthood. Harper and McLanahan (2004) find that in comparing families of the same race and similar incomes, children from broken and single-parent homes are three times more likely to end up in jail by the time they reach age 30 than are children raised in intact married families.

Several studies indicate that when children with intact families are compared with children with absent fathers, the results are astounding (Coughlin & Vuchinich, 1996; Dawson, 1991; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000). Children from



single-parent homes are more than twice as likely to be arrested for a juvenile crime, twice as likely to be treated for emotional and behavioral problems, roughly twice as likely to be expelled from school, and three times more likely to drop out of school.

A recent study indicates that over a period of 10 years, contrary to the emphasis that mental-health professionals, social scientists, and culture-at-large place on the deprivations that boys are assumed to face if they have no everyday father in the home, many boys from single-parent homes see the lives of their friends with fathers as being very strict (Drexler & Gross, 2005). One child from a single parent home expressed, “I wouldn’t want a dad like that.”

Drexler and Gross (2005) find that because competition, dominance, and control are not the mainstays in homes of boys she studied (single-parent/lesbian homes), the boys could do and develop what is thought of as the more “womanly traits” of self-expression, access to feelings, compromise, and stronger attachments to those in their everyday lives.

Drexler and Gross (2005) suggest that boys who are raised in single-mother households were attracted to and commonly found male role models from outside the home to compensate for a lack of a father in their lives.

Drexler and Gross (2005) believe that boys from single-parent and lesbian homes are just fine without dads and they no more have an urge for father hunger than anyone else. In fact, they went on to suggest that boys who grow up in intact families with a father present do not spend very much time with them anyway and have the same issues.

Popular media has weighed in on the impact of father-son relationships or the lack thereof. In a *New York Times* article, Gates (2002) describes that the majority of the

summer movies show “father and sons working out their relationship on the big screen” (para. 1). In them we will see “boys and men bike, mourn, manipulate, and reach out for the closeness they never had” (Gates, 2002, para. 1).

In a study of reported stressors according to family type, Garland and Yankeelov (1998) show that single parents reported more marital conflicts (presumably with ex-spouses or partners). It was also noted that single parents in all samples reported more financial strain and unsolved problems.

Rowatt (1977) says that single parents are expected to perform all functions of parenting. They face unique hardships due to a lack of awareness and sensitivity from couple-oriented social situations. Single parents have to figure out how the meals will be prepared, how the house will get cleaned, and who will take care of the car. There is no division of labor. One person is in charge of everything. It is extremely difficult for one parent to find the time to do everything.

Further evidence indicates the challenges that single-mothers have. Doherty and Carlson (2002) suggest that single mothers get blamed for most of the social ills. Single parenting is a very difficult proposition in contemporary society. At the same time that these challenges exist, there is also the side of society that praises the “heroic single parents” who do a “wonderful job” raising their families. Rainey, Swindoll, and Zuck (2001) say that single parents are often the most “desperate, hurting and lonely” people in church (p. 190).

Rowatt, (as cited in Cremin, 1975), suggests that one-parent families lack the completeness of context with one partner absent. Simply stated, boys and girls need both male and female role modeling for full identity formation. A visit with the father is

insufficient for forming ideals of masculinity and a weekend with the mother leaves much to be desired in providing a female image for children. Furthermore, the role model for successful need-fulfillment in marriage is non-existent. Children are deprived of the opportunity to experience their parents' sharing life in a loving fashion. Single parents can find surrogate role models for their children and this helps, but on a limited basis. For example, good sex education is commonly accepted to be the children's observing their parents exchanging playful affirmation. Where do the children of divorced parents find good sex-education models? Where do they find parent models in general?

### **Limitations**

Volumes of literature exist about single parenting. The one issue I found in the religious realm was the lack of biblical references that point to and address the topic directly. From the many articles that I reviewed, I found it very troubling to put together a theological portrait from current authors.

### **Restoration**

We live in an imperfect world with imperfect people. No matter what the standard is, these systems and/or paradigm are destined to fail because of human frailty, undue suffering, and cause and effect. Through sin, suffering and death of righteous relationships and self was brought upon all mankind. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

The good news is that God looks after the lost (Luke 15:3-6). He also looks after the "fatherless," the "widows," and unwed mothers (Jas 1:27). There is hope for all that is lost, broken, and fractured. One day, all will be made perfect, and the hurt from youth with absent fathers and the loneliness of unwed mothers will be healed. That perfection

which was lost in Eden by Earth's first parents will be restored one day. One day there will be a "new heaven and a new earth." "God shall wipe away all tears. . . for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:1, 3).

In order to partake of this transcendent reunion, the obligation to give of self wholeheartedly is binding. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Ps 51:17). "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). The same thing that God requires, He was willing to give through his Son: "For God so loved the world that He gave" (John 3:16).

The ultimate plan of restoration has been in place from the beginning: "To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created" (White, 1923, p. 15). The "essence of the gospel is restoration" (White, 1940, p. 824).

### **Conclusion**

Anderson and Guernsey (1985) suggest that because of God's interaction with humanity through his Son Jesus as outlined in Hebrews 4, He is able to sympathize with us, to understand our weaknesses, and to extend both mercy and grace to us in time of need.

True ministry to families must be engaged and have a significant impact. Outreach to these families in need includes "everything that a church and its representatives do which has an impact on the founding, development, and ministry of families" (Garland & Yankeelov, 1998, p. 16). However, Rainey et al. (2001) add that churches do not necessarily need to add programs for single parents. Church leaders only need to ask intact families to include single-parent families in their lives. Intact families will need to take the initiative. They state that we must step in and be a father to the

fatherless, to help the “widows” in their distress (Jas 1:27), to walk beside these single parents in one of life’s toughest assignments.

Purnell (2000) state that one of the greatest things we could do for single parents is to help a single woman know how to raise a boy. Churches need to let community people know they are the first resource when they need help.

Rainey et al. (2001) say that when we minister to single parents, we are being like God Himself, who is “a father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, ... [who] makes a home for the lonely” (Ps 68:5-6).

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### **Introduction**

Something that particularly breaks my heart is seeing young children grow up without a father in the home. I am challenged to face this reality every weekend in the congregations I pastor. I was fortunate enough to have a father who played an active part in my life. However, I have seen a growing number of single parents, particularly women, complain about absent dads in their children's lives. This is a serious issue because if it has a significant impact on the youth, it also has an impact on our society, and ultimately, on the world.

#### **Father Absence**

I contend that there is definitely something missing in a child's growth experience and internal, interpersonal development when a father is absent. Multiple authors support this argument. Corneau (1991) says that an individual's psychological identity is based on the sense of his own spine that provides him with support from the inside. The father's absence results in the child's lack of internal structure; this is the very essence of a negative father complex. Erickson (1998) adds that fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child wellbeing in our society. Ricks (2008) says sons need fathers to play a positive, active role in their lives. Erickson (1998) goes on to add that lack of contact with a knowledge of their father

leaves children with a gaping hole in their soul that is best described as “father hunger” (p. 286).

Panettieri and Hall (2008) suggest that there is a real problem with absent fathers. In families where the father initially visits with the children and remains involved in their lives shortly after divorce, his presence usually diminishes greatly over time. They indicate that America is experiencing the mass disappearance of its fathers.

I have witnessed boys raised by mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, but no fathers or male figure. These boys have a tendency to adopt feminine characteristics. Hamilton (1977) highlights a study that describes the child envying the privileges of his parents. The study describes some evidence that the boy who is raised in a female-centered home may primarily envy the status of females until the time that he begins to associate with an adolescent male gang, particularly if the father is absent. These challenges are not very isolated. Garcia (2008) states that there is a population-wide decline in men’s testosterone levels over the past twenty years. This may be compounded and particularly troubling for the African-American community. McKenna (1999) notes from the census that single mothers head 65 % of African-American families. Kunjufu (2007) notes further that some 68 % of African-American children are being raised in single-parent homes, most of which are headed by women. Coles and Green (2010) confirm the fact that African-American women have the highest rates of non-marital births.

Being faced with negative overtones of feminization is a challenge for boys raised by women. Garcia (2008) says that in sports and war, the big fear of men is to be feminized. Marsiglio (2008) states that boys quickly learn that they will be rewarded or chastised in particular settings depending on whether they present themselves as

independent, aggressive, competitive, emotionally cool, or anti-feminine. Betcher and Pollack (1993) note that as a boy grows, he is taught not to need his mother. The result is that he is often forced to pretend not to need anyone. A man's need to assert his differentness and independence also takes the form of rejecting all that is feminine. Pollack (1998) agrees that this push away from all that is feminine is a common side effect of what it means to be a man. He says that being masculine is not based as much on the positive identification with father, but on the negation of the male child's tie to mother. Becoming masculine is defined as avoiding the feminine.

This "dis-identification" with all that is feminine or this separation from mothering can be both helpful and harmful. Dobson (2001) says that the harmful impact of separating boys from mothers too soon can be felt 40 or 50 years later. Furthermore, Dobson (2001) indicates that according to a study at Harvard University, researchers found that 91 % of college men who said they had not enjoyed a close relationship with their mothers developed coronary artery disease, hypertension, duodenal ulcers, and alcoholism by the midlife years. When certain needs are not met in infancy or when mother-son relationships are not of high quality, it is possible to predict the potential life-long psychological and physical health issues that will arise.

I watched the Basketball Hall of Fame speech by former Chicago Bull champion Denis Rodman. Instead of extolling the virtues of his skill and championships, he spoke about the impact his father had on him by leaving him when he was five years old and what he missed from his mother. He said that his mother worked a lot to support him and his two older sisters, but he said she never embraced him, never hugged him. The issues Denis Rodman had with drugs and the law are well documented. He even said he was



surprised that he had lived that long. He added that as a product of his upbringing, he had not been a good father, husband, or son.

If single mothers are raising adolescent boys, and these boys are encouraged to exhibit only masculine characteristics, this can prematurely push boys into a state of aloneness. Pollack (1998) says an adolescent boy encounters potential shame and embarrassment whenever he is asked to “act like a man,” but does not yet feel equipped to do so. The destructive feelings of self-hatred, inadequacy, and loneliness can become embedded within the definition he creates of his own nascent masculine identity. This is compounded when there is no masculine figure around to model what “acting like a man” really means. Betcher and Pollack (1993) contend that because there may be no father around to attend to the boy’s needs when this separation occurs, these adolescent boys are left with a trauma due to this conflict and, as men, they may continue to wall themselves off from women throughout life.

Marsiglio (2008) digs into the concepts of “acting like a man” under the concepts of the “sturdy oak,” “give ‘em hell,” and “big wheel” (pp. 21-31). In each concept, aggressiveness is central. In fact, he says that at times, boys will respond to this masculine ideal by embracing violence as a way of life and an acceptable means to resolve conflicts. Winbush (2001) describes how this same idea of violence has impacted African-American males. He states that if trends continue as they have been, by 2015, half of all black men in America will be in contact with the criminal justice system via incarceration, probation, parole, or indictment. Horn and Sylvester (2002) adds that children whose biological fathers are absent, are on average, 2-3 times more likely to

engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological parents.

It is important to note that while we see the fact of violent and or criminal behavior in the African-American community, perception apart from fact has been a major factor as well. Winbush (2001) points out that when a black male commits a crime, it is expected; when a white male does so, it is explained. Coles and Green (2010) illustrate that African-American families are disproportionately represented in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of violence, crime, joblessness, and drug activity. Low-income African-American families have the highest rates of criminal victimization.

The fact is that there are other aspects like poverty and joblessness that contribute to violence. In fact, Majors and Billson (1992) suggest that some African-American youths experience this anger, frustration, and rage at the perceptions and racism and conditions of poverty in their lives—for example, poor schools, joblessness, lack of role models, and lack of adequate housing. These pent-up emotions born of frustration and disappointment may explode in aggressive acts against those who are closest in their daily lives—other black people. Boyd-Franklin, Franklin, and Toussaint (2001) round out this concept of “act[ing] like a man” with the fact that African-American males who are involved in gangs see violence as a way of proving their masculinity and their manhood (p. 21).

I have observed that in some single-parent female-dominated homes, they coddle their boys, pleasing them in every way possible. James and Thomas (2009) say that this type of neurotic parenting rarely stops when a boy goes to grade school or junior high.

After college, she is happy to let him live at home, and she will be certain to tell his wife how to cook his favorite meal and how he likes his clothes ironed or she tries to be the mother and the father, probably losing what a mother really needs to be. James and Thomas (2009) add that this type of bonding could create psychological chaos for a boy and it produces massive amounts of shame in his heart. Without a father or male figure who will model male behaviors, strengths, and ethics? Erwin (2006) references what we have said earlier, that traditional thinking has attributed boys' delinquent behavior, aggression, even homosexuality to weak or absent fathers and dominant mothers. The reasoning is that boys have to compensate for these overbearing women either by becoming overly aggressive, "too masculine," or retreat to sexual and/or psychological confusion. He asserts that boys benefit from both fathers and mothers who are strong and nurturing. However, as I mentioned earlier, it is a real challenge to find a mother who has the perfect balance of both strength and nurturing.

The challenge is real because, as Meeker (2010) points out, while mothers offer sons many of the same things that fathers do, they offer them differently. It is very important to note that sons receive them very differently from a mother than from a father. In fact, Biddulph (2008) suggests that the way a mother deals with her son from the time he is born has everything to do with her own "male history." This has a huge impact. The resulting issues, from those who suggest mothers can do and be everything to a boy a father can do and be, are apparent in our society. It is still developmentally necessary for children to have that father and or male figure present in their life.

### **Challenges and Solutions**

As I proceed with this review, I would like to look at a few of the challenges and

solutions to this problem and what single mothers can do to help raise and counteract the absence of the father in the lives of young children. Furthermore, I would like to narrow my focus to the impact of fatherlessness on adolescent boys.

President Obama grew up in a home without a father. His father left when he was two years old. He said that while a wonderful mother raised him, he felt his father's absence and wondered what life might have been like if he had been present (Obama, 2011). It is difficult to argue that President Obama would have been more successful if he had had a father present, but Daniels (1998) argues that children reared in two-parent homes are richer, happier, smarter, more popular, and less prone to abuse, neglect, violence, and promiscuity than those in single-parent households.

There are tremendous benefits for boys raised by two parents. There are also the horrible possibilities that a child without a father present is more likely to experience traumas of some kind. What is difficult is that the numbers suggest there is a large and growing percentage of children who are exposed to these challenges. Sowers (2010) suggests that over 33 % of youth, 25 million children in the United States, grow up in fatherless homes, searching for a dad. This vital missing element creates a soul hunger that cannot be totally satiated by a mother.

Herring (2005) suggests that several things happen when a father is absent, lost, or has abandoned the family:

1. Intensified separation anxiety,
2. Denial and avoidance of feelings associated with the loss of the father,
3. Identification with the lost object, and
4. Object hunger for males.

The father is the object, and males, in particular, long to have that object back in their lives. If girls are similarly unable to reach a point where they are able to cope with this loss, they can unconsciously attempt to gain the affection they lost from their father by becoming promiscuous (Herring, 2005, p. 67).

Another result youth may experience in dealing with the loss or absence of a father is coming to the conclusion that God is distant and uncaring (Sowers, 2010). Vitz (2013) takes issue with Freud's projection theory that belief in God is the result of being raised in a home with a good father. He says that if this is true, the opposite must also be true—individuals from fatherless homes more than likely will have a tendency or likelihood to reject God.

There are a multitude of issues that can arise from a father's absence. There are far too many to list here, and realistically, the list probably grows with the increase of divorce and separation impacting families in a postmodern world.

Because this is a challenge that apparently is not going to go away, society has been forced to redefine family, and single mothers have had to redefine and interpret parenting in a single-parent context. It becomes challenging for a mother to know exactly what to do or how to raise a boy without a male role model. For example, Carson (1994) gives a bird's-eye view of what some women have to decide if they have a son: "Should she minimize the differences between boys and girls? Should she give him "girl" toys? Should she surround him with unisex playthings? How can she get him to be in touch with his feelings as well as be strong?" (p. 56).

Chisholm (2007) gives an apt reply to these questions. If mothers learned to do these things, they would not struggle with the questions of sensitivity. An adolescent boy

will acquire the sensitive part just by being around a woman. Chisholm advises: (a) find ways to celebrate the fathers they will be someday, (b) point your sons to the perfect Author of fatherhood, and (c) make every hurt a learning encounter to show them the character of God the Father.

Having no single male figure may be a good thing not only so that mothers may more easily point to God the Father, but this is also an opportunity for the adolescent male to have multiple figures (Engber & Klungness, 2006). The adolescent can pick up on behaviors and habits and beliefs of many male encounters while growing up.

There are no easy answers for single mothers raising boys. It is going to take hard work and mental work at that. Drexler and Gross (2005) say that it will take a “cognitive commitment” (p. 129).

Panettieri and Hall (2008) suggest there are reasons to believe mothers do a great job with raising adolescent boys without fathers. In fact, they add that there is no choice but to recognize this as fact because single mothers currently heads nearly 11 million families in America. Consider the list of high profile individuals who were raised by single moms:

Lance Armstrong – seven-time Tour de France winner;

Ed Bradley – CBS TV news correspondent;

Les Brown – author and motivational speaker;

Dr. Benjamin Carson – Neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins;

Bill Clinton – 42nd president of the United States;

Bill Cosby – actor, comedian, activist; and

Barack Obama – 44th president of the United States.

This is just a short list of successful men who were raised by their mothers in a single-parent environment. One might consider that the reason they were successful was because of their education, material comforts, or just plain family time. How can a mother alone have success with an adolescent male? Leman (2006) suggests that the most significant predictor of a child's successful development is the positive expectations set for him, the belief in "you can do it," come what may.

Lush and Vredevelt (2001) tell the story of a mother's belief in her famous son. She said it took tremendous energy to raise Winston Churchill. Relatives saw him as a pesky nuisance. His teachers wailed that he was a failure. But his mother perceived his uniqueness and special needs, and rather than making him fit a prescribed mold, she nurtured his personal interests. They note that she played the roles both of mother and father and in doing so, she helped save the civilized world from being destroyed during the Second World War. Pollack and Shuster (2000) say that far from making boys weaker, the love of a mother can and does actually make boys stronger emotionally and psychologically.

Another factor as regards successful single mothers raising boys is that they have learned to manage disaster without anyone else's help. There is no one else to delegate difficulties to. Frisbie and Frisbie (2007) say that in two-parent homes, each parent often wishes that the other partner would somehow be magically transformed into a tough disciplinarian, an effective leader, or a superb household manager. They say that the fruit of such avoidance is children whose behavior is out of control, children who never learn proper respect for adults and authority.

If single mothers are really doing their jobs well, they will work themselves out of

a job. James and Thomas (2009) contend that as a boy matures, his mother must learn to strike a balance between supporting her son and letting him stand on his own two feet. This also gives him the freedom later to have fulfilling relationships with his wife and daughters.

In any event, as long as there are single-parent homes, there are going to be challenges. Even in two-parent homes, there is still the challenge of finding quality time to actually engage with the youth. Fathers can certainly be more accountable. The key goal for single parents is to provide an atmosphere that stabilizes the home and normalizes opportunities for adolescent males to flourish with positive models to emulate.

Having a strong sense of self, individuality, pride, and healing from the past is critically essential to being a solid and well-rounded parent. There is a life-long impact that occurs for generations if the parent does not have his or her own foundation settled. Anderson and Guernsey (1985) say that the parent also provides the child with a model of the parenting process so that in years to come when the child becomes a parent, the eschatological baton can be passed from generation to generation.

### **Impact of Single Mothers**

In this project, we are not simply talking about parenting by two parents. We are looking at the impact of the single mother. If the two parents have an impact on the generational gift they model to their children, how much more important is this for the single parent, particularly the single mom?

One of the first things single mothers need to know is that they can have an unhealthy impact on the child by over-mothering, that is, choosing to mother when it is



not needed. In fact, this is a mistake women make while looking to fulfill the need for empowerment. Thoele (2001) states that naturally wanting and needing empowerment, we have gone underground and adopted secret and dishonest ways of having and using power. However, she suggests that if we want to save our relationships with our mates, children, friends and coworkers, then stop being everybody's mom. I believe that at least single mothers who try hard often cross this threshold. They do this by trying to fulfill a void in their life and it can have a lasting and devastating impact.

Another way mothers can over-do it is by over-managing love and expectations. Meeker (2010) opines that the trouble begins when they see themselves in their children. She states that we see our own character traits in them, and some of these traits we like, but others we cannot stand. Their behaviors become personal because they are not only themselves, but they see a younger, smaller version of ourselves in them. Meeker (2010) gives an appropriate example of what a mother can do with a son and her expectations. She says that the mother reduced her expectations about normal seven-year old behavior and resolved early on that regardless of what other children did, this was something her child did. The mother decided that she would refuse to take her son's behavior personally. She lowered her expectations, separated herself from it, and began to view the situation objectively.

Another challenge for single mothers is living in the past or living with the past in the present. It can cripple personal happiness and the children's happiness as well. It is important to move on, no matter how much that painful, past, broken relationship meant.

We all know that relationships end for various reasons that we literally cannot control. The issues could be on either end of the spectrum, but at the end of the day, it is

over. It is the pain that lingers. This pain can cause us to build up defenses. McKay and Fanning (2000) suggest that there are three major kinds of defenses:

1. Running away. This defense includes drugs and alcohol, various forms of avoidance, and emotional isolation.
2. Attacking others. You block the feeling of being bad with outer-directed rage.
3. Attacking yourself. You block the feeling of being bad with inner-directed rage.

McKay and Fanning (2000) find that lingering in these defenses may appear to be temporarily helpful, but in fact, these defenses actually prove more painful than the original feelings one ran away from. The quicker acceptance is adopted, the better the emotional environment will become. Sherfield (2004) notes that improving the emotional environment can happen as simply as forgiving them in the privacy of our own minds and soul, or sending them an apology for the wrongs committed. In any case, the unfinished business of relationships can continue to cause damage to one's self-esteem, so deal with it and move on.

Why is self-esteem so important? We have already looked at a few of the challenges, but further studies (Schiraldi, 2007) show that those lacking self-esteem are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, problem anger, chronic pain, immune-suppression, and a variety of other distressing physical and psychological symptoms. This is amazing. How many mothers have been dealing with low self-esteem while trying to raise children? It is no wonder we have so many problems in our society. It is vital that self-esteem development be a real focus.

This focus on self-esteem cannot be understood without knowing what Anderson

(2004) calls the two dimensions of experience: self-image, what we get from seeing ourselves as others see us, and self-fact, who we are when we strip away everyone else. Having a healthy sense of self must include these two parts. What happens when we do not have these two dimensions in view?

The frightening part of not dealing with self-esteem issues comes more clearly into focus when it impacts self and others later in life. Engel (2006) opines that most victims of childhood neglect and abandonment tend to continue to neglect and abandon themselves as adults. Cruse (2010) discovers that individuals who have not dealt with these issues are often referred to as adult children who somehow stay emotionally immature. Engel goes on to state that this impact is most serious when the neglect comes from mothers. Mothers are supposed to be nurturers, providers of love, nutritious food, and so on. The cycle continues when these issues are not confronted.

Engel (2006) says that children who have been neglected or deprived of the things they need—namely affection, acknowledgement, and protection—are left with some major holes in their development and in their soul. Sedlacek and Sedlacek (2014) note that these deep wounds may be further exacerbated by unmet needs such as affirmation, attention, discipline, guidance, and comfort. McKay and Fanning (2000) find that babies who are not comforted, held, spoken to, rocked, or loved learn that their cries of distress do not bring relief. They learn helplessness and that they are not important. This is the beginning of poor self-esteem. Furthermore, Engel (2006) states that these children will also be insecure and self-critical and will suffer from low self-esteem. When these children grow into adults, they are going to have to find ways to fix these holes or else potentially end up living recklessly or making risky life decisions. Neuroscience

discoveries have shown ways to recover from life issues of the mind. Sedlacek and Sedlacek (2014) note that when a person opens up and shares their story and feels truly heard, they feel decreased anxiety and experience a change in their brain circuitry. However, McKay (2000) says that when we give our children the gift of acceptance, we give them a psychological armor that will protect them for a lifetime.

Children are not the only ones who need protecting. While single mothers need a boost in the self-esteem department, there are other ways that they can care for themselves.

### **Self-Care**

Self-care is especially critical to the single mother. If she does not seek to meet her own needs, she will not have the emotional, psychological energy to care for her children. It is important to set priorities and get back to basics. Leman (2006) states that the human body can only take so much before it says, “No more.” Exercise and proper rest aid in recovery and prepare single mothers for the challenges ahead. Frisbie and Frisbie (2007) note that single parents report some of the worst eating habits of any category of adults. In general, single parents do not make good choices when it comes to their personal diet and nutrition.

Whitehurst (2010) also offers a few suggestions on what a mother can do to manage self-care. Here are a few examples:

- Read a book or write in a journal
- Watch your favorite video
- Give yourself a manicure
- Call a friend and go shopping

In summary, what single mothers need to remember and recognize is that physical and emotional wellbeing is centered on making small, but consistent positive choices. Single mothers with boys have a huge responsibility to produce quality men while trying to balance so many other things. I believe that education is needed to help single mothers have a greater impact on their homes and on society. Adapted education is also needed for the single fathers of these boys. It has been shown that positive male influence is necessary.

Finally, an additional way single mothers can care for themselves, as well as care for their sons, is by linking him with a mentor. Some single mothers are so desperate to fill that father-figure and relationship void that they settle for anything. Engber and Klungness (2006) say that a bad father can do untold damage to a son by being a model of poor behavior. If a son's father had been neglectful, physically or emotionally abusive, or just plain unloving, that son would be better off without him. In some cases, in the long or short term, it might be better to get a mentor. Panettieri and Hall (2008) recommend the Big Brothers organization. This organization provides one-on-one youth services, matching fatherless boys with adult male volunteers for mentoring, fun activities, and supportive relationships that often last an entire lifetime. The acceptable age range is between six and 14 at the time the application is made. Marsiglio (2008) recognizes the value of mentoring through the Big Brothers program of giving back to others, helping kids expand their options, and passing along values and experiences to a younger generation.

It is clear that more education is necessary for single parents. If single mothers neglect properly managing and negotiating the challenges of the absence of fathers in boys' lives, the impact on adolescent boys and society will be felt for generations to come.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Description of the Intervention**

##### Introduction

This chapter includes a brief review of the ministry context in which this study takes place and the development of a seminar specifically designed to address issues of single mothers with at-risk adolescent males. The chapter will also provide a concise overview of reviewed literature, which addresses single parenting with adolescent males, and a review of the theological foundations which bolster the project. In addition, there is a description of the research method, how it was implemented, and an overview of the material shared at the seminar.

##### Ministry Context

The target population for this intervention were members of the Gary Brunswick Heights SDA Church and Mizpah SDA Church, all who lived in South Chicago, Illinois and Northwest Indiana. The intervention was designed in order to be replicated in the states of Illinois and Indiana and also included elements and concepts that could be used in other populations and socio-economic contexts. The sample was made up of single mothers with adolescent children/boys living in South Chicago and Northwest Indiana. For data collection, we used primary sources and the qualitative method. For the intervention, we used the teaching, modeling, and coaching for life quality management implementation.

## Research Methodology

The method used in this research was a mixed method study. Each participant's involvement in the study was voluntary. I collected data through the focus group interview and the questionnaire. This information was documented via audio digital recording and written notes. Subjects were not identified in the recording.

The protocol or instrument I used is a set of pre-determined questions that were answered anonymously from a specifically designed questionnaire. This should give a perspective on the relationship of single mothers as it relates to their self-esteem or overall view of their challenges in raising adolescent boys without support.

The research focal point is the following: Does seminar training in the area of financial management, relationships skills, parenting, self-esteem, and time management make a difference in the level of self-esteem in single mothers?

The quantitative feature of this project was set up to assess whether or not the training and parental strategies made a difference in their levels of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the dependent variable and training is the independent variable.

The qualitative methodology is designed to learn more about the personal experiences of the single mothers through focus groups discussions.

In order to access the needs of the families (single parent families) with boys, primary and secondary sources were used.

In every method used for primary sources, the data was documented, collected and analyzed after the assessment.

Primary sources for assessment and data collection:



1. Questionnaire – Single parent families answered the same questions about predisposing challenges in single-parent families related to self-esteem.

2. Focus Group – Several focus groups were organized to look for honest reactions, opinions, and attitudes about various challenges single-parent families face, as well as helpful solutions for raising boys without active fathers.

3. Personal Observation – As a professional, I shared my own observations related to the discussed topic.

Secondary Sources – The literature review was used as the secondary data. Data from both primary and secondary sources were analyzed considering the following variables: age, gender, family status, and religious experience.

The targeted population focus was single mothers with at-risk adolescent boys in South Chicago and Northwest Indiana. This is a prime group that can realize their personal potential and improve the conditions at home if they receive this experience-based curriculum while their children are at an impactful age.

The data was collected through the focus group interview and questionnaire. The focus group was digitally recorded to account for each response verbatim. The instrument used for the quantitative self-esteem questionnaire is an “Index of Self-Esteem” by Walter Hudson. This instrument is designed to evaluate how the participants feel about themselves or how the participants see themselves. A score of 30 or above indicates low self-esteem challenges. A score of 30 or below indicates no problems with self-esteem.

A study was conducted to determine the validity of the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) by Walter Hudson. The questionnaire is a twenty-five-item summated category-partition scale that was designed to measure the degree, severity, and magnitude of

problems associated with self-esteem. Abell, Jones, and Hudson (1984) indicate that the ISE had a reliability in excess of 0.90 and good-to-excellent content, concurrent, construct and factorial validity. This study suggests that the potential for clinical research application of ISE is high.

## **Development of the Intervention**

### Concise Review of Literature

There is a grim reality that a percentage of the population is struggling and trying to survive in the best way they know and they are failing. A large population in many inner cities is faced with an uphill battle and there seems to be no end in sight. Single parents all over the country are doing the best they can, and some succeed, but mainly fail to capture the resources they need to get ahead and support their families with the basic things many take for granted. There are struggling children looking for their father and finding that replacement in all the wrong places. Sowers (2010) suggests that over 33 % of youth, 25 million children in the United States, grow up in fatherless homes, searching for a dad.

Where is the church in this struggle? I have seen a growing number of single parents, particularly women, complain about absent dads in their children's lives and the lack of proper support from church. This is a serious issue, because if it has a significant impact on the single mothers' attitudes and self-esteem and on the youth, it ultimately has an impact on our society, and ultimately, on the world.

It has been well documented in research that a father's presence has a powerful impact. Many have survived without their fathers, but Ricks (2008) states that sons need fathers to play a positive, active role in their lives. Erickson (1998) goes on to add that a

lack of contact with a knowledge of their father leaves children with a gaping hole in their soul that is best described as “father hunger.” Erickson (1998) adds that fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society.

I wholeheartedly applaud the hard work and dedication of single mothers. These hardworking women manage to raise their children alone against all challenges. In the best cases, they sacrifice their own desires to make sure their children are taken care of. This is easier said than done. As Meeker (2010) points out, while mothers offer sons many of the same things that fathers do, they offer them differently. More important, sons receive them very differently from a mother than from a father. In fact, Biddulph (2008) suggests that the way a mother deals with her son from the time he is born has everything to do with her own “male history.” This has a huge impact. The resulting issues from those who suggest mothers can do and be everything to a boy that a father can be are apparent in our society. It is still necessary developmentally for children to have that father and/or male figure present in their lives.

The benefits of being raised by two parents, mother and father, are innumerable. Having both the velvet and the steel, the compassionate and the assertive, the emotional and the theoretical strikes a powerful balance that cannot be duplicated in any other format when things are going well. Without this equilibrium, a large and growing percentage of children is exposed to additional challenges.

I personally know that I was able to make different choices when faced with bullying, drugs, girls, body care, hard work, and professional career as a result of having my father present. I remember him specifically telling me something immensely valuable

when I complained about working for a difficult boss. He said, “If you can work for this man today, you will be able to work for anyone, anywhere tomorrow.” He was right and I never quit anything I ever started. The key goal for single parents is to provide an atmosphere that stabilizes the home and normalizes opportunities for adolescent males to flourish with positive models to emulate.

There are no easy answers for single mothers who are raising boys. Single mothers have a steep learning curve. However, successful single mothers have learned to manage disaster without anyone else to help; there is no one else to whom to delegate difficulties.

This is a great argument to support the need for strong self-esteem. Further studies (Schiraldi, 2007) show that those lacking self-esteem are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, problem anger, chronic pain, immunosuppression, and a variety of other distressing physical and psychological symptoms. Depression and a low self-view can certainly hinder the journey toward successful parenting. How the parent sees himself and interacts with that world and the children has a carryover affect that can have a damaging impact on the children’s psychological development. Anderson and Guernsey (1985) state that the parent also provides the child with a model of the parenting process so that in years to come, when the child has become a parent, the eschatological baton can be passed from generation to generation. Furthermore, single-parent depression and low self-view can lead to neglect, which can become another life-long struggle for the child. Engel (2006) says that most victims of childhood neglect and abandonment tend to continue to neglect and abandon themselves as adults. This is amazing. How many mothers have been dealing with low self-esteem while trying to raise children? It is no

wonder we have so many problems in our society. It is vital that self-esteem development be a real focus.

With all of these challenges, how can single parents take care of themselves? It may not seem obvious, but time is a precious commodity. There is not a lot of additional time to do the little things that make a difference. Self-care is essential for everyone, but especially for the single parent. Leman (2006) states that the human body can only take so much before it says, “No more.” Exercise and proper rest aid in recovery and prepare single mothers for the challenges ahead. Frisbie and Frisbie (2007) note that single parents report some of the worst eating habits of any category of adults. In general, single parents do not make good choices when it comes to their personal diet and nutrition.

In summary, what single mothers need to remember and recognize is that physical and emotional well-being is centered on making small, but consistent positive choices. Single mothers with boys have a huge responsibility to produce quality men while trying to balance so many other things.

#### Review of Theological Foundation

There are several theological questions and or problems that persist in consideration of this study on single mothers with adolescent boys. The past and present problem of struggling youth from single-parent families and the perceived plight of single mothers demands a response from the theological realm. Does the Bible address the specific needs of single-mothers with adolescent boys? How does God deal with the struggle of single parents then and now? How does God view the plight of mothers with boys? How does Scripture address gender roles?

## Gender Roles

In today's society, there appears to be a tension between God's ideas of gender and everyone else's ideas. Do the Scriptures still have authority on issues such as gender? If we take a look at today's society alone, the answer would be a categorical "no." Losing the biblical viewpoint is clearly at risk when there is an over-simplification of the right to define oneself, rationalization of biblical views against modern laws of inclusion, and those who have a socio-political agenda in an asexual nihilistic reality.

Genesis 1:27 clearly states, "In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Looking at Genesis 1:27, we first see the differences in sex. "The two words 'male' and 'female' are translations of Hebrew adjectives that indicate the sex of the two individuals" (Nichol, 1978, p. 216). Matthews (1996) specifically states that those Hebrew words for "male" (*zākār*) and "female" (*neqēbā*) express human sexuality and that because of the different sexual roles, there is an intrinsic distinction within the human family. This passage expresses God's intent for humanity and reveals the ideology of a dual heterosexual expression through the common bond of marriage.

In addition, God's creating both male and female in his own image indicated that both have a level playing field and an equality within the characteristics of God.

The image of God today seems up for grabs. Rainey et al. (2001) state that when those roles that God designed are distorted or unrecognizable, the glorification of God in our bodies cannot be possible. First Corinthians 6:20 states that we should "glorify God in [our] body and in [our] spirit, which are God's." Glorifying God in body and spirit can only be done when there is a strict following of His teachings regarding the role of both men and women. White (1894) stated, "sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the

image of God in man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life” (p. 63).

This altered identity-reality calls for a rebirth. John 3:7 says, “You must be born again.” “Rebirth” and “perfection” speak to the specific divine obligation for humanity and could allude in addition to the fallen definition of altered roles. Furthermore, the personal interpretations of perverted sexual identity are met with a biblical illustration of man’s seeking out alternative inventions after God has made man “upright” (Eccl 7:29). Ultimately, God’s ideal is that all men and women assent to the acceptable and righteous ideal found in Genesis 1:27, rather than suffer the reprimand (Ps 51:5) that will follow those who surrender to the “iniquity” we all have been born in (Prov 14:34).

The apostle Paul spoke to the roles for husband and wife (Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pet 3:1, 7). Ephesians 5:22 states, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” Scriptural references highlight the fact that God is interested in the wellbeing of mankind and a life in harmony with order. Many may suggest that the word “submit” would diminish one person while empowering the other. The obvious differences in men and women as described in 1 Peter 3:7 with women as “the weaker partner” does not brand one a lower human than the other. Genesis 1:27 already pointed out that both man and woman were created equally in God’s image. Galatians 3:28 implies that in Christ, men and woman are “one” in equality and empowerment. Nichol (1980, Vol. 6) clarifies this further by saying that in the Christian view of subordination, it in no way denotes inferiority in this context.

In the next verse, Paul states, “For the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph 5:23). Taken alone, this is a very powerful statement that strikes a nerve against modern

secular thinkers. Lepine (1999) suggests that any thought that there would be a hierarchical structure between a man and a woman would be unacceptable to critics based on the western view of individuality and personal empowerment ideology. Nevertheless, this statement rubs even Bible-believing Christians the wrong way because, as Christopherson (1999) states, many feel they need to acclimate their world-view to certain current cultural developments and adapt evident features of their faith to secular ideals. This revelation that religious people are compromising their foundational beliefs about God's design for headship in order to mingle and mix with current cultural changes is not surprising. Several years ago, the idea emerged that congregations should find a happy medium between accommodation and resistance (Smith, 1998). The descent down this slippery slope has been gaining momentum for a while.

The problem people have with this statement of Paul should be directed more at the abuse of the biblical idea, rather than at the idea itself (Lepine, 1999). The idea of headship is not about furthering self above others or authority over another (Henry, 1994). This headship that Paul is speaking of is modeled in the manner in which Christ loved the church in comparison to the secular constructs of authority (Eph 5:25). This form of headship centers attention on the way a "leader" is called to serve the "subordinate." Christ is portrayed as giving himself up for the church, nourishing the church sacrificially in the same way that husbands are instructed to support their wives (Richards & Richards, 1987). Richards and Richards (1987) state that Christian headship elevates the wife as the lawful aim of a husband's loving focus.

If the biblical model of having a male and female presence in the home reflects the characteristics of God, then having a single parent alone in the home would reflect a



critical imbalance in the system of order in the family. Without this headship and the full reflection of God's characteristics present, the impact on boys, as well as on society could be unsettling. This is why Psalm 68:5 states that God is "a father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows." A strong argument can be made for the multidimensional reason God sent Elijah to the widow woman in Zarephath. The church must be the Elijah for the single mothers in the community today. The widow was not an Israelite (Nichol, 1976, Vol. 2). It was a blessing for Elijah to be able to obtain sustenance, but this meeting was an opportunity for God to reveal his life-giving power, his compassion, and his unceasing watchfulness on those outside of his chosen nation (House, 1995).

Anderson (2017) indicates that the city of Gary, Indiana has lost more than half its population. Gary has less than half its population and nearly 60 % of the buildings in Gary are vacant. With the loss of jobs in the steel industry, there has been a sharp decline in church membership. It is time for the churches today to follow the calling of the Elijah message before it is too late. The churches need to be sustained but the community needs the help from the people of God. Malachi 4:5-6 states, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet ... and He shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers."

### **Raising Children**

There is a need for strong spiritual leadership when it comes to raising children. Just as the presence of Elijah was needed to restore health and hope, the biblical instruction is clear that parents need to take an active part in the rearing of their children. The Bible teaches that children should be trained (Prov 22:6). Training is the responsibility of parents. Parents today sit their children in front of the television or send

them off to day care because their priorities are elsewhere. Biblical guidance suggests that parents should take this training role to heart in order to keep a generation of youth to adults steadfast on the paths of righteousness.

While parents have a responsibility to teach, children have a responsibility to follow the guidance of the parent. Many parents today give their children too much freedom and a multitude of options. In many homes today children do whatever they want. Scripture says that children should “obey parents in the Lord” (Eph 6:1-3). As parents follow the holy principles of Scripture, children should heed and obey.

The Bible suggests that it is possible for parents and especially fathers to go too far with rules and restrictions. Biblical counsel instructs fathers to be careful not to “provoke anger” in the children (Eph 6:4). A father can “provoke anger” by taking things too far.

In summary, the Bible is specific about the balance needed in the home between the husband and the wife. There is no domination between the sexes, but biblically-speaking, there is a sharing of love and mutual respect with togetherness.

### **Prophetic Voice**

One of the most important values in the home that may often be overlooked is probably respect. This value is actually significant for both the husband and the wife. The word “respect” may actually have a different meaning depending on who is speaking and therefore, it must be defined in order to ensure that it is truly shared in the right manner. White (1952) stated that if God’s word is followed, the husband and the wife “will respect each other” (p. 15). This is not only an important value, but an important role.

White (1952) outlined detailed roles for husband and wife. She suggested that

God designed the family to function as a “firm” (p. 211). She also noted that children look up to the father as the key individual for “support and guidance” (p. 211). The mother does a lot to keep things going, but the father has a key role in guidance and support.

When White (1952) spoke about mothers, she did not suggest that the mother’s role is of a lower status. She said that the mother’s role is as the father’s equal. She added that the mother’s word should be considered as “law.”

White (1952) suggested that the mother has a special place in God’s heart. She did not indicate whether she was speaking to the challenge of the single mother or the mother with a spouse. She noted that God “knows the burdens of every mother’s heart and is her best friend in every emergency. . . He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares and anxieties. The Savior . . . will hear the mother’s prayers and bless her children” (p. 204).

Ellen White (1952) suggested that children should be cared for appropriately and should be placed “in a position favorable for the formation of a right character” (p. 187). Similarly, the state uses its authority to find appropriate dwelling for children who have been neglected or abused or who lack resources such as caring parents. White (1952) also illustrated the responsibility of the church to “take these destitute children, bring them up for Me” (p. 167). Nowhere did she specifically identify and give guidance for the challenge of the unwed mother or the irresponsible father.

The traditional family with a father and a mother is the ideal for every home. It truly takes a cooperative effort to be successful. White (1905) noted that both father and mother should work together “for the highest good for their children” (p. 394).

## **Outcome Justifies Method**

In ancient cultures, women who were single parents either through divorce or widowed had a very difficult time because there were few opportunities for support (Coomber, 2007). We notice in Scripture such a woman who struggled to survive after she lost her husband. The widow of Zarephath managed on her own as best she could, but the biblical narrative illustrates the real near-death struggle she had to deal with and how she was doing what she could to survive by gathering sticks for fuel.

In this narrative, we notice that this single mother was low on food and ultimately, was helpless when her son got sick. She was basically near the end of her rope. During this time of hardship, God called a spiritual leader to intervene and provide practical support in order to bring order and stability, restore her son, and provide the means of support in that home (1 Kgs 17:14).

The fact that Elijah restored this young man back to life should be enough. Some may raise the question regarding the method Elijah used to do this (1 Kgs 17:21). As far as biblical methodology goes regarding healing, there is no set standard. Naaman was offended by the method of having to dip in the Jordan River, rather than calling on the name of the Lord (2 Kgs 5:11). Jesus spat in the dirt and made some mud to place on the eyes of a blind man (John 9:6). Elijah stretched himself over the child and cried to the Lord for the boy's life (1 Kgs 17:21). In each instance, these individuals recovered and were returned to an improved and natural state of being.

My initial reflection on this different methodology brings to bear who Elijah was and who he used as a source to bring life back into the boy. Elijah was a "man of God" (1 Kgs 17:18). He was also the same man who, through the Word and power of God, told

Ahab there would be no rain (1 Kgs 17:1) and restored the widow's dwindling supplies with the abundance of oil and flour (1 Kgs 17:12). His character and actions are set in line with a sanctified life. That does not say that people do not change or that people do not have personal predilections. What it does say is that it is the faith of Elijah and his connection with the divine that allowed God to use him in a miraculous way in the first place. This is not an ordinary occurrence. This is such a meaningful factor that we only see the widow's displeasure with Elijah at the point of her son's death, not regarding any part of Elijah's method of reviving her son (1 Kgs 17:18). In fact, one scholar states, "Regardless of the method used, the important fact is that God raises the boy from the dead (House, 1995, p. 251). I personally do not see any cause to question the methodology Elijah used to revive the young man because God would not have used any process that would bring harm to this child, allow further pain to the widow, or contradict his message about the treatment of children throughout Scripture in the Old or New Testaments.

### **Impact of Absence**

It has been shown that some individuals who have been let down by their fathers tend to reject God. A young man in summer camp illustrated this point by saying, "How can I call God 'Father' when I do not know what a father is?" Balthazar (2007) indicates that it is difficult to call God "father" when one's father is absent. A multitude of youth struggle with their relationship with God. They also begin to take the blame themselves, asking, Why were we abandoned? What did we do wrong? Are we bad? Furthermore, the question must be asked, if the fathers who abandoned them, abused them, and neglected them go to heaven, why would they want to go there?

There are several other factors in play when a father is absent. A relationship with God can be damaged as previously mentioned, but self-esteem and a person's sexuality are also affected due to father absence. Seutter (as cited in Nicolosi, 1991) points out that the primary dynamic behind male homosexual desire is the failure of the father-son relationship, noting that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to have had a distant, hostile, or rejecting childhood relationship with their fathers or father figures. Seutter (2004) seems to suggest that the "father-of-origin" theory supports the former supposition. This theory says that much of a person's self-image, values, and relationships are formed by one's family-of-origin experiences.

There are always alternative perspectives when looking at a point of view as personal as father absence. From a spiritual perspective, we notice a further negative response to a man, but this time from a woman. This negative reaction was from a woman while she was in the midst of her perplexity over the apparent loss of her son. She had previously lost her husband to death. There is clear evidence of direct emotional response to her pain being specifically pointed toward Elijah and God himself (1 Kgs 17:18). From the widow's viewpoint, Elijah killed the boy and God is being held responsible for his demise.

When things were going wrong, blame was cast on this male figure and God who may have reminded her of so much loss. She seemed to direct her anger, rejection, and frustration at the ones she needed in her life the most. When fortunes turned and a male figure is positively connected, active, and present, it is evident that there is a very different response from everyone in the house. The widow recognized Elijah's authority and apparent contribution and the child's life is revived in him again (1 Kgs 17:24). The

connectedness families feel toward fathers and male figures in the home clearly has close ties to how we relate to God as Father, Provider, and Lord.

## **Restoration**

I have lived long enough to understand that bad things happen to people who do not deserve it. Life is not fair and it is just a matter of time before trouble rears its ugly head. People are imperfect and situations are imperfect. As a result of sin, the distortion of righteous relationships was brought upon all mankind. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

There is good news: God looks after the lost (Luke 15:3-6). He cares for the “fatherless,” the “widows,” and unwed mothers (Jas 1:27). There is hope for those who suffer brokenness and loss. One day, all will be made perfect, and the hurt from youth with absent fathers and the loneliness of unwed mothers will be healed. That perfection which was lost in Eden by Earth’s first parents will be restored one day. Just as the life of the widow’s son was restored, there will be full restoration in that day. One day in the new heaven and earth, “God shall wipe away all tears. . . for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:1, 3).

Self-surrender is required for this transcendent reunion. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Ps 51:17). “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20). The same thing that God requires, He was willing to give through his Son: “For God so loved the world that He gave” (John 3:16).

The ultimate plan of restoration has been in place from the beginning: “To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was

created” (White, 1923, p. 15). The “essence of the gospel is restoration” (White, 1940, p. 824).

## **Conclusion**

Ministry to families today must be relevant and proportionate to today’s needs. If the church is focused on intact families and a large portion of the families in the community are single parents, then they are missing the point all together. Old family-focused programs may not be a solution for today’s challenges. Family ministers must adapt if they are going to reach populations in the communities that need the most help. Rainey et al. (2001) suggest that church leaders need to ask intact families to include single-parent families in their lives. There needs to be some initiative on the part of church leaders to reach out and make a difference. They said, “We must step in and be a father to the fatherless, to help the ‘widows’ in their distress (Jas 1:27)” (p. 213).

I believe that my Man College program speaks directly to the need of the single parent, as well as the adolescent male. This program reaches out to the single parent family and offers training support with basic man skills for the boys, as well as financial, parenting, self-esteem, and relationship classes for single mothers. Purnell (2000) says that one of the greatest things we could do for single parents is to help a single woman know how to raise a boy. Churches need to let community people know they are the first resource when they need help.

## **Implementation Narrative**

The purpose of this project was to determine whether this project would help improve single mothers’ overall coping ability and elevate or positively impact their self-esteem and life quality while raising adolescent boys. The specific target group for this



project was single mothers on the south side of Chicago, along with those of northwest Indiana.

A single-parent-focused design on post cards was distributed. A total of 5,000 post cards were mailed to community members in South Chicago, as well as to northwest Indiana residents. Saturdays and Wednesdays were used to hand carry flyers door-to-door to invite single-parent families to the program. The church clerk and pastor made announcements during church and flyers were handed out following the announcements. The announcement went as follows:

There will be a Parental Management Seminar for Single Mothers that is designed to speak specifically to the challenges they face in raising boys. The task of this Parental Management Strategy for Single-Mothers with Adolescent Boys Seminar is to develop, implement, and evaluate this seminar that is designed to address problems such as low self-esteem, financial challenges, and barriers to successful relationships that are created by raising boys with absentee fathers. The identity of the single parents who choose to participate and share in this project will be protected for privacy purposes. A select number of professionals will help give presentations during this seminar. More details will be made available on the day of the seminar. Invite your friends and neighbors and our hope is that they will be blessed.

Flyers were also mailed out and handed out to friends and family from previous family-related programs held at the church.

There was very little concern that we would have more participants in attendance than we anticipated. In past conferences and evangelistic crusades where we had mailed out 7,000 flyers, we actually received a minimal response in attendance from the community. Mailing out 5,000 flyers to the community would insure that we would get a solid number of participants from the community in South Chicago. Over the course of four years of presenting community programs after mailing out flyers, there was no evidence to suggest that we would receive more participants than we could support.

Hamblin Hope Incorporated coordinated the mailing list with the post office. We

gave Hamblin Hope the zip codes we planned to target and they bulk-mailed the flyers to those zip codes of our target area.

There were two separate events in this program. The entire program covered a 30-day period with seminar training at the start of the 30 days and a follow-up program after the 30 days were completed. During the first session, the self-esteem questionnaire was administered followed by training seminars, a focus group questionnaire, and a focus group. The focus group lasted about one hour. Participants were encouraged to return 30 days later to participate in the second event for a follow-up and further training. The second event was similar to the first where there were preliminary training seminars, followed by a focus group questionnaire, group discussions, and a final self-esteem questionnaire.

Participants were seated in a single group for the following: (a) Welcome, (b) Introduction, (c) Informed Consent, (d) Icebreaker, (e) Self-Esteem Questionnaire, (f) Presentations, and (g) Focus groups: Participants were divided into two to three small groups. These focus groups centered their discussion on the presentations and the content in the questionnaire. Time was designated for participants to write their answers out on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected and used to account for possible responses that might be missed during the discussion. The presenters led the focus groups. The participants were seated in small groups for the following: (g) Questionnaire and collection of questionnaire, (h) Closing remarks, (i) Reminder about follow up program, and (j) Dismissal.

The outline of the seminar conducted on two separate Sundays over a period about a month is as follows.

Table 1

*Seminar Outline*

<b>Session One (Day One)</b>	<b>Session Two (Day Thirty)</b>
Registration	Registration
Welcome	Welcome
Brief Introduction	Brief Introduction
Informed Consent	Informed Consent
Self-Esteem Questionnaire	Session One: Three Things about Men
Icebreaker	Break
Presentations	Session Two: Doing It Alone
Session One: Mistakes in Relationships	Break
Break	Session Three: Self-Esteem Part II
Session Two: Financial Freedom	Focus Group Questionnaire
Break	Focus Groups
Icebreaker: Self-Esteem	Self-Esteem Questionnaire
Session Three: Children and Obedience	Gift Cards Give Away
Session Four: Health Insurance Info	Questions and Closing Remarks
Focus Group Questionnaire	
Collection of Questionnaires	
Gift Card Give Away	
Questions and Reminder of Program	

The presentations were led by professionals with a vast knowledge base related to issues that impact single mothers and family issues. The list of professionals who led out were as follows: (a) P. C. Willis Sr. and P. C. Willis Jr., Pastors; (b) Dr. Emerson Miller, Counselor; (c) Dr. Trinoda Radcliffe, Physician; (d) Rebecca Stephenson, Social Worker; (e) Dr. Ernestine Johnson, Financial Specialist; and (f) Evelyn Thomas, Educator.

Each focus group consisted of 8–10 people. During each group interview, a moderator asked participants to respond to a predetermined number of open-ended questions and then listen to hear what people have to say. Group interviews are primarily about listening, but also about being non-judgmental and systematic with the information

people share. In order to maintain confidentiality during the discussions, participants were identified by initials. Notes were taken to capture the sentiments of the discussion, but were destroyed once the study was complete. Other respondents would be instructed to maintain confidentiality.

Attendees included single mothers with boys and single mothers with girls. They were informed that participation in this study was completely voluntary. All participants were invited to be a part of the project activities, but only single mothers with adolescent boys were permitted to fill out the questionnaire. The information gathered from mothers with adolescent boys was used in the study.

All participants were allowed to join the focus groups. Only information gathered from mothers with adolescent boys was used in the study. All those who participated partially/fully and remained until the end of the seminar had the opportunity to receive gift cards. To receive the gift card prize, several questions related to the presentations were asked at the end of the program. The first person to raise her hand to each question and successfully answer the question could receive a gift card prize immediately. Each participant could answer a maximum of two questions correctly in order to allow other participants a chance to win. There were no guarantees that everyone would win and receive a card. The cards were simply a gift of thanks for participation in this important project.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter includes a short review of the ministry context in which this study takes place and the development of a seminar specifically designed to address issues of single mothers with at-risk adolescent males. This chapter exposed the reality that above

all, what single mothers need to remember and recognize is that physical and emotional well-being is centered on making small but consistent positive choices. This chapter also illustrated that the church can step in and be a help to the mothers and a father to the “fatherless.”

The intervention was developed with a concise overview of reviewed literature that addresses single parenting with adolescent males and a review of the theological foundations, which bolster the project.

The implementation of the project has been clearly described, including a succinct summary of the seminars designed to provide relevant enrichment to the participants.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION AND RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to advance parental management skills of single mothers who are specifically raising boys in a fatherless home. This project may equip single parents with support information and specific skills to face financial challenges, relationship barriers, and discipline issues in the home. This project may help single mothers identify and address self-esteem challenges that may plague their potential for personal and parental satisfaction. The information we gathered through the questionnaire and the focus group might be used to educate single-parent families regarding this seminar program.

#### **Description of the Research**

A single-parent-focused design on post cards was used to mail 5,000 flyers to community members in South Chicago, as well as in northwest Indiana. A total target group of 24 single parents responded and participated in the presentations, questionnaire and focus group. One hundred percent of the responding population was African-American because of the dense African-American presence in South Chicago and northwest Indiana.

The purpose, potential risks, procedure, and benefits of this project, questionnaire, and focus group were described in the consent form. By signing the form, they agreed to be digitally recorded, as well as to participate in the questionnaire. They also

acknowledged that they were at least 18 years old and agreed to participate in the focus group interview.

There were two separate events in this program. The entire program covered a 30-day period with seminar training at the start of the 30 days. Additional seminar training, a questionnaire, and focus groups served as a follow-up to the previous training at the end of the 30-day period.

During the first session, there were training seminars and a questionnaire. The participants were encouraged to return 30 days later to participate in the second event. In the second event, the participants received seminar training, a questionnaire, and a focus group discussion based on specific questions and the seminar.

Participants were seated in a single group for the following: (a) Welcome; (b) Introduction; (c) Informed Consent; (d) Icebreaker; (e) Presentations; (f) Questionnaire; and (g) Focus Group. For the focus group, participants were divided into two small groups. These focus groups were encouraged to center their discussion on the presentations and the content in the questionnaire. Selected presenters led the focus groups. Time was given for participants to write their answers on the questionnaire and the survey prior to the group discussion. The questionnaire was collected and used to account for unique responses; (h) Questionnaire and Collection of Questionnaire; (i) Closing remarks; and (j) Dismissal.

The participants in the study were made up of three major groups: one group consisted of mothers who were never married; another group consisted of mothers who had children from a previous marriage; and a third and much smaller group of mothers

were married, but whose spouse was not present in the household or was completely absent from family interaction.

The setting of the focus group and questionnaire was the church sanctuary. Each participant was allowed time to fill out the questionnaire before the group dialogue portion began.

Once the questionnaire was completed and collected, the moderator divided the large group into two small groups. There were no major differences in the two groups. All participants were single mothers with similar family configurations, dimensions of interest, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. If there was a difference at all, it was in level of education. Other than in the matter of educational level, these groups should be considered homogeneous.

One group was selected to be recorded by the sound technician since both groups were in the sanctuary. Each group's thoughts and opinions were reflected on in the questionnaire to capture any variance from the discussion.

## **Outcomes**

### Self-Esteem Inventory

The first self-esteem questionnaire was given before the presentations on day one. The second self-esteem questionnaire was given following the training seminar on day two. During both seminar sessions, there was a class that addressed self-esteem specifically.

Attending self-esteem classes and other classes related to parental management, personal finances, and time management is all about making positive changes and seeking growth and self-care. The increase of self-esteem and the positive impact of this



project answer the question, “Does a training in finance, time management, self-esteem and parental management make a difference in the level of self-esteem in single mothers?”

Eleven out of the 24 participants who wrote responses to the self-esteem survey attended both presentations. Following the coping skills classes and self-esteem classes, the majority of single parents scored with a positive self-view. In Appendix B, Self-esteem Index Results show the following: 2 out of 11 have a significantly low self-view following all presentations and actually increased their score, recording an even lower self-esteem. One out of 11 had low self-esteem, but her self-esteem improved after 30 days to a positive self-view. Seven out of 11 improved their self-view following the presentations. Eight out of 11 had a good view of themselves following the presentations.

Over the course of 30 days, the majority maintained a positive self-view. Only a few still registered low self-esteem scores.

### Focus Group

The group discussion began with the moderator asking the questions and allowing the single-parent participants to respond in a natural way. Only one small group was recorded in order to document verbatim each response and reaction valuable skills.

**Moderator:** 1. What would you say are your top challenges as a single parent?  
What would the top challenge be for you?

**Parent 1:** Finance

**Moderator:** Can you come over a little closer? Ok, we have one that says Finance. That’s a real issue. Does anyone have any comments on that?

**Parent 2:** If you have one parent, you have one paycheck. If you have two parents you have the potential for two paychecks. At least there is a support network to balance out everything else.

**Parent 3:** Sometimes you have two parents and you still only have one paycheck.  
(laughter)

**Parent 4:** Another challenge would be physical duties, like cutting the grass, shoveling the snow, washing the car. Those types of things where you used to have someone else do them.

**Moderator:** Ok, that is kind of serious.

**Parent 1:** If you don't have the support of your partner raising the children, it's hard.

**Moderator:** So, you are saying lack of support raising of children?

**Parent 1:** You are not on one page or in one accord with the other parent.

**Moderator:** Yes?

**Parent 2:** Stress.

**Moderator:** What are you saying about stress?

**Parent 2:** Stress, trying to take on dual roles. Because you don't have that other parent, you have to take on dual roles, which increases stress.

**Moderator:** I heard someone say about single parents, "They are the mom and the dad."

**Parent 5:** Yes, I am not saying it's the same thing, but I'm the mom and the dad.

**Moderator:** Is that reality?

**Parent 2:** That's reality

**Moderator:** I am not saying you are wrong, but in a sense, you are filling the shoes.

**Parent 4:** I'm not saying you can't raise boys to be men or girls to know what a male's role is, but I know the challenge is there to try to appeal to that need.

**Moderator:** So in essence, this brings stresses. If I can give a little plug here, this is why I developed the Man College Program especially for single mothers with boys because it may be easier for a mother with a daughter to coach mentor or train because they can pick up what you do and follow in your footsteps, but how do you teach a boy how to go to the bathroom, how do you teach a boy how to talk to girls from a male perspective because there is a different edge. How do you teach a boy how to stand? That is why you really see boys sometimes end up standing like their mothers—not because they are gay, but because that is all they have had to role model for them.

**Parent 6:** Education, keeping them in school.

**Moderator:** That is a top challenge. Is it because if they don't have fathers, they drop out?

**Parent 7:** No, well I told my boys if they were going to drop out they could not live here. I told them, there will be no drop-outs.

**Moderator:** Ok, you told them that if they dropped out, they could not stay here? That is a serious line of demarcation.

**Parent 8:** Sometimes there is another problem with single mothers with daughters. Sometimes these mothers allow these boys from single parent homes who may be kicked out to move in with the daughters in a single parent home setting.

**Moderator:** Have you seen a lot of that?

**Parent 5:** I have seen it where the single mother lets her son have his girlfriend stay over. They claim nothing is going on.

(Laughter)

**Parent 9:** People that do that don't know Christ. My oldest son in New York City; we lived in a project building. I didn't know he was sneaking out of the house down stairs and another mother was allowing him to come there because she allowed her older daughter to have her boyfriend in there. My first grandchild was aborted because the mother allowed it. The second time she got pregnant she made this a habit. This is because she didn't know Christ and didn't know he was sneaking out of the house. I was asleep because I used to work. My mother got up at 4 am and I got up, you know, and he was sneaking out of the house.

**Moderator:** Wow! Ok. Any other top challenges that single moms face?

**Parent 8:** Time

**Moderator:** Time! Time for what?

**Parents:** Time for everything. Time for the child, time for work. Everything.

**Parent 10:** You know, my parents were married for 33 years and they got divorced. My youngest brother and my brother that was born next to him, two children left at home in that single parent setting—it became quite a challenge for my mother. They were good boys, but they were still boys. One of the things that I admired about my mother, my mother said, “This is my house.” She said, “When you cannot follow the rules in this house, then you are going to have to go.” My brother Michael, brilliant mind, graduated from Indiana University. He came home from one semester and my mother told him to wash the dishes and so he felt that because he was a man now and because he

had a college education, this that and the other, that he didn't have to obey the rules in my mother's house. My mother had a broom stick, and so she popped him upside the head with the broom stick. She said, "The day you graduate from college, I will sit your bags outside this door." That is exactly what she did. I admire my mother for that. She didn't let my brothers take her power away and sometimes, sometimes, I don't know how to say it, sometimes you have to take your house. You have to take your house back and don't let your kids take it from you.

**Moderator:** So that leads to answer the next question: How do you deal with these challenges? You said, "Take your house back."

(Laughter)

**Moderator:** It sounds like getting in control of these situations. "Take your house back," I like that.

Anyone else have anything to comment on how you deal with these challenges of time, finance, stress, education? How do you deal with some of these challenges? What are some other solutions we can come up with?

**Parent 9:** I know this may sound corny, but if I don't pray I am in trouble, because I don't have enough time. Even if you are structured, you have to do certain things, then you have these unexpected events that come up. You better start praying. I have had so many crises, having to be in too many places at the same time, and both are important. You know what? You can only pray and be calm about it because you can't do no more than what you can do.

**Parent 11:** I can't beat myself over what I am not able to do. So, for example, and I tell my kids, I had to cut off the cable. My boys were not too happy because they lost

ESPN and they can't watch their basketball like they wanted to, but wanting to give your kids everything. I didn't have cable growing up, so I wanted to give them cable as a good mother.

**Parents:** Right, right! (Laughter)

**Parent 11:** So, I don't have it. Mommy's priorities are somewhere else. I am trying to do something else, so that extra \$50, I need to save it because this is what I need to do now and just not beat myself over it.

**Moderator:** So, what I heard you say is, "Changing priorities."

**Parent 11:** Yes

**Moderator:** Ok. Yes ma'am.

**Parent 5:** That is true. I was just going to say along with that. I never got cable period because if you have it, you better sit down and watch that TV. We didn't have time to watch TV. You don't have money to give to someone and you are not even using the service. Ok, so when Aaron got grown, the first thing he did was go and get cable and a phone and now he complains how high cable is. He tells everyone, my mom and dad, neither of them would get cable and so that is what he felt like he had to have. Now that you get older, you realize that it's not as important as what you thought it was when you were a kid.

**Moderator:** Yes, right.

**Parent 1:** Thinking about what the other parent said, I stay in a low-income area. A lot of the reasons why these single parents allow these other children to stay with them (boyfriend or girlfriend) is for financial reasons. They do it for extra money. This is what they do to get by. Times are hard and the way the system is, it's created to keep people

down, you know what I am saying? I am not saying it's right, but that is how it is. One question: If your child is an adult teen, you try and give them guidance. Are you wrong for this? Are you being judgmental, hypocritical?

**Moderator:** Ladies, what do you think?

**Parent 12:** You never stop being a parent.

**Parent 10:** I have a son who is 49 and I have never stopped being a parent and having an influence in their life.

**Parent 12:** If they don't listen, it's on them. You have a role to play as a parent to tell them, because you love them. You don't want to see them hurt. But now a lot of times that they are an adult or have an adult mindset that "you can't tell me nothing." I am going to tell them anyway. If they don't want to hear it, they don't have to, but at least I told them and I did my part.

**Parent 8:** You will notice the older they get, they begin to listen, because they learn that what you told them in the first place was right.

**Parents:** (Laughter.)

**Parent 9:** That is the important key. You have to earn the respect and trust of your child. That goes for anybody that has to listen to you. Otherwise you are just beating a dead horse.

**Parent 11:** I can remember as a young adult, and I have been thinking about this more recently as I am almost 40, but I just wish . . . My parents trusted me a little too much to make my decisions myself and I just wish, "Tell me what you expect of me." And so, I had a talk with Carson, I need to tell you how I see you at 21. This is what I want you to do. If I don't tell him, I can't assume he knows what I want for his life. And

so, I think you have to tell them what you expect, even if they are 21, 22, because my grandmother said, we are children for a while because it takes us a long time to grow up. I think that even at 21, 22, we still don't know everything. Carson told me the other night, "You always think you are right." I said, "Yep, you got it." I said, "I am for you."

**Parent 9:** My mother put a lot of trust in me. I ended up making mistakes and she should have governed me more. I remember I felt so bad. She trusted me so well. I called her up and I was in New York City and I said . . . she asked me where I was and I said, "I am at the library." Um mum, I wasn't at the library. And I felt rotten, because I never really lied like that.

**Parent:** Did you learn from your mistakes?

**Parent 9:** Yes, I learned from my mistakes.

**Moderator:** How important is education?

**Parents:** Very important!

**Parent 13:** If you don't have education, you are not going to know nothing.

**Moderator:** Why did you say that?

**Parent 13:** Because if you don't have education then, like if you are trying to get a job or something, you are not going to know what to do.

**Moderator:** Have you tried to get a job?

**Parent 13:** Yeah.

**Moderator:** Was the process challenging?

**Parent 13:** Yeah.

**Parent 2:** Society is steadily growing. You have 2-year-olds who can work an iPad better than some adults. I am looking at society now . . . if we don't have the



education that we need, even if you don't get to the 12th grade, you need at least a high school diploma.

**Parent 10:** My daughter has a master's degree and she said the job market is so tight. She said, "Mama, I thought my education would get me in the door. The job market is so tight now." So, if you have a high school education, take it a step further. You need all you can get.

**Moderator:** Because the market is tight and because people don't have jobs, they have time to go to school. They may not be smarter than you; they just have nothing else to do but go to school.

**Parent 9:** That means if it gets tight, you better find out which career is hiring.

**Parent 5:** You just can't go get whatever just because you like it. You have to see what the job market has before you decide.

**Parent 2:** My baby son decided to go get his Masters and he applied to US Steel and they told him he didn't have enough education, that he was not qualified for that job. As it turned out, he had too much education and they were afraid he might take over someone else's job.

**Parent 9:** That's exactly what it is.

**Parent 14:** Education is important. It seems those that don't have it get caught up in drugs and getting killed on the street.

**Parent 1:** I am looking at it in a totally different way. My brothers, they both graduated and came out . . . one was up for pro football and the other one wrote a book. Both of them ended up dying, but God was over their life. My point is, you can have all the education in this world, but if you don't have the education of godliness, what does it

matter if you gain the whole world and lose your soul. When you check out of here and you don't know when that time is, we are all on borrowed time. Are you right with Christ? I look at life in a totally different way.

**Moderator:** Excellent.

**Parent 15:** I'm going along the lines of what you just said. I am going to school for my PhD. You can have all the education you want in the world. Recognize that education is just not in this institution of an academic setting. You can learn from multiple venues. You can learn from church. You can learn from talking to a friend. You can learn on the street. There are so many ways to gain knowledge. We just need to be life-long learners. Continuing to grow. Never stop.

**Parent 11:** When everybody's mind immediately shifted to the academics, the Masters, the PhD's, but education is just about learning, learning life. The saying, "When you know better, you do better," it's just important to know better. We need to teach our children to be constantly seeking knowledge. Especially now with Google, you can find anything. My son asks me something and I tell him to Google it. He has more access to knowledge than I had. I had to go to the library, get the card catalogue. He has a tablet and he can type in the question. That's education to me and just knowing better so you can do better.

**Parent 9:** My mother always told me this, "Get an education because there is one thing, no matter how poor you are, they can't take it away from you." My oldest brother wasn't raised by my mother. He had what they called a "mothers wit." He wasn't able to read like me. My brother built an extension on his house, very good with his hands, and he did have a job down in South Carolina. The thing is, she also said, "Do the best that

you can, with what you've got." That's what's wrong with society today. A formal education, like one of you said, is not everything. Like I am studying now how Sweden does it. Ellen White says that children should not go to school until they are seven or eight. In Sweden, they do not teach them anything formally about math, A, B, C's, and when they start at seven years old, their math level is much higher. Like the Montessori system, when we use our hands and just do simple things, we are going to have to learn to do that in these last days. We, as Seventh-day Adventists, have a gold mine. When you don't have a job, you better start creating one. When you don't have an income, start creating one. The food that we eat, why aren't we making this bread, vegetarian chicken and chili. We are going to have to do that in these last days. I am sorry, I know I am going off on a tangent.

**Moderator:** We have a building next door. We need to frame it for an income opportunity. Someone can sell baked goods. Another can promote a day care or use it for banquets. Sometimes you have to create your own wealth. You have to create your own opportunities. Some people don't have the finances to go to school. Some of these young kids have come up with businesses and they are now young millionaires and CEO's of their own companies.

**Parent 10:** I guess by now most of you know how much I love my mother. My mother had a high school education. My mother amazed me. She had such a brilliant mind. I feel that if I lived another 50 years I would never be as smart as her. Someone asked me what college did my mother graduate from. I told them, she didn't graduate from college. She was surprised because she had such a brilliant mind. I am thinking about what someone said today. You said, "When you know better, you do better." She

gave her life to the Lord and I feel that made a huge difference.

**Moderator:** We have about 10 minutes so I want to get to these last two questions.

**Parent 9:** I want put a plug in there for that building over there. You want to make some money? People need to know how to eat healthy and how to make it taste good. I had everything ready to bring someone in from South Carolina, but there are a bunch of good cooks here. You need to have a Taste of Vegetarian every quarter for the public. Food like music is universal. You could make so much money and have all kinds of religions and people coming.

**Moderator:** Thank you. We have two more questions and I want to end at 5 pm. OK? I need my single parents to really jump in to finalize these answers. How has being a single parent impacted your self-view? Where are you in that reality as a single parent?

You have been quiet. Talk to me. I see your mind has been working (Singled out a particular parent).

**Parent 16:** My daughter will be 17 on September 10th, my son will be 15 on October the 9th. My daughter is a basketball player. She is on my phone. When she was in 7th grade, she was playing with the 9th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders. She just came back from Atlanta, Georgia reviewing all the different colleges. The school paid for it, but I had to pay the rest. I am a single parent. I am seven years' cancer-free on February 14, 2015. I have been taking care of both of my kids by myself and a once-a-month check of \$763 dollars ain't nothing.

**Parent 9:** You did good!

**Parent 16:** I had stopped going to church but I started coming back and like I said, two kids, taking care of them by myself is real hard. My daughter will be in 11th grade next year and she is talking about she wants this, that, wants to go to the prom, this and that. I am saving it up and she is a basketball player, she runs track, plays softball and she plays volleyball. My son, it's so hard for him. He wants to be a football player, but my daughter wants to be a WNBA basketball star. I told my daughter you need to look for a summer job. She said, "No, Mom, I want to stay with you until I am 18." I said, "You can stay on a college campus." She said, "Mom, since you are still sick, I want to stay with you and one day you can have a butler and maid." I said, "If that is your dream, I am not going to knock it down. If you don't want to work, that is on you." She said, she will work when she is a WNBA basketball player. My mom died of cancer and that is how I got it.

**Moderator:** You have been doing your best?

**Parent 16:** You can say it like that but let me tell you this, "I am still the mom and dad and I don't care what anybody says." I am still the mom and dad. I took care of them when they were born. I was there when they were sick. I took them to the doctor, the hospital and I am still by their bedside and still to this day I am still with them.

**Moderator:** That is awesome. Thank you for what you do.

**Parent 8:** Me being a single parent was very stressful. It was very hard. I had no one to turn to. When you get grown you want to do things your own way after your parents told you don't do it that way. I had to turn to God. It was either fall or seek out this God that everybody was praising. And I thank God that once after I sought after him, you know, he turned the light on for me. He opened the door for me.

**Moderator:** That is awesome. Ok, we are going to go to our last question. How does having free time for yourself or having it or not having it impact your daily life? We kind of touched on that a bit already.

**Parent 9:** I am unique. I don't even have free time.

**Parents:** I understand what you are saying.

**Parent 9:** I can't watch TV. I can't do anything because of all I have to do. I am encouraged knowing that in a couple years I will have this degree over with and then I am going to be free, so that is the only thing to keep me going.

**Moderator:** That is light at the end of the tunnel. Anybody else?

**Parent 11:** I had to learn not to beat myself up if I wanted to do something for me. I had a birthday a few weeks ago and my mom took me shopping. My mom said, "I am not going to give you anymore gift cards because you don't spend them on yourself." So, she doesn't give me money anymore. If she wants something for me, she will go get it and get it for me. It was hard because I was always thinking about the children. It's still a struggle, but I have to begin to understand it's OK if I want to run out and get an ice cream cone; I can do that. I do everything else for them, so I can spend about 30 minutes on me.

**Parent 12:** I had to learn how to take time out for myself because I was the kind of person who would always give, give, give. And when it came to my children, I need to do for them because no one else will do for them. I am very independent. That was doubly hard because I didn't want anyone doing what I could do. So, I would try to do everything until one day I got very sick. I promised the Lord from that point that I was going to take care of myself after that, after I got sick and got back on my feet. So, my

children were grown and got married and had their own children. They were so used to going everywhere with me, I said I am going to Puerto Rico and they said “Can we go?” (Laughter) They were asking very seriously about that, too. They said, “We will stay out of your way and you will not have to watch the children or anything,” and I said, “No.” I learned how to say “No” because this is my time and I need to go and have time to myself and enjoy myself and I will tell you about it when I get back.

### **Summary From Groups**

Top challenges identified in the focus group were as follows: (a) Finance and employment; (b) Raising children and discipline: Finance and raising children were identified equally as top challenges; (c) Lack of time; and (d) Lack of support and/or lack of a partner.

Regarding top challenges, I would have predicted that “lack of support/lack of partner” might have been right up there at the top of answers, but it was one of the lowest inputs during the discussion. Upon reflection, I got the sense that these single mothers had accepted the reality of their situation and there were much more important concerns than something they could not control.

The top coping strategies recommended by participants were as follows: (a) Prayer: An overwhelming number of participants identified “prayer” as the number one coping strategy. Prayer indicates spirituality is a key component in survivability for single mothers; (b) Do what you can and/or face it; (c) Manage use of time; and (d) Invite positive male influence.

A common theme that came out of the discussion was that prayer was a chosen method for coping. I am not sure if the location of the seminar had any influence on this

answer, but most certainly, spirituality would appear to be an important resource. In my research, I did not find, nor did I look for single mothers' views of spirituality. One of the single mothers stated, "If I don't pray, I am in trouble." I think this aspect is worth exploring to determine how increased spirituality with single mothers might influence their self-esteem.

The majority of the participants viewed their situation as a single parent as "hard," "difficult," and "need help." Only a few stated that their situation made them feel more "resilient," "positive," and "strong." I was surprised that four of the participants felt that being a single parent was empowering. However, I learned through listening that because they had found a way to survive the challenge, they viewed their situation in a positive perspective.

It is probably not a common view to think that single mothers are interested in education because for the most part, going to school to pursue a degree when they have small children is very difficult. While they did acknowledge that there are various forms of educational fields, I got the sense that they all felt that education was valuable and if given the chance, those who did not have their degrees would go and get one.

Financial consideration is a constant reality for single parents. One parent indicated that some single parents may compromise their moral principles to make sure there is enough money in the house. An example that was given was allowing the girlfriend to sleep over with the son. Several parents felt that no matter what the financial status was, morality would not be compromised. I observed that there were groups of single mothers at various education and financial levels. In my opinion, the parents' view



of morality and/or ethics seemed to reflect the status of the parent's position financially and educationally.

One parent mentioned that we need to “earn the respect of your child.” I found this view clashing with my own view, but I do not believe the other parents really had time to unpack this perspective. Otherwise I think they would have agreed that children are the ones who need to earn the parents' respect. The conversation turned to the fact that several of the parents were very lenient and permissive. This “hands-off” approach of the parent allowed the child to get into situations that might not otherwise have occurred had they been a bit stricter. I got the sense that they wished their parents had been stricter. Upon reflection, I personally believe that being strict with the important things has a long-term positive effect if a parent leaves plenty of room for freedom in the things that do not really matter. I believe that children, in general, need structure, and boys need it even more.

### **Conclusions**

With respect to the findings in this study, the significant impression the lack of self-esteem has on the entire person cannot be overstated. Schiraldi (2007) states that those lacking self-esteem are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, problem anger, chronic pain, immune-suppression, and a variety of other distressing physical and psychological symptoms. If the absence of a solid self-esteem can be this detrimental, the second and third order effects it has on family members and children in the home can only be imagined.

If self-esteem is not improved, the cycle is passed down through the presence emotional immaturity which, in turn, could lead to neglect of the children. Engel (2006)

says that children who have been neglected or deprived of the things they need—namely affection, acknowledgement, and protection—are left with some major holes in their development and in their soul. Therefore, low self-esteem is passed down to the children.

This research project provides these single parents with an opportunity to break the cycle of generational low self-esteem. The single mothers who improved their self-esteem due to this study may finally be a force-multiplier for their families for years to come.

Single mothers who participated in both seminars and the questionnaire over a period of 30 days not only recorded a positive self-view, but the majority of those who participated in both events also improved their self-view. Only a small minority remained low in self-view or got worse.

I believe that while the seminar classes were beneficial for the majority of the participants, others still may return to the overwhelming challenge of low income options, child discipline challenges, and time constants.

The focus group provided an opportune environment for content-rich reflections on the questions during the discussion. Some of the dialogue drifted into other content that departed from the direct questions, but further discussion shed light on important concerns to them at the moment. Allowing the conversation to flow naturally was shown to be important to the process of discovery on subject matter that may not have been unearthed otherwise. In future seminars, more time should be left for dialogue in areas of interest important to the participants as they answer other questions. Spontaneous dialogue may have led to some confession and soul-healing. The opportunity to dialogue in a safe environment proved to be encouraging, supportive, and enlightening.

Not all the participants verbalized their responses but they all wrote down their personal reactions to the qualitative questions independent of the open discussion portion. The qualitative questionnaire results reflect the answers from participants on both event days.

### **Recommendations**

This ministry project should continue. It can help inform, educate, provide community, and promote self-esteem and coping skills for single mothers with adolescent sons.

There are several recommendations I would add considering the self-esteem portion of the research and they are as follows:

- Find a larger sample of single mothers who can participate in the self-esteem portion of the inventory. While it is difficult to predict how many people will attend a seminar like this, it would be helpful to have more samples to compare results.
- Shorten the period of time between the two seminars. If the parental strategy training is not implemented throughout that period, single parents may forget the key lessons, falling back into the old methods of survival and lose the value of self-care that would promote a positive self-esteem.
- Increase the number of practical exercises that would promote self-esteem.
- Follow up with the participants between the two events for the following reasons: (a) To ensure they are following the teaching points their learned; (b) To facilitate support and provide further guidance as needed in their development; and (c) To encourage them to return and participate in the follow up seminar.

I would also recommend adding a training component for adolescent males. I believe that the parental management strategy may have been improved if the training had been dual focused. Having only one side of the single-parent family participate in the exercise still does not answer the question, “Do adolescent males have an improved parental relationship and knowledge base now that the single mothers have had this training.” I believe that adolescent males should also receive some instructional training. According to Waltz (2007), mothers should foster their sons’ sense of their own masculinity by surrounding them with teachers, coaches, and other male figures who can become important models in their lives. The Man College Basic Training program is such an instructional program that focuses specifically on the needs of adolescent males. This program teaches basic man-skills to adolescent males ages 9-17 who may not have positive male figures such as fathers to teach them the basic skills young men need in order to be equipped appropriately for adulthood.

Masters (2015) states that when the admonition to “be a man” is stated, boys or men of any age feel degraded for not measuring up in some way. This, in a way, shames them into “driving them into behaviors that estrange them from much of their humanity” (p. 185). The natural reaction to that kind of shame could lead to behaviors such as aggression, violence, anti-social behavior, or anything that does not reflect behavior less than masculine. Holden (2017) notes that boys raised by single parents are more likely to be predisposed toward psychological disturbances. The pressure placed on young men to prove their masculinity, those who may not be equipped to process the full meaning of being a man, can raise psychological challenges.

Mandara, Murray, and Joyner (2005) indicate that father absent boys from

particularly low income backgrounds perceive themselves to be less masculine. This mindset could set them up to be bullied, and to be the target for optional gender descriptions they might not otherwise have considered had they experienced the strong presence of their father or consistent positive male influence. According to Brown (2017), several popular social media sites offer alternative ways to describe gender other than male or female. Examples of these alternative descriptions and or sexual orientations are as follows: Bigendered, Bi-Dyke, Boidyke, Bro-sis, Cross Dresser, Cross-Living, Femme Dyke, Fetishistic Transvestite, Gender Illusionist, Gender-Bender, Gender-Blender, Intersex, Male Impersonator, Metamorph, No-gendered, Omnisexual, Transitioning, Transmale, Two-Spirit, Ze. Chandlers' (2017) view fits this scrip well. He states that in a postmodern world, it is acceptable for a man to determine truth for his own existence, even in relation to gender.

I certainly empathize with those who sincerely struggle with erroneous perceptions of their masculinity or those seeking understanding of who they really are. However, there is a push to celebrate a lifestyle of masculinity that does not meet the biblical distinction between the sexes articulated in the language of Genesis 1:27. The celebration of the recent academy award winning film "Moonlight" that portrays an African American young man finding love in another young man is a commentary on the emasculation of African American men from having little to no positive contact with their fathers. The context of the film describes the young adolescent "Chiron" as gay. He lives with his crack-addicted, single mother. The main young character presents as shy and withdrawn, and is neglected by his mother because of her habits and addictions. He is bullied and called names. This confused, neglected boy, with no positive male figure in

his life seeks comfort in another male with a similar background as his. The celebration of this film is disrespectful to the real crisis in the African American community where 68 % of families are led by single mothers (Kunjufu, 2007). Perhaps celebrating and elevating an effeminate Black male is the only path to acceptance for African American men in America because they are more non-threatening than the others who are 2–3 times more likely to land in jail or be wrongfully convicted for violent crimes (Chokshi, 2017).

Myers (2016) points out that men are facing a masculinity crisis. He suggests that a previous definition of what it means to be a real man, such as “strong,” “provider,” “authority,” “ultimate decision maker,” and “economically dominate” (para. 2), needs to be redefined to a more appropriate form of masculinity, which is more gender-equal. This “gender-equal” ideology does not only embody the focus on fairness toward women. Underlining this “gender equality” is a push for gender-neutral and gender-fluid men away from “outdated notions of masculinity” (“The future of men is women” section, para. 2).

Having programs for adolescent boys provides them socialization with key male leaders that can point these boys back to the original plan for man as God intended. This is a force multiplier for a healthy and healing society. The Man College Basic Training program is restorative. With Man College training, they would also be surrounded by a cadre of male role models, mentors, and veterans who can model behaviors and teach and provide experiences that guide them through what basic man skills and masculinity look like.

Finally, I believe that both the single-parent program and the Man College Basic Training program can work in harmony to support this unique population. These single-parent-model results should encourage churches and communities to provide more support for this population.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRES



## **Single Mothers Focus Group**

### **Open Ended Questions**

1. As a single parent family, do you experience challenges? What are they?
2. How do you cope with those different challenges?
3. How has being a single parent impacted your self-view? Would you consider it low or high?
4. Is being in a single parent family different from a two-parent family? If so how?
5. How important is education? Please explain.
6. How important is free time for yourself and how does having it or not impact your daily life?

## **Test Your Self-Esteem.**

How do you feel about yourself? Is self-image or self-concept a problem for you? This simple questionnaire can help you evaluate how you see yourself.

### **INDEX OF SELF-ESTEEM**

By Walter Hudson

This questionnaire is designed to measure how you see yourself. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by placing a number by each one as follows:

- 1 - Rarely or none of the time
- 2 - A little of the time
- 3 - Sometime
- 4 - A good part of the time
- 5 - Most or all of the time

- 1.I feel that people would not like me if they really knew me well.
- 2.I feel that others get along much better than I do.
- 3.I feel that I am a beautiful person.
- 4.When I am with other people I feel they are glad I am with them.
- 5.I feel that people really like to talk with me.
- 6.I feel that I am a very competent person.
- 7.I think I make a good impression on others.
- 8.I feel that I need more self-confidence.
- 9.When I am with strangers I am very nervous.
- 10.I think that I am a dull person.
- 11.I feel ugly.
- 12.I feel that others have more fun than I do.
- 13.I feel that I bore people.
- 14.I think my friends find me interesting.
- 15.I think I have a good sense of humor.
- 16.I feel very self-conscious when I am with strangers.
- 17.I feel that if I could be more like other people I would have it made.
- 18.I feel that people have a good time when they are with me.
- 19.I feel like a wallflower when I go out.
- 20.I feel I get pushed around more than others.
- 21.I think I am a rather nice person.
- 22.I feel that people really like me very much.
- 23.I feel that I am a likeable person.
- 24.I am afraid I will appear foolish to others.
- 25.My friends think very highly of me.

Scoring: questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 25 are reverse scored. This means you reverse the number values. 1 becomes 5, 2 becomes 4, 3 remains 3, 4 becomes 2 and 5 becomes 1. Then add up the numbers for each question and subtract by 25. The range of scores will be between 0-100 with 0 indicating the lowest self-esteem and 100 the highest. A score of 30 or above means you have a problem with low self-esteem. A score of 30 or below indicates no problem.

APPENDIX B  
RAW DATA

### Self-esteem Index Results

	Pre	Post	Above 30 (Low)	Improved	Worse/Under 30	Good
1.	30	14		1		1
2.	19	16		1		1
3.	5	5		1		1
4.	2	8			1	1
5.	35	32	1	1		
6.	19	19		1		1
7.	14	12		1		1
8.	15	23			1	1
9.	31	28	1	1		1
10.	48	51	1		1 (over 30)	
11.	75	86	1		1 (over 30)	

<b>Top Challenge Single Parents</b>	<b>How To Deal With Challenge</b>	<b>How Has This Impacted Self View?</b>
1. Looking for employment	Face head on	Harder, difficult
2. Care for kids, school	Doing what you can	Going good
3.	Pray	Hard and stressful
4. Raising children	Pray	Big challenge
5. Raising children	Pray	Much harder
6. Finding employment, getting kids to obey	Take classes, spend time, pray	I want to be better
7. Finances, time management	Time management, organize, positive male influence	
8. Finances, stress, loss of support, frustration	Prayer, can overwhelm	I am not where I should be. I have to do things I never imagined to support my family
9. Finances	Tithe, provide a home	Follow Christ values
10. No time	Pray	Low impact on self
11. Discipline, time, lack of manly influence	Ask for help	I know I am strong, can provide, positive attitude
12. Physical house duties	Do what I can	Lonely, missing something
13. Time for myself	Prayer	More exhausted

Results from Questionnaire:

- 1. Top Challenges:**
  - Finances/Employment (5)      Raising children/Discipline/ (5)
  - Lack of time (4)              Lack of support/lack of partner (2)
  
- 2. How to cope with:**
  - Prayer (7)                      Face it/Do what you can (5)
  - Use of time/organize (2)      Invite positive male influence (1)
  
- 3. S Parent Self View:**
  - Difficult/Hard/Need Help = Low (8)
  - Positive/Stronger/Resilient = High (4)

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## VITA

## VITA

**Name:** Philip C. Willis Jr.

**Date of Birth:** March 12, 1969

**Place of Birth:** Hinsdale, IL

**Married:** June 13, 2010 to Vivian N. Garrido

**Children:** Hannah Willis, Amanda Willis, Victoria Willis, and Philip Willis III

**Ordination:** June 2003

### **Education:**

2017	Doctorate of Family Ministry, Andrews University
2015	Command and General Staff Officer College
2014	Masters of Social Work, Andrews University
2014	2 Units of CPE: Hines VA/Loyola University/Urban CPE
1996	Masters of Divinity, Andrews University Seminary
1993	Bachelor of Arts in Theology/Psychology Minor, Oakwood University

### **Experience:**

2012 – Present	Behavioral Health Chaplain
2010 – Present	Director/President: “Man College” Basic Training
1997 – 2008	Pontiac School District, Consultant
1996 – Present	Lake Region Conference, Pastor

### **Military Experience:**

1996 – Present	US ARMY, Lieutenant Colonel, Deputy Command Chaplain
2004 – 2005	IRAQ, 1225 <sup>th</sup> CSB Combat Tour
2009 – 2009	IRAQ/Kuwait, 126 <sup>th</sup> CAV Combat Tour
2009 – 2011	Camp Atturbury, 205 <sup>th</sup> INF BDE, Observer Trainer Instructor

### **Published:**

2013	Bullet Proof: How To Arm Yourself For The Fight Of Your Life
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